SELF-COACHING GUIDE #2: LEADERSHIP

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1. Peter Drucker on Knowledge Workers, Management and Leadership

If you're reading this, you're almost certainly a knowledge worker of one sort or another. And if you're a knowledge worker within an organization, here's an essential question you need to ask: *Am I being **managed**, or am I being **led**?* And if in turn you're responsible for the performance of other knowledge workers, you need to ask yourself: *Am I **managing**, or am I **leading**?*

I'm prompted to ask these questions by Peter Drucker's [Management Challenges of the 21st Century](#), one of the most insightful and thought-provoking books I've ever read, and one I return to regularly, nearly a decade after its publication. The first chapter in this pithy volume, "Management's New Paradigms," explodes six deeply flawed assumptions that Drucker saw underlying the discipline and practice of contemporary management. Assumption #3 is *"There is, or there must be, one right way to manage people,"* and Drucker uses this as the starting point for an exploration of the characteristics of knowledge workers and why they must be **led** and not merely **managed**. An excerpt from pages 17-22 of the Harper Business paperback edition:

> In no other area are the basic traditional assumptions [about management] held as firmly...as in respect to people and their management. And in no other area are they so totally at odds with reality and so totally counterproductive...

> On [the] fundamental assumption that there is--or at least should be--one and only one right way to manage people rest all the other assumptions about people in organizations and their management.

> One of these assumptions is that the people who work for an organization...are *subordinates*...

> [F]ewer and fewer people are "subordinates"--even in fairly low-level jobs. Increasingly they are "knowledge workers." And knowledge workers are not subordinates; they are "associates." For, once beyond the apprentice stage, knowledge workers must know more about their job than their boss does--or else they are no good at all. In fact, that they know more about their job than anybody else in the organization is part of the definition of knowledge workers...

> To be sure, these associates are "subordinates" in that they depend on the "boss" when it comes to being hired or fired, promoted, appraised and so on. But in his or her own job the superior can perform only if these so-called subordinates take responsibility for *educating* him or her... In turn, these "subordinates" depend on the superior for direction. They depend on the superior to tell them what the "score" is.

Their relationship, in other words, is far more like that between the conductor of an orchestra and the instrumentalist than it is like the traditional superior/subordinate relationship...

Altogether, an increasing number of people who are full-time employees have to be managed as if they were *volunteers*. They are paid, to be sure. But...[w]e have known for fifty years that money alone does not motivate to perform... What motivates--and especially what motivates knowledge workers--is what motivates volunteers. Volunteers, we know, have to get *more* satisfaction from their work than paid employees, precisely because they do not get a paycheck. They need, above all, challenge. They need to know the organization's mission and to believe in it. They need continuous training. They need to see results...

Increasingly "employees" have to be managed as "partners"--and it is the definition of a partnership that all partners are equal. It is also the definition of a partnership that partners cannot be ordered. They have to be persuaded...

One does not "manage" people.

The task is to lead people.

And the goal is to make productive the specific strengths and knowledge of each individual. [Emphasis original]

As a "Leadership Coach" (my job title) working within the "Center for Leadership Development and Research" (my unit at Stanford's Graduate School of Business) supporting such classes as "Strategic Leadership" and "Leadership Coaching and Mentoring," perhaps it's not surprising that I find this passage so compelling. *Down with "management"! Up with "leadership"!*

But the current enthusiasm for "leadership" isn't just a semantic fad; it's directly related to the rise of the knowledge worker and their (our) needs as articulated by Drucker: satisfaction, challenge, belief in a mission, continuous training and results. *Management* can actually make it more difficult for knowledge workers to attain those goals, but *leadership* is essential to their success.

What's the difference? Again I turn to Drucker, who is said to have remarked, "Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things." (Even if the quote's apocryphal, it neatly paraphrases Drucker's views on the subject.)

Some recent personal experiences have helped make this distinction all too clear. For the last six months I've worked with two teams of MBA students in Stanford's Leadership Fellows program. I'm not their "boss," but I am tasked with insuring their effective performance and assessing the results. In retrospect it's obvious that I began my relationships with both teams with a misguided focus on their *management*; I knew what I wanted them to do, and I wanted them to "do things right." So I set our

agendas, ran our meetings, defined the sub-teams and their responsibilities. And as a result, I had two teams of efficiently-managed but poorly-led and increasingly unhappy knowledge workers.

Happily, our program strongly encourages students to provide us with feedback on our own performance--and the students on these teams are particularly thoughtful and candid--and thanks to this feedback I realized that my focus on their *management* was actually demotivating. This isn't to say they needed **no** management, but they needed a lot less than they'd been getting from me, and they needed a lot more *leadership*. They needed me to help them understand and define "the right things to do," and then they needed me to get out of their way to allow them to determine how to "do things right."

I shared this perspective via email with the team members over the summer, and when classes began a few weeks ago, I said in the first meeting with both teams that I intended to play a different role going forward. At the time I wasn't thinking in terms of "management" vs. "leadership"--I hadn't re-read Drucker yet--but I did say that I wanted to be less directive and to foster a greater sense of empowerment and ownership among the team members. And over the past few weeks I've put this philosophy into practice: Not only have I stopped setting agendas, I don't even attend many of the meetings, and I don't run the ones I do attend. I make fewer decisions, particularly with regard to logistics and the allocation of resources. And I've worked hard to insure that team members are free to fulfill their responsibilities as they see fit, with minimal direction from me.

This isn't to say I'm no longer managing at all--that's still a part of my role, and at times I do get involved in how to "do things right." But I do so far less frequently, and with greater care for the consequences of my involvement at that level. I spend a lot more time and energy thinking about "the right things to do," and I'm acutely aware that the most important thing for me to do as a leader of knowledge workers is to help them realize Drucker's goals: feel both satisfied and challenged, sustain a sense of belief in our mission, obtain continuous training, and achieve results.

We're only halfway through Fall Quarter, so a final verdict has yet to be rendered, but a positive change is already palpable. (*Ed.See "Authentic Leadership" below to learn the final outcome.*) Both teams are more engaged and enthusiastic, and I am, too. There are a number of factors at work here--most notably the change from spring, when the students are preparing for the following academic year, to fall, when the Leadership Fellows program kicks off in earnest and the Second Year Fellows begin to meet with--and lead!--their teams of First Years. But I'm more convinced than ever in the fundamental rightness of Drucker's philosophy: One does not "manage" people. The task is to lead people.

*So are you being **managed**, or are you being **led**? Are you **managing**, or are you **leading**?*

Original Post: http://www.edbatista.com/2008/10/drucker-1.html

2. Bill George on Leadership at the Stanford Faculty Club

In 2007 I wrote about Bill George's appearance on The Charlie Rose Show, where the former Medtronic CEO shared his views on leadership. This morning, thanks to Tim Dorman, Managing Director at the Authentic Leadership Institute, I had the chance to hear George talk in person at the Stanford Faculty Club, along with Tim's colleague Nick Craig. I didn't get a photo of George, which is why I'm recycling the video still at right from Charlie Rose, but I did catch a number of compelling quotes that reminded me of the power of his vision. I've added headings in **bold**, and occasional paraphrases are shown [in block brackets]:

> **A leader's job:** Your first job as a leader is to bring people together. Your last job is to say, "Thank you." And in between a leader is a servant and a debtor.

> **A leader's effectiveness:** You'll know how good you are [as a leader] when you've been around long enough to fix your own mistakes. Anyone can come in and fix someone else's mistakes.

> **How NOT to choose leaders:** We've been choosing leaders for their charisma, their image and their style. I think we need a whole new era of leadership.

> **Motivation:** People are motivated by looking for meaning and significance in their lives... Think about your work. Do you and the people around you think you're part of something special? Because I think that's what people are looking for.

> **Leadership development:** Are leaders made or born? I think that's the wrong question. [Even if you have natural leadership potential], you have to develop your skills, and you have to develop yourself as a leader... It starts with the leader within. Every leader who has failed...has failed to lead themselves.

> **Strengths and weaknesses:** HR management [has been] too focused on fixing weaknesses. But by fixing your weaknesses, we may take away your strengths.

> **Authenticity:** So many leadership development programs [that focus on communication styles and related skills] really don't work because the person isn't in touch with who they are.

George also laid out four key tasks for any leader: **Align, Empower, Serve, Collaborate**:

> **Align:** The toughest job is to align people around a mission and a set of values... You can't just put out a mission statement and a list of values--well, you *can* do that, but it won't get the job done. You have to talk about it *all the time*.

Empower: We need to disavow ourselves of the notion that leadership is power over other people. Leadership capacity is the ability to empower other people to step up and lead.

Serve: The notion of maximizing shareholder value has degenerated into maximizing *short-term* shareholder value, and it's going to destroy our economy... [Business has to serve society, and we can do that by serving customers, but we need to take a longer view.]

Collaborate: [No one organization can do it alone. Leaders must be able to work across organizational boundaries.]

Finally, George spoke about three factors that are essential for a leader's development: 1) Real world experience--and specifically the opportunity to fail and to learn from mistakes, 2) Feedback from peers and subordinates who will give you the unvarnished truth, and 3) A commitment to an ongoing practice that "causes you to go inside yourself and reflect on what's important," such as meditation, yoga, tai chi or journaling. Given my own struggles with meditation, discussed in [a recent post on happiness](#), I was particularly struck by George's comment that he has meditated for 20 minutes twice a day for the past 30 years.

(Thanks again to Tim and his colleagues at ALI for an thought-provoking experience.)

Original Post: http://www.edbatista.com/2009/02/bill-george.html

3. Authentic Leadership and Your "Crucible Story"

As noted above, in February 2009 I had the opportunity to hear Bill George and his colleagues from the Authentic Leadership Institute, Nick Craig and Tim Dorman, discussing leadership at the Stanford Faculty Club. In addition to Bill's remarks, Nick and Tim led the audience through an exercise that I found compelling: Exploring your "crucible story."

In George's True North, he discusses the concept in his chapter on a leader's transformative growth:

> What enables leaders...to avoid derailment and make the transition from being heroes of their own journeys to become authentic leaders who empower other leaders? Most of the leaders we interviewed had transformative experiences...
>
> A transformative experience may come at any point in your life. It could result from a positive experience of having a wise mentor or having a unique opportunity at a young age. But as much as we all want positive experiences like these, transformations for many leaders result from going through a crucible.
>
> In *Geeks and Geezers*, Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas describe the concept of the crucible that tests leaders to their limits. A crucible can be triggered by events such as confronting a difficult situation at work, receiving critical feedback, or losing your job. Or it may result from a painful personal experience, such as divorce, illness, or the death of a loved one.

George goes on to discuss several crucible experiences of his own, including the death of his mother, the death of his fiancee three weeks before their marriage, and his deep unhappiness while leading a division of Honeywell. He writes about the concept at greater length in Finding Your True North, a "personal guide" that serves as a companion to the earlier book, co-written by Andrew McLean and Nick Craig:

Your crucible tests you to the core of your being. It forces you to look at yourself, examine your character and your values in a new light, and come to grips with who you are. View in retrospect, your crucible may become the defining experience in your life, even if you do not recognize it when you are in the middle of the experience...

Passing through the crucible--or reframing it years later with the benefit of hindsight--you will see the world differently, and thus you will behave differently as well. It is during such a passage that you recognize that your leadership is not primarily about your own success or about getting others to follow you. Rather, you understand that

the essence of leadership is aligning your teammates around a shared vision and share values and empowering them to step up and lead...

The exercise Nick and Tim conducted was disarmingly simple, but extremely powerful: Pair up with another person in the room, and spend 20 minutes sharing your "crucible stories." The first story I chose to tell my partner was one I discuss above in Peter Drucker on Knowledge Workers, Management and Leadership.

I was working with two teams of students in Stanford's Leadership Fellows program, but I was more focused on *managing* them--insuring that they "did things right"--than on *leading* them--insuring that they "did the right things." As Drucker notes, knowledge workers like my students must be led and *not* managed if they are to feel satisfied and challenged, to maintain their belief in the team's mission, to learn continuously and to ultimately achieve results. Drucker declares with great emphasis in Management Challenges of the 21st Century, "**One does not 'manage' people. The task is to lead people.**"

Both of my efficiently-managed but poorly-led teams were becoming increasingly unhappy, and it was clear that I needed to work with them in a fundamentally different way. I made a major mid-course correction and told my teams that I wanted to be less directive and foster a greater sense of empowerment and ownership among them. In practice, this required some very tangible changes: I stopped setting meeting agendas, I stopped attending some team meetings entirely, and I stopped running the meetings I did attend. I made fewer decisions, particularly with regard to logistics and the allocation of resources--clearly managerial domains. And I did all I could to give team members a free hand to fulfill their responsibilities--to "do things right"--as they saw fit, with minimal interference from me.

When I wrote that post in October I had just begun to implement those changes, and although the initial results were positive, the jury was still out. But both teams were ultimately highly successful, at least from my perspective, and it's gratifying to look back on the experience and to feel that this change in approach--from *management* to *leadership*--was a meaningful factor in our success.

I'm struck by the fact that George's discussion of "crucible stories" highlights their role in what he calls "the transformation from 'I' to 'We." From Finding Your True North:

> As leaders experience challenging times and learn the lessons of those difficult periods, the process of transforming from "I" to "We" is seeded. Initial successes may reinforce what leaders do at an early stage, but difficult times force them to question their approach...
>
> We single out the transformation from "I" to "We" because it places leaders in a powerful paradox... [Crucible] experiences force them to be humble. This newly found humility stems from the recognition that leadership is not just about them.
>
> Only when you stop focusing on your own ego will you be able to develop other

leaders. You will be able to move beyond being competitive with talented peers and subordinates, and you will be more open to other points of view. As you overcome your need to control everything or do everything, you find that people are more interested in working with you. A light bulb goes on as you recognize the unlimited potential of empowered leaders working toward a shared purpose. This transformation opens the door to discovering your full potential as an authentic leader.

I hardly feel that I've "discovered my full potential" as a leader, but my experience with these teams was certainly a significant step forward in my "transformation from 'I' to 'We,'" and I'm very grateful to the team members for their candid feedback, vast talent and extraordinary dedication.

Postscript 1: A striking after-effect of the "crucible story" exercise in the Authentic Leadership seminar was the way it created such strong feelings of closeness among an roomful of strangers. As both Tim Dorman and an audience member noted in the debrief, we typically introduce ourselves with success stories and highlights from our resume, "putting our best foot forward," and the result is that we often find ourselves in an unspoken competition with those we meet, comparing ourselves to them and feeling better or worse depending on how we measure up.

In contrast, sharing our crucible stories allowed us to feel much more empathic, engaged and connected with each other. Rather than focusing on our differences, we were surprised by how much we had in common, how many similar challenges we had faced and how similarly we had responded.

It's made me think about how I might introduce myself differently the next time I meet someone new or begin working with a new team.

Postscript 2: During the debrief, Nick asked, "What do your crucible stories tell you about your style as a leader?" I realized that although I don't go through the day thinking of myself as a big risk-taker, I'm actually fairly comfortable with risk--I can take some big leaps of faith without knowing how things will work out in the end. Not all these leaps do work out, of course--I've crashed and burned plenty of times. But they work out often enough to allow me to feel a greater sense of trust in myself, which I can tap into as a source of reassurance when I'm feeling stressed or uncertain.

Again, thanks to Tim and his colleagues at ALI for a great experience.

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Original Post: http://www.edbatista.com/2009/02/crucible.html

4. Obama, Leadership and Authenticity

I voted for Barack Obama, but without a great deal of enthusiasm. I appreciated the symbolic importance of his candidacy, and I ultimately agreed that his message of change was appropriate to the historical moment, but the fact that so many people seemed to view him as the Second Coming made me want to keep my distance. Hero-worship automatically makes me look for flaws in the hero and question the judgment of the worshippers.

Even so, I was moved by Obama's inauguration this morning, and it led me to reflect on why so many people find him such a compelling figure. Even if we set aside Obama's purely symbolic impact (as the successor to a deeply unpopular incumbent, as the first African-American president, etc.) and even if we account for the partisan passions of his most vociferous supporters, it's clear that Obama possesses several key qualities that mark him as a leader.

The quality of Obama's that stands out to me most vividly is authenticity. It's always dangerous to describe a politician as "authentic"--they're in the business of telling us what we want to hear and presenting us with a believable and consistent version of themselves. But even Obama's most cynical critic has to admit that the man is effective at *conveying* a sense of authenticity which contributes substantially to his impact. I'm sure Obama works hard at this--it's a prerequisite of his profession--but that effort doesn't seem to undermine his believability or distort him into a hollow shell. Time will tell, of course, if that is true or not. (This aspect of Obama stands in marked contrast to George W. Bush, who somehow managed to convey a sense of *in*authenticity even when, in my opinion, he was being quite true to himself.)

In Why Should Anyone Be Led By You?, Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones assert that authenticity is such an important characteristic of effective leadership today because traditional sources of meaning such as hierarchies no longer serve this function, and we look to leaders to fill that void. Goffee and Jones also offer a three-part definition of authenticity in the context of leadership (page 16):

First, authentic leaders display a *consistency between words and deeds*... But an ability to do what you say is not enough on its own.

The second element of authentic leadership is the capacity to display *coherence in role performances*. In other words, despite the unavoidable need to play different roles at different times for different audiences, authentic leaders *communicate a consistent underlying thread*. They display a "real self" that holds these separate performances together.

Closely linked to this is the third and final element. Authentic leadership involves a kind of *comfort with self*, which is perhaps the hardest aspect of all to attain. This is the internal source from which consistency of role performance is drawn. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines that which is authentic as having "undisputed origins." And in a leadership context, this is what followers are looking for: a set of performances that have a common origin. [Emphasis original]

I'm eager to see how Obama makes use of this powerful dimension of his leadership, and, more importantly, to see if his next steps enhance or detract from my perception of him as an authentic leader.

UPDATE: What I find helpful about Goffee and Jones's definition of authenticity in action is that it provides multiple perspectives from which to consider someone before reaching a conclusion about their authenticity. Obama's already drawn flak from some quarters because of a perceived gap between his campaign rhetoric on the economic crisis or the war in Iraq and the direction he appears to be taking as president. I personally don't find this troubling because I'm encouraged by the more moderate tone he's adopted following the campaign, but I can appreciate why someone with a different viewpoint might feel otherwise and might even begin to question his authenticity as a result.

However, judging authenticity solely as a perceived *consistency between words and deeds* at some point becomes a matter of relative values. What I see as a reasonable compromise someone else may see as a disgraceful sellout. But if we set aside specific policy issues and go to the next levels in Goffee and Jones's framework, the questions to ask about Obama are: *Does he display coherence in role performances and communicate a consistent underlying thread?* And *Does he seem comfortable with himself?* And my answer is a resounding "yes."

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Original Post: http://www.edbatista.com/2009/01/obama.html

5. Bill Curry on Leadership and Kindness

We don't necessarily associate great leadership with kindness, particularly when discussing Vince Lombardi-era football. But former NFL player and longtime college coach Bill Curry had this to say in an interview with Tom Tolbert on KNBR:

> Unexpected, undeserved, unrewarded acts of kindness from great leaders...make great teams.

He was referring to the kindness showed to him as a rookie Green Bay Packer in 1965 by veteran African American players who took him under their wing and, in his words, "taught me how to behave." Curry had no black teammates in college at Georgia Tech and initially found the diversity he encountered in the NFL hard to handle. But influential team leaders such as Willie Davis apparently went out of their way to reach out to Curry and helped him adjust.
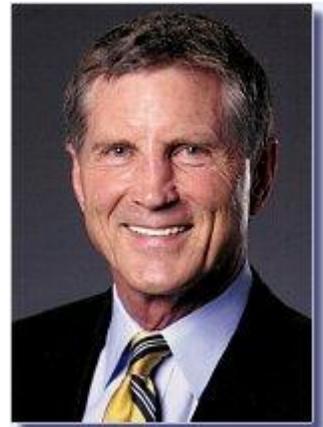
Curry expressed profound gratitude for his teammates' kindness, and in his retelling, that kindness was as instrumental as Lombardi's legendary toughness in shaping the '60s Packers into a tight-knit, cohesive unit. I'm not suggesting--nor was Curry--that Lombardi's approach was wrong, or that kindness alone would have had the same affect.

And yet it feels as though we hear about leaders' toughness all the time, and we never hear about their kindness. But when I think about the most effective leaders I've known and worked with, they had the ability to be both tough and kind as needed, and those aspects of their personality didn't cancel each other out. Rather, their skillful use of one approach complemented the other; their kindness meant even more because I knew how tough they could be.

Original Post: http://www.edbatista.com/2008/08/bill-curry.html

6. McClelland and Burnham on Power and Management

What qualities characterize high-performing managers? One resource that Stanford's "High Performance Leadership" class uses to explore that question is Power Is the Great Motivator, David McClelland and David Burnham's classic HBR article on this topic (originally written in 1976, revised in 1995 and republished in 2003.) The authors reach three primary conclusions that run counter to some conventional wisdom on effective managers. (The article is rooted in McClelland's motivational needs theory, which suggests that people are driven by needs for power, for achievement, and for affiliation, i.e. a desire to establish relationships with others.)

1) High Achievers Aren't Necessarily Good Managers
People with a high "need for achievement, the desire to do something better or more efficiently than it has been done before," do not necessarily make good managers, because "they focus on personal improvement and doing things better by themselves." They also "want concrete short-term feedback on their performance." But effective managers achieve superior results not merely by performing well themselves but by motivating others to perform well, and they often receive little if any direct feedback.

I'm struck by the fact that so many aspects of our educational system identify and promote high achievers, essentially creating a managerial class that, by virtue of its emphasis on individual accomplishments and its association between success and direct feedback, may be poorly prepared to actually manage. In McClelland's 1995 update, he notes that SAT results...

> ...relate little to how competently those people manage in the workplace later in life. People who scored exceptionally well on SATs often later functioned poorly as managers, and people with only average scores often made the best managers.

In the same passage, McClellan also noted that a high need for achievement is important to effective management in a small organization or sub-unit, but I still find his initial conclusion compelling--managers focused on their own achievement may view colleagues and subordinates as obstacles to be overcome rather than as forces to be marshaled.

2) Good Managers Have a High Need for Power and a Low Need to be Liked
McClelland and Burnham also concluded that effective managers had a higher than usual need for power, coupled with a relatively low need to be liked by others:

> [M]ost of the managers...were high in power motivation compared with the average person. This finding confirms that power motivation is important for management. (Remember that, as we use the term, power motivation refers not to dictatorial behavior but to a desire to have impact, to be strong and

influential.) The better managers, judged by the morale of those working for them, tended to score even higher in power motivation. But the most important determining factor of high morale turned out to be not how their power motivation compared with their need to achieve but whether it was higher than their need to be liked.

This resonates with my experience. The very best managers I know have exceptional people skills and use them to great effect, but those skills are employed in service to the manager's larger goal of influencing and motivating others, not simply to generate warm feelings.

3) A High Need for Power Doesn't Necessarily Translate into Displays of Power
Uninhibited self-aggrandizement or abuses of authority shouldn't be mistaken for a good manager's strong need for power. McClellan and Burnham determined that the most effective managers were mature and disciplined, which minimized their displays of power and reinforced their focus on achieving organizational results:

> Mature people can be most simply described as less egotistic. Somehow their positive self-image is not at stake in their jobs. They are less defensive, more willing to seek advice from experts, and have a longer-range view. They accumulate fewer personal possessions and seem older and wiser...

> [T]he best managers possess two characteristics that act as regulators--a greater emotional maturity, where there is little egotism, and a democratic coaching managerial style. If an institutional power motivation is checked by maturity, it does not lead to an aggressive, egotistic expansiveness. That means managers can control their subordinates and influence others around them without having to resort to coercion or to an authoritarian management style.

<><><>

McClelland and Burnham are aware that they're raising some controversial issues, but they think their critics are making a key mistake:

> Our findings seem to fly in the face of a long and influential tradition of organizational psychology, which insists that authoritarian management is what is wrong with most businesses... But much of the apparent conflict between our findings and those of other behavioral scientists in this area stems from the fact that we are talking about *motives*, and behaviorists are talking about *actions*. What we are saying is that managers must be interested in playing the influence game in a controlled way. That does not necessarily mean that they are or should be authoritarian in action. On the contrary, it appears that power-motivated managers make their subordinates feel strong rather than weak.

I think it's notable that McClelland and Burnham insisted on using the word "power," rather than softening it to something like "influence" or "impact." We're more

comfortable with these latter terms--"power" makes many of us feel uncomfortable. And I believe that's precisely the point--until we get comfortable with it, we're going to undermine our own effectiveness as managers and leaders.

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Original Post: http://www.edbatista.com/2006/10/mcclelland_and_.html

7. Heifetz and Linsky on the Dangers of Leadership

Can leadership be hazardous to your quality of life?
Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, authors of A Survival
Guide for Leaders think so:

> [Y]ou can lead *and* stay alive--not just register a
> pulse, but really be alive. But the classic
> protective devices of a person in authority tend
> to insulate them from those qualities that foster
> an acute experience of living. Cynicism, often
> dressed up as realism, undermines creativity and
> daring. Arrogance, often posing as authoritative knowledge, snuffs out
> curiosity and the eagerness to question. Callousness, sometimes portrayed as
> the thick skin of experience, shuts out compassion for others.

I've certainly known burned-out leaders who've displayed these qualities--and who
sometimes wore them with pride, like campaign ribbons on old soldiers. But I'd go a
step further and argue that we don't need to be in formal positions of authority to fall
prey to these defensive tactics. Anytime we're in a leadership role, we face the
temptation to "dress up" our cynicism, our arrogance, our callousness as something
else.

Heifetz and Linsky are issuing a challenge to all of us, whether we're running a
company or just getting old(er): *Drop the facade and get back in touch with your
creativity, your curiosity, and your compassion.*

Original Post: http://www.edbatista.com/2006/10/heifetz_and_lin.html

8. Matt Doherty: Live and Learn?

A minor drama has been playing out in college basketball over the past few years that intersects directly with my ongoing interest in leadership and management. You don't have to care about basketball for this to be a worthwhile read, but I'm going to have to set the stage, so bear with me for a few paragraphs.

Coach Matt Doherty, now at Florida Atlantic University, was fired in 2003 after just three seasons at the University of North Carolina, where he'd been an outstanding player 20 years earlier under legendary coach Dean Smith.

Before his high-profile failure at UNC, Doherty's coaching career had been on a steadily upward path. And in his first season at Carolina, he'd even been named national Coach of the Year. But in Doherty's final two seasons the team performed far below expectations, suffering its first losing season in four decades, and Doherty alienated everyone from the university athletic department to his own players. Perhaps most significantly, there were steady rumors that Doherty's aggressive coaching style masked an out-of-control anger management problem, and he had few defenders when he left Chapel Hill.

UNC then tapped Roy Williams of the University of Kansas. Williams quickly turned the UNC program around and won a national championship in his second season--with players Doherty had recruited--contributing to the impression that Doherty's poor management had caused the team's earlier troubles.

Doherty had two years remaining on his UNC contract at an estimated annual salary of $650,000, so I'll understand if you're reluctant to shed a tear for him. But in sports circles this was regarded as one of the most spectacular coaching failures in recent memory, and for a man who'd experienced continued success in a highly visible profession, it must have been excruciating. (I'm indebted to SportsProf and Thad Williamson for their perspective on these events.)

So what did Doherty do while he was collecting on that fat contract for two years, before he returned to coaching with Florida Atlantic in 2005? According to an SI.com article by Stewart Mandel, he traveled with his family, did some pro scouting and TV work...and he enrolled in some executive management seminars at Wharton and Darden.

Specifically, in 2003 at Wharton he took a class with Frances Johnston, co-chair and managing director of the Teleos Leadership Institute, a consulting firm based in Philadelphia that focuses on change management and leadership development. Mandel suggests that this was a transformative experience for Doherty:

> Afterward, Doherty approached Johnston, whose clients more commonly include CEOs and other business-world leaders, to tell her how much he identified with her lecture [on the importance of emotional intelligence.] Soon

he was devouring books on leadership and making monthly visits to Philadelphia to meet with her.

> "Matt had the self-awareness to recognize that management of his own emotions was one of his issues at UNC," says Johnston, who holds a master's degree in sports psychology [as well as a doctorate in adult and organizational development.]

Doherty appears to have retained Johnston as an executive coach, although Mandel doesn't use the term in his article:

> On the day of the Campbell game, Doherty's first order of business was a 9 a.m. phone call with Johnston, one of several regularly scheduled chats they've had throughout the season.

If the rumors about Doherty's profane tirades at UNC are to be believed, his inability to control his temper was a major cause of his undoing there. Admittedly, he was in a terribly difficult position, trying to live up to Dean Smith's record of success and an entire state's expectations. But instead of relieving the pressure by finding allies and motivating them to work toward the team's success, he only increased it by alienating everyone who was in a position to support him (particularly his players, several of whom had considered transferring to another school.)

I wouldn't suggest that college coaches--or anyone in a high-profile management position--seek primarily to curry favor and make friends. Being a hardass, when appropriate, is a useful skill, and people respond to a wide range of motivational techniques, including discipline.

But there's more to leadership than command authority, and Matt Doherty's experience during and since his time at UNC suggests three big take-aways for the rest of us:

1) Management Style Matters. A reputation for having high expectations and exacting standards can be an essential management tool. But when even the Army is revamping boot camp to provide recruits with "a more positive leadership approach," we need to use care in how we establish that reputation, and how we communicate our expectations and standards to others. At UNC, Doherty apparently just cursed more frequently and louder. It seems likely that he's added some new skills to his repertoire, judging from the Teleos Leadership Institute's approach:

> Resonance - and resonant leadership - is a hallmark of the best-managed companies... [R]esonant leaders mobilize people and large systems through encouraging passion, hope and optimism, building powerful partnerships and relationships, and capitalizing on the emotional reality of their teams and organizational culture. Resonance exists when an organization, team or leader can fully engage and optimize the talents of its people in the pursuit of goals and objectives that are shared within the group.

And Doherty's comments to Mandel reinforce this point:

> "Leadership is now a passion of mine," says Doherty. "I feel like I learn something every time I talk to [Johnston.] We talk about the development of groups and how it relates to team dynamics. At first they're infants, completely dependent on you, then they evolve into adolescents and try to test you. Once you realize this is the normal progression of a team, you get less frustrated."

Doherty's success prior to UNC wasn't an accident. But as Joe Murphy, a mentor of mine, likes to say, "Successful people sometimes succeed *in spite of* themselves," and Doherty would appear to be a case in point. His management **skills** were being undermined by his management **style**, and at UNC that imbalance finally caught up with him.

2) Change Agents Need Sensitive Antenna. Doherty clearly sees himself as something of a change agent. Just prior to his arrival at UNC, he spent a year at Notre Dame, where he took a program that hadn't had a 20-win season in a decade and went 22-15. Doherty and others credit his success at Notre Dame to his high-energy, comprehensive approach and his commitment to revitalizing an organization that had grown complacent.

But change is a complex process, and what works in one setting can be disastrous in another. It appears that this is what happened to Doherty at UNC. Thad Williams has a concise description:

> [I]t was hoped that Doherty could bring some fresh energy to the [UNC] program--and that he did--but it was also assumed and hoped that he could play the role of "successor" to Dean Smith: that is, continuing what was good about the program while also bringing in some fresh ideas of his own.
>
> What happened instead can be described usefully by the metaphor of "regime change." That is to say, Matt Doherty soon made it very clear that this was now *his* program, he was calling the shots, and that it was not a simple continuance of the Smith-Guthridge era...
>
> In short, in attempting to place his stamp on the program, Doherty moved aggressively to clean a house that most people thought wasn't dirty--or at most needed a little dusting--to begin with.

Doherty's failure to sense that what had worked so well at Notre Dame was not going to have the same effect at UNC isn't necessarily surprising. We all tend to rely on those tools and techniques that have served us well in the past. But when we're consciously acting as change agents, it's essential to pay particularly close attention to how our agenda and our actions are being perceived.

It's not clear to me whether Doherty failed to pick up on the resistance his actions were generating at UNC, or whether he sensed those cues and thought he could safely ignore them. Ultimately, it's a difference without a distinction--his inability to

integrate feedback from the environment and tailor his approach as a change agent doomed him as a new leader.

3) We All Have the Capacity for Change. Despite Doherty's earlier successes, the failure at UNC clung to him and made it difficult for him to find another top-tier coaching position. (Consider that Carolina's home games attract roughly 20,000 fans, while before Doherty's arrival Florida Atlantic averaged just over 500. Five hundred.) He wasn't washed up, but his reputation as a volcano waiting to erupt insured that big-time athletic directors were going to wait until he'd proven himself in a low-stakes job like FAU before they took a gamble on him.

Mandel suggests that Doherty's work with Fran Johnston has had a significant affect on him:

> After spending a day watching Doherty interact with his team, it's evident he has a more amicable relationship with his current players than he reportedly did at North Carolina...
>
> [W]hen his...Blackberry alarm goes off in the middle of the session, giggles cascade through the room as several players raise an arm behind their head and wiggle five fingers -- a team sign for the $5 fine Doherty now owes.
>
> "At UNC, I got mad if a cell phone went off on the bus or in a meeting, and I ended up making them run sprints," says Doherty. "Coach Walters [now a member of his staff] started the five fingers, and it's become kind of a fun thing. It's fun to take the fine yourself, to show you're not above the rules."

At the time of his firing, Doherty was 41 and had been coaching for 15 years. He was old enough and experienced enough to give potential employers reason to believe he was unlikely to change. Doherty surely realizes that good press about his changed ways will increase his chances of returning to a major program, and anyone with an ounce of sense in his position would rein in his temper and say the right things for a few years.

But if Doherty were simply telling reporters like Mandel what they wanted to hear, there'd be no need for an ongoing relationship with an executive coach like Johnston-- in fact, there'd be little use in sitting through all those management seminars in the first place, unless this is just an elaborate spin campaign. Anything's possible, but it seems more likely to me that Doherty was so shaken and humiliated by the UNC experience that he took a serious look at his management philosophy and style and realized that he needed to change.

I'm not really all that interested in college basketball, but I think Doherty's story is a compelling one, and I'll be interested to see if he's truly learned from his failure at UNC and uses the opportunity at Florida Atlantic to preach--and practice--a new management gospel.

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About Me   about.edbatista.com

Professional
I'm an executive coach, a change management consultant, and a Leadership Coach at Stanford's Graduate School of Business. I help individuals find professional fulfillment and develop their leadership and interpersonal skills; I help people work together more effectively as members of a team; and I help companies and nonprofits adapt their management practices and organizational culture to better fit their changing needs.

My work as a coach began after a 15-year career in management, during which I took two years off to earn an MBA at Stanford, and I've helped launch three new organizations. In addition to coaching and change management, I'm particularly interested in the intersection of organizational culture and social technology.

Personal
I've lived in San Francisco since 1990; I'm married to Amy Wright, a recovering corporate attorney-turned-law school librarian; and I'm passionate about listening to music (particularly jazz, but I love punk, blues and bluegrass as well), hiking throughout the Bay Area, and visiting New Orleans whenever possible.

What I Do   services.edbatista.com

I help individuals find professional fulfillment; I help people work together more effectively as members of a team; and I help companies and nonprofits adapt their management practices and organizational culture to better fit their changing needs.

My coaching services are aimed at helping people be as fulfilled and as effective as possible in their professional lives. I work with individuals to assist them in unlocking their full potential, meeting new challenges, and developing their skills. People often find an executive coach a helpful resource when they're...

- Starting a new job
- Taking on new responsibilities
- Coping with a changing environment

- Considering a new position or career
- Addressing areas for improvement
- Simply trying to get "unstuck"

I'd be happy to have an initial conversation to discuss your needs and how we might work together. My contact information is above, or you can reach me at contact.edbatista.com.