



Organizational Leadership Development

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No person can achieve their full potential without undergoing some transformational change. This view is promoted by Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas in their book, *Geeks and Geezers*. Whether it was the loss of a parent at early age, suffering a debilitating disease or being imprisoned for their beliefs, these defining moments or as the authors refer to them as "crucibles" – compelling us to decide who we are and of what we are capable.

Organizations can also be at the crossroads of emerging powerfully empowered to tackle the challenges of today's rapidly evolving marketplace, especially if they possess the workforce that is adaptable and resilient enough to change while working collaboratively.

Having worked with public and private enterprises, regulated industries, centralized and decentralized institutions, Beacon believes that the success of world-class organizations hinges on three common denominators – 1) clarity of mission and strategic goals across all levels; 2) effective and consistent communication of mission and goals; and 3) cultivating a culture that infuses the mission and goals into the DNA of the organization. We further believe that it is imperative for managers to create an environment that inspires creativity, innovation, courage and boldness to redefine, realign and redesign the way we think and perform. We refer to this approach as "**aspirational thinking**." It is different from strategic or tactical thinking or other processes we normally associate with the planning process. Aspirational thinking catapults the change agent beyond the here and now to a higher plateau of possibility thinking.

Aspirational thinking includes the following transcendental principles:

1. **Inspire courageous followership.** Leadership does not necessarily connect with authority. An individual can exercise influence, uphold organizational integrity or serve as the "canary in the cage." Empowering people to stand up, speak out and operate without the threat of rebuke and retaliation, to encourage and nurture the next generation of leaders.
2. **Focus on performance rather than personality.** It is human nature to get mired in personality dynamics where individuals dominate the way we think and behave, act and react. Recently, we facilitated a board retreat for a neighborhood council populated with professionals from diverse socioeconomic, philosophical and professional backgrounds and life experiences. Leading them through introspective exercises it became self-apparent to them that the use of divisive language, distrust of personal motivations and a lack of understanding cluttered their common view of their mission and collective goals. Realigning them on shared values and unifying themes allowed them to unleash ideas for enhancing performance and ultimately improve the quality of life of their shared neighborhoods.
3. **Foster transformational rather than transactional behavior.** We live in society that sometimes seems fixated on making the sale or glorifying the art of the deal. This hubris needs to give rise to emphasizing corporate social responsibility, environmental stewardship, investment in human capital and elevating the brand identity to a higher purpose.

Visionaries like Tony Hsieh of Zappos.com, one of the major on-line shoe retailers, has catapulted his company to \$1 billion in sales and heralded it on Fortune's *Best Companies to Work For*. In less than a decade, they have achieved phenomenal results by making organizational culture and customer service the cornerstone of their company, as their employees deliver 'WOW' customer service accounting for 75% of Zappos' clients coming from repeat customers and word of mouth marketing.

4. **Create opportunities rather than raise objections.** We often become fluent in the language of not instead of why not. Upon his release from prison for 27 years, in 1990, Nelson Mandela immediately went back to work to lift apartheid and fight for justice and equality for all South Africans. At the end of 1993 Mandela and the president F.W. de Klerk were given the Nobel Peace Prize for their work for peace in South Africa. His charm, self-deprecating sense of humor and lack of bitterness over his harsh treatment transformed him into a global icon.

5. **Light the path for others.** According to leadership gurus Kouzes & Posner, leadership consists of five tactics: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act and encouraging the heart. In this vein, I find it gratifying to speak to young professional groups, who reinvigorate me. On one occasion, addressing a group of inspired college students at the Future Business Leaders of America national conference, I had an opportunity to speak to a young lady who was considering an alternative career. I encouraged her to consider public service as an option. Several years later, the same individual, now working as the district director for a state elected official, presented me with a commendation for public service. She confided in me that she took my advice and appreciated the encouragement.

Aspirational thinking becomes the fulcrum or a platform to pivot or change course. When properly activated, an individual can unleash an array of perspectives, possibilities and solutions. This sort of "looking beyond the horizon" thinking was coincidentally one of the criteria General Electric used in selecting its new CEO, Jeffrey Immelt-- the ability to see around corners and to effectively engage others, to look in the same direction and then take the necessary action steps to get the team moving in the same direction.

This deliberative process is the framework for our Performance & Resource Enhancement Program (PREP) which is predicated on a simple belief--grow the person to unleash their full capacities. According to Kevin Cashman, *Leadership from the Inside Out*, (Former President of the International Association of Career Management Professionals) "The missing element in most leadership development programs is growing the person to grow the leader." Beacon embraces the notion that:

Personal Understanding = Leader Development

PERFORMANCE & RESOURCE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM (PREP)



Aspirational leadership needs fervent practice and widespread fertilization in an organization from the “tree tops to the trunks.” Research and studies have developed hundreds of models to identify and help people develop and enhance personal and professional performance (e.g., as DISC, Symlog, Myer's Briggs, among some of the more popular). We believe aspirational thinking is the key factor in growing the person to stimulate true institutional change. Our PEP Model is designed to be a dynamic, interactive, and iterative approach which integrates organizational roles and expectations, and individual needs and personalities resulting in a convergence of a common mission, culture and brand identity. Max DePree, former CEO of Herman Miller Furniture states, “In the end, it is important to remember that we cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are.”