

CENTER FOR MANAGEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

# Solutions

PRACTICAL PERFORMANCE STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP THE BEST IN YOURSELF AND OTHERS

**SUMMER/FALL 2016**

**THE  
FUTURE** IS  
**LOADING...**  
Are you ready?

**THIS ISSUE:**

**BUILDING YOUR**

**GO-TO  
TEAM**

LEARNING FOR

**TOMORROW**

**And Other Strategies  
to Keep You Moving Forward!**

PLUS

DR. ALAN ZIMMERMAN'S

**Comment** AND  
**COURAGE**

From MARGIE WARRELL

**SPECIAL FEATURE**

**A CONVERSATION WITH**  
Office of Administration Commissioner  
**DOUG NELSON**



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**SPECIAL FEATURE**  
**A CONVERSATION WITH**  
**OA COMMISSIONER**  
**DOUG NELSON**



The old adage, “history repeats itself” is generally true. So often we are faced with challenges and opportunities that aren’t always “new” but that are nonetheless every bit as impactful. That’s why one of the best ways to prepare for the future is to speak with—and learn from—people who have paved the way for important initiatives, worked effectively with others on a variety of issues, and who know firsthand what it means to accomplish something meaningful in the workplace and community-at-large.

In this issue of *Solutions*, we’re pleased to have the opportunity to ask Doug Nelson, Office of Administration Commissioner, some questions about his experiences working in state government.

***Solutions:* You’ve had a long career working with a multitude of people to accomplish a variety of goals. In your experience, what benefits have you realized from including people “at the table” with different viewpoints when addressing important issues?**

*Doug Nelson:* Including different perspectives in discussions and activities can bring tremendous value and opportunity, and can be one of the best ways to make informed decisions. Making sure everyone feels comfortable stating their position without repercussion is incredibly important – as is listening. Once the decision has been made, the team needs to come together to move in the right direction.

***Solutions:* It’s safe to say that change is constant these days. People come and go, and no one person can know everything. From an organizational perspective, how important is it for staff at all levels to share their knowledge and experience with their co-workers and peers?**

*Doug Nelson:* As we approach a big transition period at the state it is extremely incumbent for all staff to share their knowledge and experience. Relevant information should be recorded and documented to share with the next administration. The goal is to ensure that the state (not the individual) moves in the direction that is best for all its constituents.

***Solutions:* You’ve had many successes over the years, and maybe a few times when everything didn’t go quite as you had planned. If it’s true that something can be learned from every experience, what value do you place on periodically analyzing what works well and possibly not so well?**

*Doug Nelson:* To improve the state’s work environment, you have to assess your successes—and your struggles. It is always good to debrief after a project, contract or series of meetings to determine what went well, what didn’t go well, and what steps to take next. Reflection on how things have gone is extremely important if you want the state to move forward.

***Solutions:* As we’re busy trying our best to stay on track each day, it can be challenging to look beyond tomorrow and the week ahead. That can get in the way of making long-range plans. What strategies have helped you to plan for and advance the goals of the Office of Administration?**

*Doug Nelson:* One of the biggest long-range plans we have worked on in recent years is moving to more of an e-government platform. This affects all divisions and employees, and is already helping the state tremendously. For example, in the area of purchasing we will have a state-of-the-art online electronic marketplace that, when fully implemented, will help the state, local governments and vendors achieve success in what they are trying to accomplish. Looking out beyond the current moment is extremely important. Planning for things like future IT and construction projects, or anticipated hiring challenges will allow you to achieve better results than just being completely reactionary.

***Solutions:* Because the workplace and work processes can be dynamic on many levels, how can employees in the Office of Administration, and state government as a whole, prepare for the challenges and opportunities ahead of them?**

*Doug Nelson:* I think we have to continue to strive to allow opportunities for our employees to advance. Whether that be through training, project management, contract management, or continuing education – anything that can help them do their job and progress as an individual is extremely important. Talking with people regarding management opportunities and how we take on those responsibilities is an area the state should always work on because it will make our employees better leaders.

***Solutions:* State employees don’t always get a lot of recognition for what they do, in spite of the fact that they are responsible for so many critical products and services. What aspects of state service often go unnoticed by the general public?**

*Doug Nelson:* It takes all kinds of employees for the state to function the way that it does. People below the management level often times go unrecognized for the work they do. For example, in my five years as Commissioner of OA there hasn’t been a single time I have come into the Capitol Building during severe weather when the steps and the property weren’t taken care of and accessible by the general public. That doesn’t happen by accident. It happens because employees show up early to clear and take care of the property. The state would not be able to provide all of the services for our citizens without the help of our state workforce.

***Solutions:* Nearly every week someone in State government transitions into the role of a new supervisor or manager. As we conclude our interview, what advice do you have for them?**

*Doug Nelson:* The state is always in need of employees willing to take on new responsibilities. Do so with an open mind. Do so with a passion. And do so with an opportunity to promote and advance the people that you manage. Take every chance you can to train. Take every opportunity to learn from the good and the bad. And enjoy it!



# What *skills* will employees need in the future? By Allan Forbis

What does the future look like for your organization and work team? Many of us may wonder if we'll be prepared to meet the challenges waiting for us; and if the workforce we rely upon for support will have the skills they need too.

While there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to prepare today's workforce for tomorrow's great work adventure, there are important indicators that help to point us in the right direction. For example, a recent report from the World Economic Forum indicates that in just a few years, business leaders will be looking for employees with some unique and important skill sets.

The Forum's "*The Future of Jobs*" report indicates that, on average, more than one third of the desired skills of most occupations will be comprised of skills that are not always considered important to the job today (at least by some). If the executives representing more than 350 employers from various industries surveyed for the report are correct, there are interesting predictions about how technological advancements will force labor markets to evolve.

Based upon the report, here's a Top 10 countdown of the skills that will be most in demand by 2020.

**10. Cognitive flexibility.** The ability to think about multiple concepts simultaneously will become increasingly important as time goes on. According to the report, a wide range of jobs will require a higher level of cognitive abilities—which include creativity, logical reasoning, and problem sensitivity. As organizations and their challenges become more complex and global, the ability to dig deep to find solutions to critical issues will be vital.

**9. Social (Negotiation) skills.** In case there is any doubt, *social skills*, i.e., the ability to work through problems with others is going to become ever more important in the workforce of the future. Why—because those skills will be uniquely "human" in an ever-increasing high-tech environment. People will want to be listened to, and have their opinions and ideas considered. It's estimated that by 2020, this skill in particular will be in high demand for computer and mathematical jobs, such as data analysts and software developers.

**8. Service orientation.** As defined in the report, this means actively looking for ways to help others. As work processes become more automated, it may result in less human interaction. While that may be fine in some cases, there will still be a strong need to work together as a team to solve problems, and make the most of each person's strengths and abilities to add value to the important work each organization does. A machine can't do that, at least not yet!

**7. Judgment and decision making.** As organizations increasingly collect more data, there will be a greater need for employees who have the ability to analyze the data and use it to make decisions. You won't always be able to put information into a computer and have it "spit-out" the right (or best) solution for unique situations that at times may be volatile. There will be "gray" areas that need special consideration, and the right people involved to make the most appropriate decisions for everyone.

**6. Emotional intelligence.** Robots can do a lot, but they will likely not be able to understand the complexities of people, and why they act, respond and behave as they do. That's why it will remain important for employees to be aware of others' reactions, and to understand why they react in certain ways. That's part of the human equation that can't be overlooked.

**5. Situational Responsiveness.** This one also falls under the *social skills* umbrella and is defined as the ability to adjust actions in relation to others, or the situation. The old adage, "best-laid plans" will remain with us for a reason. Organizations will need employees who can "go with the flow," remain flexible, cope with pressure, and collaborate with others to keep work processes moving.

**4. Managing People.** Some things won't change. Someone who can successfully lead, encourage, coach, and otherwise identify the best people to perform various tasks and jobs within an organization will continue to be sought after. As the workforce changes and employees become even more dispersed and specialized, the ability to manage diverse work teams will require even stronger leadership and interpersonal skills. This is (and will be) important; and people who can do it well will be in demand.

**3. Creativity.** The ability to be creative and harvest innovative ideas will be a huge quality employers look for. With the onslaught of new technologies, creative people will be in demand to figure out ways to apply technology and create new products and services that address the changing needs of the organizations and society in general.

**2. Critical thinking.** Being able to use logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of different solutions and approaches is a skill that will still be needed even though automation is becoming more prevalent.

And, finally, it should come as no surprise that the number one skill employers seek will be...

**1. Complex problem solving.** Even with the increase in data to help make decisions, people will still need the basic skill of being able to solve complex problems. In fact, respondents to the survey ranked this skill as the most in demand right now—and it will remain the number one most desired skill in 2020.

As you read this Top 10 list, you may have noticed that there was one common theme (or skill) mentioned over and over again – *THINKING and REASONING*. While it's clear that we will become even more surrounded by technology in the future, the ability to think through problems while working with a multitude of diverse people and concerns will carry the day.

The challenge for each of us is to prepare our work teams and employees to think independently, embrace creativity, and work together effectively with everyone. This may seem like a tall order, but I suspect a lot of organizations are doing these very things already.

*Keep preparing for the future!*



# Just a thought...

Another Tip from the Solutions Team

## Encourage strategic thinking in your team

All leaders must possess a strong understanding of the difference between strategy and tactics. Simply put, strategy represents long-term thinking—the *framework* involved in organizing what you do over time to achieve your ultimate goals. Tactics involve *individual steps* towards those goals—the things you do today to prepare for tomorrow to achieve that strategy.

Leaders recognize these definitions, but employees don't always understand the distinction because most of the time they are focused on the day-to-day activities needed to keep work processes moving along. As a result, it can be difficult to get them to invest time on longer-term strategic projects—the important but non-urgent items that make the difference between wheel-spinning and getting somewhere. As the manager, you want your team members to do their regular work each day while still carving out some time for strategic work or thinking.

To ensure your team keeps moving forward with an appropriate mix of strategy and tactics, implement the MEET Formula in your team:

**Mastermind.** In a separate meeting, make everyone aware of the big organizational goals and vision for your team, and engage them in mapping-out precisely what they would need to do to move in that direction. Publish those objectives in shared space, where everyone can access them, and then keep track of your group's progress in future emails and meetings. Communicate and communicate again!

**Engage.** If team members are excited about their work, you'll have an easier time keeping them on track. So incentivize them in some way. You probably can't give them money, but you can notice their extra effort, let upper management know about their good work, and use other small gestures to let the employee know how important their efforts are. If nothing else, just say "thank you." You'd be surprised how far that will take you.

**Empower.** Give your team members the power to make life easier not only for themselves but for the entire team. Encourage them to take the initiative to improve group efficiency in ways that pave the way for long-term success.

**Tools.** If you need to pound in a nail and all you have is a wrench, you can do it—but not efficiently. You need a hammer to do the job right. So make sure your people have the right tools to accomplish their tasks so they can build a framework for future success. If someone needs a new computer, see if you can supply it. If someone requests training (or you see a need for it), invest in it. Providing the right tools and resources improves your team's engagement and empowerment quotients.

The MEET Formula will ensure you're communicating incessantly, creating incentives, allowing creative decision making, and providing the tools needed to do the job right. Your employees will keep an eye on the horizon, not just on the task in front of them.

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— Arnold H. Glasgow



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**BEST PRACTICES:**

## Practical observations to help you become an even stronger leader

*Things you've probably heard before...but may have forgotten!*

There are many practical reasons for becoming a better leader. To help you navigate the path to doing that, here are some observations that may be relevant to you.

**Recognize the world is rapidly changing.** You can decide that you are going to help create change and learn from it, or you can try to resist it. As you have already discovered, change is the one thing you can count on. Your ability to adapt to change will significantly impact your organizational success.

**Develop a positive mental attitude.** No one wants to follow someone with a bad attitude. There are many things you can't control, but the one thing you have complete control over is your attitude. Pick a positive one. And remember—your attitude, whether positive or negative, is contagious. People find it easier and more personally rewarding to follow positive leaders.

**Focus on what you can do, not on what you cannot change.** Where are you going to spend your energy? Complaining about things you cannot change or creating the things you can? Focus on what you can do, and take responsibility for doing that. There is power in responsibility.

**Reach out to people who have different perspectives.** It is easy to communicate with people who think just like you. It's not so easy with someone who has a different viewpoint. But if we only have the ability to communicate with people who think like us, we are limiting ourselves from learning new and valuable information.

**Lead with your heart and head.** Have you ever heard a manager say, "I don't care what you think—we have a job to get done!" The thing is that the people on your team are the ones who are going to get the job done—and people have feelings. In fact, everything about motivation and the desire to do good work is based on a feeling. If a "leader" does not consider people's feelings, it will be impossible to be effective in the role as leader.

**"The pessimist complains about the wind. The optimist expects it to change. The leader adjusts the sails."**

– John Maxwell

**Become comfortable with the unknown.** One of the necessities to becoming empowered is to feel comfortable with the unknown. It's called having the ability to deal with ambiguity. As fast as our environment is changing, it is impossible to know all the facts or have all the answers. If you think you know everything, you are in for a shock!

**Develop a leadership "tool kit."** No one can have all the answers, but what you can develop is a "tool kit" of resources that can help you to solve problems. If you only have a hammer, you tend to see everything as a nail. Collect information, learn from others, attend training, read, develop a strong support network, etc. Remember, good leaders never stop learning.

**Look for multiple right answers.** With the environment changing as rapidly as it does, we can no longer afford to look for just one right answer. That may not exist. Instead, become multilateral in your thinking. Search for—and be open to—additional possibilities, not just one solution.

**Substitute effectiveness for perfectionism.** If you wait until all the available information is in to make your decisions, there's a good chance that you will have waited too long. Good or bad, in today's changing environment, we can't afford the luxury of waiting until something is absolutely perfect.

**Develop the flexibility of a sapling.** Have you ever noticed that while the wind and rain can easily uproot a large tree, that saplings often survive. The large trees snap and fall because they are not as adaptable. Saplings, on the other hand, are pliable and blow with the wind. A true leader should understand that success does not depend on their title, but rather on the values they uphold, and the choices they make each day. Leadership will not be achieved through technical expertise, but rather the emotional connection with the people they lead.



Seconds Count: Excerpts from

# myquickcoach

## Implication Thinking

Transcript of a MyQuickCoach video lesson from Bob Treadway

You can't engage in strategic leadership unless you become practiced and competent at anticipation and foresight. A critical skill is **implication thinking**. An implication is a consequence, result or effect of something that happens. Implication thinking helps you to determine how those effects, consequences and results affect the future, explain challenges and point to successful actions. Implication thinking, when you do it with other team members, allows you to not only make sense of the future, but will bring out possibilities you hadn't imagined. It's used skillfully by top leaders.

I've been in meetings where Warren Buffett, the chairman of Berkshire Hathaway was interacting with managers of various divisions of a company. Many were giving forecasts or outlining the actions they or their organization would take. The question I saw Buffett use again and again in those situations is asking, "And then what happens?"

When he gets a response from the manager, he asks, "And then what happens?" And often he'll follow that with, "And then what happens?" Those questions elicit implications. Every time he asks that, the respondent has to imagine the next effect, consequence or result. In other words, they have to in their minds project what will happen.

What does the human mind have to do to answer the question? It has to think in the future tense. It has to forecast. It has to imagine. It's useful to think of a sequence of implications, as Buffett was demanding in those situations, but it's even more useful to think of a cascade or layers of implications.

What I do with my clients, with executive teams, with boards of directors, is ask a similar question in a slightly different way. I want more than one answer to "And then what happens?" So if in response to the question, they say "This" (whatever "this" might be), I ask, "What else?" In other words, I'm looking for multiple responses. Then I take those responses and say, "Well, if that occurs, then what happens?" And get at least two more responses.

**On the next page, you'll find an illustration of what this can look like on paper to help you apply this approach in your own work. It's a fairly easy diagram that represents a cascade or pyramid of implications.**

In the upper left hand corner, in that circle, write what the event, issue or scenario is that you're considering. Then ask yourself, "And then what happens?" And fill in the blanks next to it.

When you've done that, take that response and ask, "And then what happens?" And develop at least two responses to that. And then take each of those and repeat the process. You'll quickly fill out the diagram.

It's surprising how quickly you'll catch on, and how quickly you can also generate responses—especially if you're working with others—which is a good way to do it

*This article concludes on the next page.*

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Groups that use Implication Thinking often have some of the same reactions.

When they use it, they say,

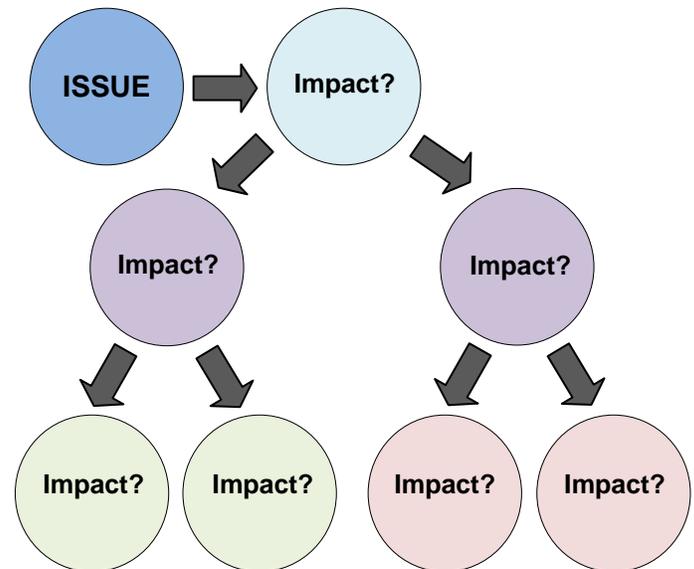
“Gosh, we immediately began to realize things that we'd never considered otherwise.”

They say,

- “It causes us to think about the future in-depth.”
- “Even though the situation we started with was negative (as many of them are), we began to see positive aspects of it as they naturally occurred.”
- “We needed to add more circles than we originally had on the diagram because we were coming up with more responses.”
- “The actions we need to take become clear as we do the thinking and build the implications.”

Take this simple model and apply it to an event, trend, scenario, possibility, probability, challenge or change that's coming from your organization and watch what emerges.

### Implicit Thinking Cascading Implications Diagram



#### SIDEBAR

### What are you going to do in the here and now?

By Allan Forbis

If you've read many of the articles in *Solutions* that focus on change, listened to others who have encouraged you to plan for the future, or just know how important it is to be prepared for whatever happens to come your way, it's possible that you're feeling a little overwhelmed.

If so, it might be a good time to take a quick “time out” and focus on what's going on right now instead. Many experts say that living in the present is one of the best things you can do to be happy and live a less stressful life. We're not saying to ignore everything you've heard and read about planning for the future – that would be a mistake. What is important is to strike a balance. Don't get so caught up thinking about tomorrow that you lose sight of what is currently going on today. Truth be told, no matter how much you plan, you never know for sure how life is going to turn out. The only time you will know is when you are actually in that moment. That's why the moment you're in now is the moment you control. You can make the most of it, or ignore it and waste it away.

You can seal yourself off in your office or work space, or you can come out to see what you can do to help a team member or customer. You can continue to walk right by the co-worker you haven't spoken to all week, or you can stop by to say hello. You can work on your own “stuff,” or read the report sent to you from a team member three weeks ago asking for your feedback—and who is still waiting to hear from you.

If that's not it, maybe the thing to do is to take a moment to recharge your own batteries so that you can regroup and refocus on what you really need to do today. That might mean taking a walk, not looking at the computer for a while, reading an inspirational book for a few minutes, or powering up with a healthy snack. There's a lot you can do in your very own moment!

On a larger scale, another important thing you can do right now is to rededicate yourself to the goals of your organization. Remind yourself how strongly you believe in what you're doing, and how much you value the team members who contribute to this endeavor.

Because of this, and because you're not alone at work and have a team to work with you—helping them to work in the moment is something you should do too. Share with them how valuable it can be to stay focused on the present. Even if this may sound strange for you to say and do, studies have shown that working in the moment (aka, mindfulness at work) can increase engagement, productivity, innovation, and measurable business results.

If you need more inspiration, thank about this quote from public speaker and life coach Eckhart Tolle:

**“Nothing has happened in the past; it happened in the Now.  
Nothing will ever happen in the future; it will happen in the Now.”**

Take a moment to invest in yourself, your work team, and your organization. Don't forget to live in the moment. It's worth it!

To learn more about this topic, attend our new half-day program:

**Living in the Moment: An Introduction to Practical Mindfulness**

[Click here](#) to read the full description for the program.

# TECHNICAL JOURNAL

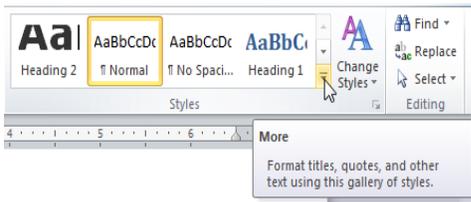
## Microsoft Office Tips

From the Center for Management and Professional Development's  
[Computer and Technical Skills Training Team](#)

### Creating and Applying Styles in Microsoft Word

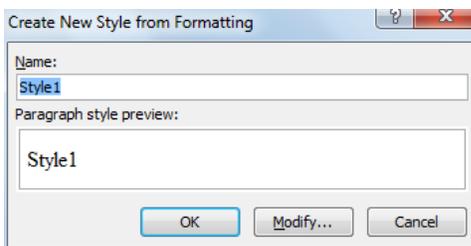
A style is a set of formatting characteristics that you can apply to text in your document. You use a style to quickly change text appearance and save time formatting text over and over with the same styles.

1. Select the text that contains the formatting you want to save as a Style.
2. Click the **Home** ribbon. In the **Styles** group, click the **More Style** button.



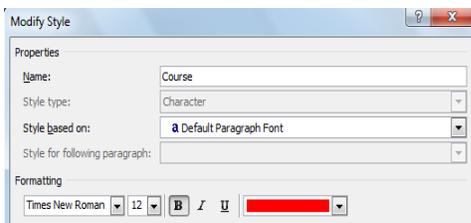
A list of command and styles appears.

3. Click **Save Selection as a New Quick Style**.

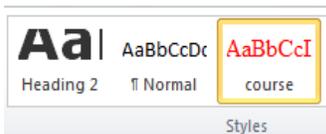


You want to save the selected format as a new style. The Create New Style from Formatting dialog box appears, as shown here.

4. Click the **Modify** button. In the **Name** box, type the name of the Style. In the **Style type** drop down, click **Character**.

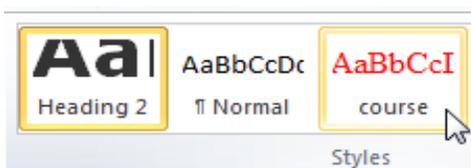


5. Click the **OK** button.

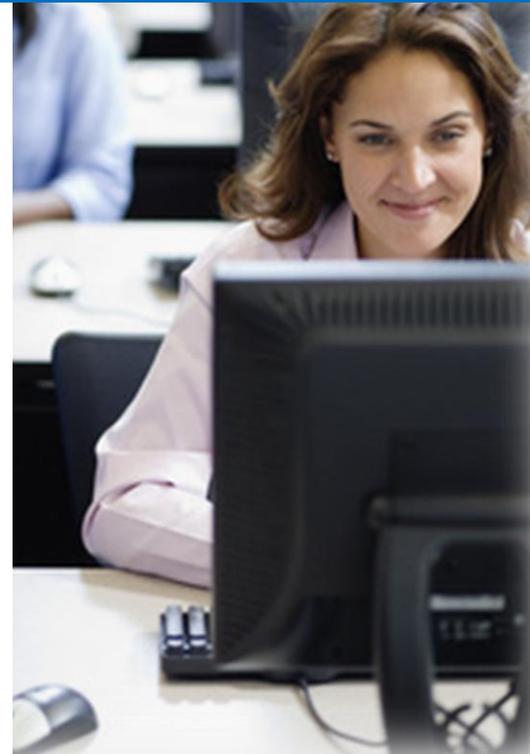


The dialog box closes and the character style 'course' appears in the Quick Style gallery.

6. Select the text you want to apply the style to.
7. Click the **Home** ribbon. In the **Styles** group, click the Style Name.



If the style you want is not listed, click the **More Style** button to expand the Quick Style gallery.



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Dr. Alan Zimmerman, author, national speaker and President of Zimmerman Communi-Care Network has spoken to more than a million people. The Center for Management and Professional Development is proud to offer Solutions readers the opportunity to benefit from Dr. Zimmerman's expertise and his solution-focused approach to leadership and personal enrichment.



## DR. ZIMMERMAN'S Comment

### **"If you think you're leading and look behind and no one is following, you're just out for a walk."**

No matter what role you play or job you have at home or at work you can be tremendously more effective WHEN you master KEY leadership skills. Let's focus on just one of them—communication.

#### **Leaders are good communicators.**

I think it's a safe to say that even if you didn't know who was who in a group, you could probably spot the leaders by just watching and listening to the group for a few minutes.

Typically, the leader is articulate. He expresses himself persuasively, and authoritatively. She may speak last on a subject, or she may be the one that the rest of the group really listens to.

If you don't fall into that category of being articulate and persuasive, don't worry. Many great leaders were basically shy and introverted in their early, formative years. They did not automatically or "naturally" gravitate towards the limelight.

In many cases, it just happens because of their deep convictions about a particular mission or cause. They simply had to speak out on the issues that were important to them and their organizations. Some of those leaders were likely never totally at ease in the leadership role, but they LEARNED to do it nonetheless.

Whether through trial and error ... specific training ... or a series of difficult events where they had to either sink or swim ... effective leaders LEARN how to communicate with others. And so can you.

#### **Leaders communicate their vision of a "better way."**

Of course, you may be thinking that you know several good communicators in your organization, but they're not necessarily effective leaders. That may be true. Some of your coworkers may be quite articulate as they complain about the management or direction of your company, but none of us would put them into the category of being an inspiring, effective, motivating, or team-building kind of leader.

So let me be more specific when I say leaders are good communicators. Good leaders focus their communication on their vision of the future. They help define that vision and they enlist the help of others to attain that vision.

In doing so, leaders often focus on emotional issues that connect them with others. They talk about the quality of their products, or their dedication to customer service, or their commitment to the dignity of all employees. Consultant John Zenger says, "They focus on values that appeal to employees, enlisting them in a noble course that gives meaning and purpose to their work."

Of course you may be thinking of "leaders" who might be considered effective—but certainly not good—people like Hitler, Stalin, Bin Laden, and Saddam Hussein. You might argue that all of them were good communicators, and they all talked about their vision of the future. So how do they fit into my definition of "good leaders?"

They don't. Each of them failed the ultimate, leadership communication test. Each of them was a liar. As Dr. Spencer Johnson, author of *Who Moved My Cheese?* says, "Integrity is telling myself the truth. And honesty is telling the truth to other people." None of those "notorious" leaders ever did that.

#### **Effective leaders also communicate by example.**

LeRoy Thompson, Jr., the author of *Mastering the Challenges of Change* says, leaders "must consistently exhibit the behaviors they want others to emulate." He illustrates this principle with Arnie Kleiner, who took over as general manager of WMAR-TV in Baltimore when it was referred to as "the number four station in a three-station market." Kleiner wanted everyone to discuss the stations' problems frankly and to plan improvements.

People were hesitant to level with him—until the lost wallet incident. After returning to his office from shooting a routine editorial, Kleiner discovered that his wallet was missing. He assumed someone had stolen it.

He issued an angry memo to all station staff announcing the theft, but declaring amnesty if the perpetrator would just return the credit cards, driver's license, and other identification. Most of the staff was incensed that the general manager was accusing them of stealing, but no one said anything. The air was thick with hurt feelings and hostility toward him—a familiar climate at WMAR.

Three days later, Kleiner donned his studio jacket to do another editorial—and discovered the wallet in an inner pocket. He could have simply announced the wallet was found, omitting details, but he seized the opportunity for leadership.

He sent another memo letting everyone know that he had blown it and that for the rest of the day everyone could "feel free to tell me so to my face."

For the entire day, everyone from the janitor to the weatherman made it a point to take him up on his offer. "From that moment forward," Thompson reports, "there was a noticeable change in the morale of WMAR-TV; making a mistake was no longer the end of the world."

Kleiner led by example. In the future, when he was wrong he admitted it. And when he was wrong, he did not repeat the dysfunctional behavior of blaming everybody else. He started to model the openness and flexibility that he wanted his staff to exhibit.

You have the potential to be a leader—or at the very least, you have the potential to exhibit some constructive leadership behaviors. And it all starts with your communication skills.

#### **ACTION:**

List 3 things you are doing – or could do – to let coworkers know that their job matters. Then do those things this week.



# COURAGE

From Margie Warrell



## It's official: Your future is uncertain!

Just picked-up today's paper: New York to Sink Beneath Sea! (or so declares the headline in the New York Times). Continued economic instability...Companies restructuring and sending jobs off shore...The list is long!

There's no doubt about it, uncertainty can be uncomfortable. We human beings are wired to want to control our environment. We enjoy the stability that comes from having continuity between our past and future—a future that is familiar, stable and predictable. We like to feel that we are masters of our own ship, and in control of our fate. So it's entirely natural to find ourselves feeling a little out of sorts when our future becomes an unknown quantity.

Funny enough, it was not too long ago that my husband came home from work and told me he'd been offered a job that meant packing up our home and life in the US and moving back to Melbourne, after 17 years away. I couldn't have been less prepared or more surprised! Sometimes life's biggest changes come without any notice!

From that experience combined with many other periods of uncertainty, change and anxiety over the years, I've learned a few really important lessons:

**Trust yourself.** Too often we underestimate our ability to handle challenges. Trust yourself that whatever happens, you can handle it – one day, even one moment, at a time.

**Be grateful.** While not everything may be as you wish, you have a lot to be thankful for. Don't fail to appreciate all that is wonderful in your world.

**Focus on what you can do.** Don't waste energy thinking about all that you can't control or do.

**Don't force outcomes.** Let go of any attachment you have to having things turn out a certain way.

**Embrace "not knowing."** While we are wired to want to plan and predict the future, life's greatest opportunities are often unplanned and totally unpredictable. Don't miss them.

In an increasingly anxious and uncertain world, more and more people I meet struggle with uncertainty and try to compensate by becoming over-controlling. Yet as they do, they get their knickers in a bit fat knot, and create lots of unnecessary and unhelpful stress-inducing drama as they try to answer the unanswerable and worry about their ability to handle the future.

What lies ahead? What if they restructure? What if I lose my job? What if I get relocated? What if my spouse is relocated? How will it affect my life and family? What adjustments will I need to make? What if I can't make them? What if I don't want to make them? What if I'm not successful? What if I am...? What if... what if... what if...?

Whether it's change you are choosing, or change that is thrust upon you, when the ground beneath your feet begins to shift, you can't help but feel a bit off kilter.

I have been a queen of "What ifs?" over the years. I know their futility. I know that when you spend your life dwelling on the What ifs? it can take away attention from making the most of where you are now and setting yourself up to handle the future in the most constructive way.

The reality is that nothing is ever truly certain, except uncertainty. However much you like to avoid risk and control your world, you can never truly know what tomorrow will hold. Just go to any hospital ER and ask a patient if being there was part of his or her plan for the day.

Embracing uncertainty that exists in your life is crucial to coming out the other end of it with no fewer gray hairs than you went in (or at least, not as many as you would have got had you resisted it.) It's also paramount to growing in wisdom, clarifying purpose and learning the valuable lessons that can teach.

Helen Keller once said, "Life is a daring adventure or nothing."

So let me ask you: How can you approach your future today with greater self-trust, curiosity and adventure?

It's impossible to chart a certain path through uncertain waters. You can only adjust your sails as you move along—with greater flexibility, more resourcefulness, deeper faith and a heightened appreciation of the mysterious nature of life.

Uncertainty can ultimately enrich your life, or diminish it. What determines which it will be is how you approach it. So trust yourself. Whatever lies ahead for you, you can handle it. And knowing that, you can enjoy where you are today that much more and make the most of the opportunities that change always provides.