Leadership “Story Line”

The Problem and the Solution

In a global knowledge economy, the source of highest value is the creative engagement of the whole person: body, heart, mind, and spirit. However, most of our organizational and management practices are based on an industrial model where people are treated as things. Even though we may agree intellectually to the value created by unleashing the full creative potential of people, our practices do not reflect that. We are still trapped in an industrial age.

Great leaders have the mind-set, skill-set, and tool-set necessary to unleash the highest talent and capability of people against the organization’s most important priorities. These are found in the “Whole-Person Paradigm” and the 4 Imperatives of Great Leaders.

The Whole-Person Paradigm

The Whole-Person Paradigm means that you, as a leader, see people as “whole people”—body, heart, mind, and spirit—and manage and lead accordingly. It means you recognize that the highest contributions are volunteered each day by people who could easily choose to go somewhere else. As a result, you spend your efforts creating a place where people want to stay and in which they are enabled to offer their best.

The 4 Imperatives of Great Leaders

Leaders unleash talent and capability by carrying out the 4 Imperatives of Great Leaders in a “whole person” way. These 4 Imperatives are sequential in that one builds upon another. They are also simultaneous, meaning that you must constantly pay attention to all four in order to sustain outstanding performance.
The 4 Imperatives are:

- **Imperative 1: Inspire Trust**—to build credibility as a leader, so that people will trust you with their highest efforts.

- **Imperative 2: Clarify Purpose**—to define a clear and compelling purpose that people will want to offer their best to achieve.

- **Imperative 3: Align Systems**—to create systems of success that support the purpose and goals of the organization, enable people to do their best work, operate independently of you, and endure overtime.

- **Imperative 4: Unleash Talent**—to develop a winning team, where people’s unique talents are leveraged against clear performance expectations in a way that encourages responsibility and growth.

**Imperative 1: Inspire Trust**

Trust is the core imperative of great leaders, since it affects their ability to do everything else. A mediocre leader would say, “I get things done because I’m the boss.” Mediocre leaders view their position of formal authority as the source of their power to get results. The mind-set of the great leader is, “I get things done through personal influence and credibility.” Great leaders use informal, or moral, authority.

Trust is a function of personal credibility and behaviors that build trust. Credibility, or trustworthiness, is a function of a leader’s character and competence.

- Character describes what a leader is, and relates to your motives, your values and beliefs, and your degree of integrity to those things you feel are important.

- Competence is what a leader can do, and relates to your skills, your abilities, and your track record of results.

Character and competence are demonstrated through specific behaviors that either create or destroy trust. When trust is high, speed goes up and costs go
down. It’s like receiving a dividend on everything you do. People trust your motives. Communication is easy. People don’t hold their best ideas back. No one wastes time covering up, creating unnecessary forms and procedures, or altering information to meet someone’s agenda.

On the other hand, when trust is low, speed goes down and costs go up. It’s like all of your efforts are being taxed. Figuratively speaking, if you invest 100 percent of your effort on something, only 50 percent may actually be brought to bear on your goals because of all the second-guessing and bureaucratic, protective behaviors people engage in to protect their interests. Or people may simply hold back and not offer what they could, simply because they don’t trust you.

These behaviors cannot be faked, but must be founded on the bedrock of character and competence.

Imperative 2: Clarify Purpose

Great leaders create a clear and compelling purpose for their team. The mind-set of the mediocre leader is, “As long as people have a clear job description, they’ll be fine.” The mind-set of the great leader is, “If a clear and compelling purpose exists, people will volunteer their best efforts.”
A clear team purpose answers three questions:

1. **Job to be done.** What is the specific job your customers (internal or external) are “hiring” you to do?

2. **Strategic link.** How does your team connect with the organization’s mission and strategy?

3. **Money-making model.** How does your team contribute to the economic model of the organization?

When developing a purpose, great leaders balance rigorous personal thought and analysis with appropriate team feedback and involvement. They also work to create a shared and compelling vision around the purpose—what it looks like when achieved with excellence—through effective involvement and communication.

**Imperative 3: Align Systems**

Great leaders align systems for results and institutionalize them to endure over time. The mind-set of a mediocre leader is, “Everything is so dependent on me.” Mediocre leaders either have not taken the time to set up systems, or they gratify their ego by “riding in and saving the day,” while everyone depends on them. The mind-set of a great leader is, “Enduring success is in the systems.” Great leaders work to build success into the systems so that success becomes independent of any one person, creating a lasting legacy for those who follow.

A great system:

- Is aligned to achieve your highest priorities.
- Enables people to give their best.
- Operates independently of the leader.
- Endures beyond the leader.
Although many systems are important to running a great team or organization, there are four systems that are essential to your success:

1. **Execution.** This is your system for focusing on and achieving your most important goals. A great execution system is built around *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*.

2. **Talent.** This is your system for attracting, positioning, developing, and rewarding people. It is all about getting the right people in the right positions and building their capability over time.

3. **Core Work Processes.** This is your system for organizing your most critical work as a team or an organization. Great leaders have taken the time to define their core work processes and are constantly working to improve them.

4. **Customer Feedback.** This is your system for gathering consistent feedback on how well you are meeting the needs of your customer and making ongoing improvements based on that data. A great system is based on the principles of the “Ultimate Question” and the Net Promoter Score (NPS).

**Imperative 4: Unleash Talent**

Great leaders create a culture that unleashes the highest talents and contributions of people. The mind-set of the mediocre leader is, “I need to constantly motivate and manage my people to get results.” The mind-set of the great leader is, “My job is to release the talent and passion of our team toward our highest priorities.”

Great leaders recognize that every time they open their mouth, they are creating culture. As a result, they are constantly looking for opportunities to turn a normal conversation into a leadership conversation.
There are three leadership conversations that have the most impact:

1. **Voice.** To affirm the worth and potential of each person on your team.

2. **Performance.** To clarify expectations and accountability (through Win–Win Performance Agreements).

3. **Clear the Path.** To be a source of help and enable people to succeed in their jobs.

Great leaders also recognize that these conversations become credible and powerful when there is high trust, a clear purpose, and aligned systems that support the execution of the team’s most important goals (Imperatives 1–3). As a result, they approach the 4 Imperatives as an interdependent whole and give constant attention to each imperative in order to unleash the highest and best contributions of their people.

**Becoming a Trim Tab**

The key to the big is the small. Great leaders recognize that large things are accomplished by consistently doing the right smaller things over time. Just as a small trim tab on the rudder of a large ship determines the direction of the ship, small things done consistently over time can have tremendous impact.