

THE FUTURE OF **EVERYTHING**

Strategies for Successful Business Behavior



By Russ Ouellette

with Heather Ramsey,
Trinnie Houghton and
Debra LeClair

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Dr. Russ Ouellette is a recognized expert in high-performance coaching, executive leadership and organizational development. With a doctorate in management and as a graduate of the Coaches Training Institute, he has a vast background of industry and functional diversity. He is manager of Sojourn Partners, an executive coaching firm in Bedford, New Hampshire, and is an adjunct professor at New England College in Henniker, New Hampshire.

Russ' consulting centers on executive performance, firm motivation, strategic planning and organizational culture change. His clients include leaders at GE Medical, Raymond James Financial, Miter Corp., the U.S. Air Force, major nonprofits and small business startups.

Heather Ramsey, MA, CPCC

Heather Ramsey has an exceptional background in providing vision, direction and focus to a wide range of programs. Heather is a Certified Professional Coach through the International Coach Federation. She received her B.S. in business management from Northeastern University and her master's in mental health counseling from Argosy University. Heather utilizes her broad international business experience, integrating multiple cultures and focusing on leadership development, team-building, communication skills and conflict resolution.

Some of her consulting and coaching clients have included Nike, Southern New Hampshire University, the Embassy of Denmark, Cairo, Microsoft Corp. as well as nonprofits, law firms, international manufacturers and small businesses.

Trinnie Houghton, JD, CPCC, ORSCC

Trinnie works with executives and entrepreneurs across a variety of industries in the United States, Europe and Asia in leadership and organizational development. She brings expertise in communication, relationship management and employee engagement. She graduated with honors from Boston University with a B.A. in psychology and received her J.D. with honors from Suffolk University Law School. She received her coach certification from The Coaches Training Institute and holds an advanced certification in organization and relationship systems coaching from CRR Global.

She has presented at the American Bar Association's Annual Meeting, International Academy of Collaborative Practitioners' Annual Forums, the New Hampshire Women's Bar Association's Annual Retreat, Women's Bar Association of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Collaborative Law Council, Boston Society of Architects, Easter Seals of N.H., and Catholic Medical Center's Leadership Academy.

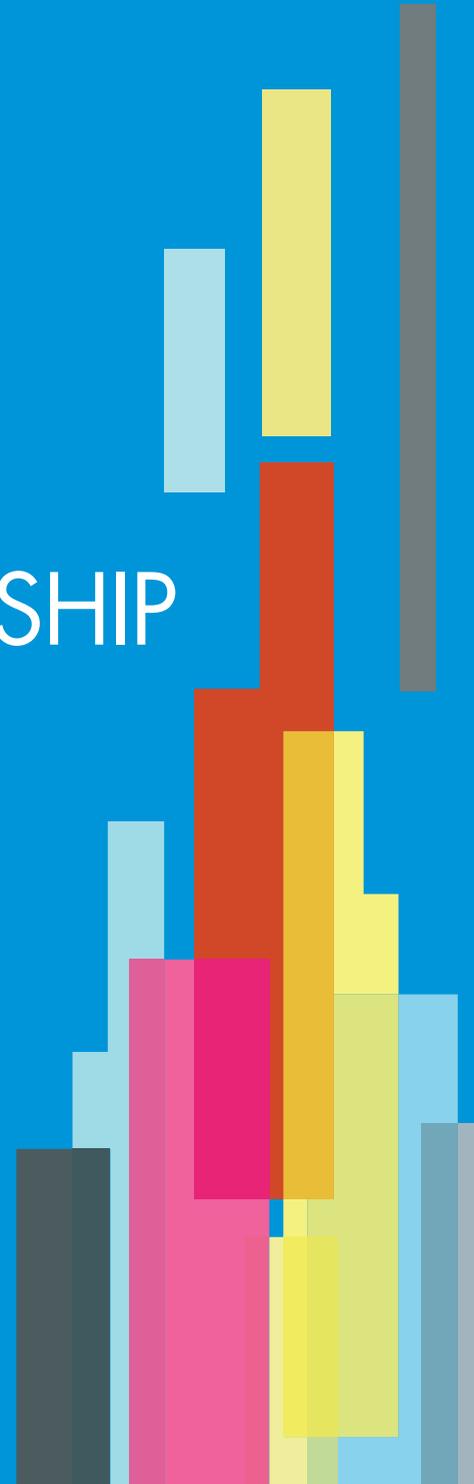
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With a strong background in behavior change, leadership development, stress management and brain science, Dr. Debra LeClair utilizes a multi-dimensional approach in working with clients to move through obstacles in meeting career and personal aspirations. She also consults and trains in corporations, nonprofit agencies and public schools to implement positive cultural change, improve interpersonal communication and enhance talent retention and management.

Debra holds master's degrees in both clinical and applied psychology and earned her doctorate in applied psychology from Rutgers University in 1998. She is a Certified Life Coach and Peoplemap Trainer, as well as a trained executive coach. In 2010, Debra completed a practicum at The Center for Mindfulness at UMASS Medical School to become a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Instructor and has been able to adapt the program to onsite work settings.

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LEADERSHIP



How to Thrust Leadership Upon Them

BY RUSS OUELLETTE

Shakespeare wrote, “Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.” In leadership theory and practice, all apply.

Our primary goal as leaders is to make more leaders. This is no easy thing to do. After all, many people we see who have talent might not step up to lead. During our development, some people are lucky enough to have been captain of a school team, achieved the rank of Eagle Scout or been mentored by a caring adult, while others were busy obtaining their 10,000 hours of practice that Malcolm Gladwell wrote about in his great book, *Outliers*.

Consider the breakthrough that people experience when they have realized that they can lead. It is a breakthrough, a moment when they hear their own voice, realize that they have something to contribute, understand that they want to be part of solutions.

I have the pleasure of mentoring graduate students through their thesis, and this is a meaningful period for them and me. Usually at the beginning of the thesis process, students have lots of insecurities about what is expected. They ask lots of questions about approach, how to do research, what to write about.

My answer to them is always the same, “I don’t know.”

What I am looking for is the student to break out of doing what is expected and begin telling me what they want to do. I want them to say, “I got this.” Only then will they enter flow and get lost in their ideas. Once this is achieved, the writing is easy, and the rest is following a process that will communicate their ideas.

In human development, there are many models that emphasize this shift from doing what is expected to creating. It’s also a moment when we realize that there are no absolute answers, only more questions. And if there are no absolute answers, then no one really corners the market on knowledge or ideas. This is a shift to “my ideas are as good as anyone else’s.”

Moving from
'What do you
want boss?'
To 'This is a
solution boss.'

So the question becomes: How do I as a professor help students along this path to self-awareness? And how do you as a leader help your most promising people towards true leadership?

Let go of control and resist the temptation to give them the answers. As leaders, we are very good at directing, cutting to the chase and giving the order, and we need to allow others the time and space to work through problems. We need to get others past the “what do you want boss?” to “this is a solution boss.” This sometimes requires us taking a deep breath.

Consider the following items to create leadership:

- Wait for the opportunity that they bring to you. It usually comes in the form of a question or an idea. Resist the temptation to answer and begin a dialogue that further develops the question. Turn the question around and help them deconstruct both the question and the answer. Once they come up with a few approaches (and these approaches will eventually be aligned with what you would have told them anyway), set them on a path to further their idea.
- Let them own the solution, and show that you support them. If they own it, it will mean more to them. This is as basic as having the artist sign their own work. If their name is on it, the solution will become part of them.

CASE STUDY BY DEBRA LeCLAIR

Honing Your Leadership Skills: Shakespearean Style

As an audience, we were in for a real treat at the recent Boston Book Festival. Richard Olivier, son of Sir Laurence Olivier, not just told, but showed us that what worked 400 years ago also has great power in today's business climate. So are we now talking about beheading our enemies? No, although that certainly is found within the drama of Henry V, the play Olivier used to illustrate his points.

Of the many leadership qualities touched upon, one of the most compelling was that even a reigning monarch has to put an intention out to win the hearts and minds of the troops. Henry V accomplished this by “turning the ‘I’ into a ‘we’.”

He started by sharing a clear and imaginable vision with all those that would play a part in co-creating

it. In “talking the talk” in the modern conference room, the sharing works best when it is done by addressing any negatives as points where the collective intelligence of a team can be employed to devise strategies to transform them into wins, “All things are ready if our minds be so.”

In “walking the walk,” leaders that take the time to interpersonally and positively connect with their teams, just by doing so are communicating that the human beings on those teams are the resource in which the leader places their faith. The leader's trust is communicated by never mentioning the possibility of defeat—focusing all imagination on what success looks like, setting thought and action to be in that forward direction.

CASE STUDY BY TRINNIE HOUGHTON

Can You Teach Leadership Skills?

Are leaders born? Or made? Or is it some combination of both? My experience says that it fundamentally comes down to this: Leadership is a choice. It is product of what we believe about ourselves in any given scenario. Our beliefs are our internal operating systems.

For example, if I believe that I'm not a good public speaker and never will be, then guess what? You got it. I will be terrible up there on stage. But what if someone asked me, what's the story you make up about totally messing up, speaking in front of lots of people? How I begin to answer that will begin to reveal what I believe about myself. For me, it is likely tied up in my sense of worth. And wow, that's not helpful to getting better at public speaking.

How might I change the story? We begin by asking questions:

1) What's the story? For example, in the public speaking example I gave, you might ask me: “If you

flub on stage (or trip over yourself), what would that say about you?” “Why is that a problem for you?” “What is the risk?” My story gradually unfolds. And I can look at it objectively.

2) How does the story serve you? If not, how else might we look at this? “What would you rather believe about yourself?” (That public speaking has nothing to do with my sense of worth.) And “what is the new story that would support this belief?”

Leadership skills can be taught: how to communicate more effectively, how to be more strategic, how to develop systems awareness, for example. The real issue is if they can be learned. If they can agree with our inner operating systems.

Until we get into the stories — our beliefs — underlying what's going on, we risk bouncing along the surface, at the whim of the many trade winds that threaten to blow us off course.

- Allow mistakes to happen. This is sometimes difficult for us because we don't want to waste time and resources. Yet, we learn from falling off the bike a few times how to keep it balanced. When they overcome the failure, they are empowered with an experience that is embedded in the solution. The failure and ultimate success reinforces that exploration is OK, and that falling down has a value.
- Since they own the solution, let them present it and put it to work. Presenting is hard, but getting through a presentation is exhilarating. When the idea turns into action, profits and furthering the mission, have them take the applause.

There will be times of anguish, confusion and frustration. This is when you encourage and reinforce that they are on the right track. Tell them stories about how you get through things, and that you can relate. Then push them back out there.

FOCUS ON: Communication

BY TRINNIE HOUGHTON

So you think you're a good communicator. I do. Until I wasn't. I jokingly made a remark, but in fact, it was hurtful to the person receiving it. Well, Houston, we've got a problem.

Lately, a couple of my clients approached me with this phenomenon as well. Each of them believed they were being misinterpreted by their staff.

It's not what you say but how you say it.

"But they took it the wrong way!" "I didn't say that!"

So we went through my clients' respective conversations to look for where the misinterpretations were happening. Here is the range of what we discovered: People felt hurt. People felt unheard. People felt that the conversation wasn't genuine. People felt attacked. People felt afraid. It all was about their feelings.

To protect against misinterpretation, we focused on how the other person was feeling. We learned, for instance, how to "bookend" the conversation. We made sure we started up a conversation openly, and closed it by checking out the impact of what we said. It goes like this:

1. Soft start-up: "Do you have a minute?" or "My intention here is to..."
2. Be genuinely curious about what is going on for them.
3. Repeat back what you heard.
4. Ask if they are ready or open to hear your viewpoint or feedback.
5. Check out impact. "What did you hear me say?" "How do you feel hearing that?"

The bookends are the soft start-up and the checking out of discussion's impact on the listener. This is best used when we have those crucial conversations – conversations about job performance or employee engagement, for example.

The beauty of it is if you mess up, as I did, you get to genuinely offer to clean it up. Acknowledge how it made them feel. "Wow, when I said that, that must have hurt you." Apologize. Restate your intention. If it feels egregious enough, enroll them into looking for a solution. "I'd like to clean this up. How can we make it right?"

You get to catch yourself in the act and change course. And after the conversation is over, what comes across most is that you care.

Focus On How Well Do You Say No?

"No is the foundation that we can build our yes on."

— Seth Godin

Contrary to what we believe, by saying "yes" to everything, we don't create value. We create stress. For ourselves. For our teams. We don't deliver our best work. We deliver our work under the gun. Doing this day in, day out is exhausting. We operate out of a place of fear, or passivity. We ultimately feel that we are powerless. It "out there" is happening to us.

Overworked clients often come in seeking to understand how to manage their time or their energy. More often, they have experienced a new success. They find themselves straddling their old role and their new one. They are not only doing their "old job" tasks, but taking on new ones. They agree to do it all in the name of getting the job done. Perhaps they are under fear of losing their jobs or perhaps not knowing quite how to rearrange their new roles.

What would it be like to say "no" or "yes" from a place that taps into our creativity – our sense of purpose? To feel we are at choice to accept or reject? What if it "in here" was really happening out there? What if we get to powerfully decide what would serve ourselves and our teams best? And what if saying "no" actually honors that decision. How to remember what we want in the midst of being asked? This is where you get to decide if you are powerful to create what you want.

Three Questions to Ask Yourself:

1. Am I feeling powerful or powerless in making this decision?
2. Will this help create what I want?
3. Am I willing to take responsibility for what will happen?

In our coaching, we often ask clients, "By saying no, what are you saying yes to?" We're asking for their powerful, inner commitment to themselves.

Focus On Telling the Hard Truth

I have the honor of telling people “the Hard Truth” all the time. Sometimes it’s not the easiest thing to do, but it is the best gift I can give to them.

What is “the Hard Truth”?

It is letting someone know that what they are doing or saying is coming across in a negative way. This could be in remarks that they make, negative body language or behavior. If it has a particular impact on me, it may very well be viewed this way by others. If I don’t tell them, they may never know that this is the way they are coming across to the people around them.

The Question Is – How Do You Tell Them?

- Ask “Do you want some feedback? I know this is not your intention, but this is the way you are coming across.”
- Say, “When you do _____, it makes me feel or it makes others feel _____.”
- Use a tone of voice that is sincere and supportive.
- If they are unaware of when this is happening, come up with a code you can use to at least bring it into their consciousness.
- Seek to understand. “When you do this, I’m curious – what is going on for you?”

It’s also important to remind them that you are telling them “the hard truth” because you care and you want them to know so they can improve the way they are communicating their message. After all, it is your duty as a friend, partner, coach or boss to tell them “the hard truth.” And it truly is the best gift you can give.

Focus On Increasing Communication by Being Honest

Feelings of resentment build up in many relationships because one side feels disrespected, slighted or unappreciated. This is human and normal. The problems begin when the one that feels slighted, does not express what is going on for them. They let the resentment build. This person does not want to start a fight or hurt the other person’s feelings. They wish to avoid the conflict and in doing so create a larger, stronger one. I can assure you that you can be honest and still do it in a way that is not hurtful or blaming.

Examples include:

- “I know it is not your intention, but when you are late it makes me feel like you don’t respect me.”
- “I am sure you are just busy, but when you don’t return my emails it makes me feel unimportant.”

The key part here is to say “when you do A, I feel B.” Your delivery of this is important. It must not be in anger or out of wanting to hurt the others’ feelings. Your tone should be in your style but should come across as calm, soft and from a place of trying to strengthen the relationship. Say what you have to say and then listen to the other person. Often, they had no idea that it bothers you and probably are sorry that it does. They may have misunderstood something and thought they were doing what you wanted. But remember, our values are different, so sometimes how I want to be treated is much different from how others want to be treated.

The follow up to this might be some sort of request of what you want instead or how you both could handle the situation differently the next time. An example of this might be

“If you don’t have time to email a long response, just send a message letting me know you received my email and that you will respond with details as soon as possible.” That way the person knows the other person is trying. With these conflicts quite often there is no need for a next step because just venting and creating a new way of working around situations is enough to help people move on.

Focus On How to Build Your Ability to Influence

Being heard and being able to influence others’ attitudes and behaviors is sometimes an elusive leadership quality that people feel that they may be born with or not. In reality, it is a skill set that can be learned. When looking to effectively communicate, it is important to be clear on the outcomes you are looking to attain along with an awareness of how your message may be best received by the other person or group.

Start off by thinking about why your idea or proposal would be important to the other party. Make that the central focus of how you frame the message or the presentation. This may seem obvious, but so many managers and leaders will talk about what is important to them first, spending key time to

make a case for what he or she values. For example, you have a new efficiency initiative you want to implement but your staff is working from overly full plates already and you feel would be resistant to “one more thing” to worry about. Lead your discussion by acknowledging the current state of stress and how this initiative will lighten the load.

When preparing to communicate in a situation where you are looking to attain buy-in, also consider what your audience will most respond to both emotionally and intellectually. Will they need to know how an idea will lessen their pain or how much it will enhance an already adequate process? Will enough of them tune into figures and statistics because they need and want details or are you better off presenting the big picture in broad, illustrative strokes, such as a graph that sums it all up? Resist building your message just on what you would want to know. If you are unsure, ask a few members of your future audience to give you simple feedback about what gets and keeps their attention. Not only are you likely to have greater impact, you will also feel more confidence going forward.

Focus On Using Forgiveness to Increase Communication

Sometimes you just have to let it go. If you can look at the situation and determine the person or group in question had no bad intentions, and you have expressed how you feel, you have to ask yourself how important it is to hold on to the resentment?

Some people are able start fresh with a clean slate, approaching the person as if only from now forward counts. Others learn to accept people for what they are and accept their abilities (or lack thereof) knowing that no one is perfect. These people shift their expectations of what this person will or won't do.

Try thinking of what they contribute to the team, to you or even to the world around them. Forgive them for not being what you want them to be and accept them for being who they are and what they do contribute.

Then move on! You will notice if you can take a moment to think about what that other person does contribute, you will treat them differently. Your non-verbal communication will be completely different. You will not feel as frustrated by them and they might not be as frustrated with you. It will help turn the relationship into something that can be productive rather than stressful.

Leadership Is Not a Solo Sport

BY RUSS OUELLETTE

I have to wonder where all the great leaders are in our presidential politics. Is this the best we can do? What about all the people who could be great leaders, who might be able to help us out of this mess? Where are they?

I think we are looking in the wrong place. There is no silver bullet. The sooner we stop looking for one, the better off we'll be.

A few years ago, I was helping with interviews for a CEO for a mid-sized firm. Their perception was that all their problems were directly related to their “leader.” They pointed out symptoms, such as lack of communication, poor decision-making and wanting to take the organization in a non-traditional direction.

When I asked the board what their role in this leader's failure was, they replied, “nothing at all.” And that's the problem. People will naturally look to blame someone, but rarely do they look at themselves.

Leadership is not a solo sport. In fact, we can't have leaders without followers. We can't lead people who have a stake in failure, are afraid to progress and grow or are cemented in the present.

I'm not suggesting that this board has to agree with its outgoing or incoming president. Rather, that they are complicit in the results, good or bad, and should at least take some responsibility.

Leadership requires a set of skills, and I do subscribe to the belief that a leader is ultimately responsible for the end result. The CEO I was helping to replace failed, plain and simple.

However, before making a recommendation for a new CEO, I would also consider the organizational dynamics and the ability, willingness and support to change those dynamics to accomplish something. What organizations think they want is a person who will heal all their ills and move people automatically to action and alignment.

Good leaders look to their entire team, partners and stakeholders to take some responsibility for finding solutions.

The Organization's Role

Don't get me wrong, there are a few people around who are gifted with the "silver bullet" capacity, but they still will fail, unless the entire effort is collective. And that is what is misunderstood.

I'm all for a leader jumping into the biggest problems they can find to truly lead, but not if the organization is unwilling to be successful from the start.

Usually a crisis of substantial proportions will push us to step back and suspend our prejudice, stop the rhetoric, loosen our heels to come together for change. Wall Street knew how to do this, and is therefore healthy again. There was not "one" leader in this success, but many, and together they accomplished a banking recovery.

Companies I know have done the same thing. The crisis of the economy has made them re-examine their beliefs and priorities, and set them on a redefined course of action. Washington can not do this, and no leader, from whatever side, will ever make a difference until the body decides to take responsibility.

If you're a business leader and not running for president, you should be looking to your entire team, partners and stakeholders, to take some responsibility for finding solutions. If you face resistance in making change you have to move people to that change, or change your own mind.

You are not the one and only solution provider. You are the leader of a team of solution providers. It is rare if everyone ever agrees. But everyone is still responsible for achieving results.

If you are thinking your CEO is not leading, take a look around and make sure you have attempted to be part of the solution. If he or she fails, you have failed. The way to success is working really hard together.

If you're just wondering who to vote for, my advice is to look for candidates who take responsibility for solutions. If they are merely blaming others, that's what they will do when they govern. If they are enlisting your support to participate in solutions, they recognize that they cannot do it alone. That's what we need – not a silver bullet.

Charge Up Your Team

Working as a team is hard. The dynamics are ever changing. It really doesn't matter what you are doing – if your team isn't connected, it will not be performing as well as they could, nor will they be fulfilled in their work. Here is what you can do to help increase the team's trust and connection:

Help Them Understand and Appreciate Each Other

Come together as a group and discuss how you, as individuals, want to be communicated with. Learning to understand what others appreciate about you provides imperative insight. This can be done on a consistent basis or completed at a meeting/retreat and then reinforced throughout the year. People don't realize the contributions that they make to the team. It is imperative to help these members see their value and to reinforce the appreciation from others within the team.

Find Out What People Need

Have your team develop ways to acknowledge accomplishments. Appreciation styles vary and often we are guessing how someone wants to get recognition for their work, energy and contributions. Simply ask and then reinforce by following through with what they asked for.

Talk About the Pink Elephant in the Room

This can be done in a way that is appropriate and professional (even though it is scary). You want to encourage team members to say what is true for them and what they need instead. For example it could be, "When you send me an email that says, 'People, we need to get it together' my team shuts down. I realize your frustration, but could we address the situation in person or word it in a way that doesn't put defenses up?" You are not putting someone down, rather just saying what is true for you and offering another way for the person to get their needs met.

Create the Vision

Have something the team can collectively work towards that answers to the bigger vision. For example, this might be how they want to work as a team or something that inspires and speaks to each person on the team. The key here is to consistently remind the team of the bigger vision so they can stay connected to it.

Define and Practice Behavior

Define how you will treat each other in many situations including when times are stressful. Practice these behaviors and debrief with the group. Catch each other doing things well.

I encourage you to start this discussion with your team. Think about what you need and how to find your team's unique path to getting there. Let others know what has worked for you and what they can try to implement with their groups. All of this helps us move towards a "real" and civil workplace – one customized by the team and empowered by the people within it.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- 1 Create leadership by allowing your people to own the solution. Support them, and it will mean more to them.
- 2 Leadership is a choice – a product of what we believe about ourselves in any given scenario.
- 3 Being honest increases communication.
- 4 Telling the hard truth conveys that you care about the friend, partner, coach or boss.
- 5 The way to success is working hard together.

“There are no secrets to success.
It is the result of preparation, hard
work, and learning from failure.”

– Colin Powell