

Catalyst[©]

Catalyst is for alumni of our leadership development seminars to remain connected, and for coaching clients, prospective clients, and other interested parties to learn about who we are and what we do. Also available electronically at www.DancingStar.com.

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An Elephant in the Room

We like to think that others do not notice us when we do not want them to. Truth is, we only fool ourselves. We may not speak the words, yet our thoughts are visible in our faces, in our energy, in our actions or even in our lack of action.

An example: "Jane" recently had a bad day at work. Though she felt she had muzzled her anger sufficiently to handle the tasks at hand, others around her seemed unsettled, if not upset. Jane has diabetes, so stress wreaks havoc with her blood sugar. The day after her "day from hell", her readings soared and stayed high for a week, leaving her tired and frustrated. Jane knows what unexpressed anger does to her physically. She is still at a loss for how to deal with it effectively.

If Jane was, say, one of your senior VPs, how would you help her deal with this situation? Put yourself in the role of observer for a moment – perhaps you have even been involved in

a similar situation. An angry but silent colleague enters the room...

Now, ask yourself some questions:

The unspoken – in your company and in your life – can hurt you

- what is the experience of being in this situation? What happens in your gut? to your energy?
- who does this situation impact?
- what is at stake?
- what does it cost your company in dollars, creativity, productivity, customer or employee satisfaction – even corporate image – to have employees unfocused (at best) or silently steaming (at worst), while trying to hide the elephant of their anger?
- what else is there to know about the impact of this situation?

And now as a business leader, how will you deal with it? Outside expertise? Internal or external allies? Perhaps change your own behavior to model a different approach for Jane?

Leaders have a responsibility to be a role model for the solution. To do so, however, we must first ensure that we are an effective model.

Perhaps we, too, think we must keep our thoughts and feelings to ourselves, thinking no one will notice our struggles if we do not say anything. Look around, and then accept that what is true for others is also true for you – whether we want to be or not, we are visible, even in our absence.

Having looked at our own behavior, we can then speak effectively to what we see. For instance: "I'm noticing behavior "x", which indicates "y" – is that your intention? Because this is the impact you're having, and I'm looking for a different impact. Let's brainstorm ways to achieve that – here's my experience..."

Once you have acknowledged the elephant and work together to tame it, solutions come more quickly. Try it!
– Deborah Huisken, aided by Kathleen O'Connor

WORKSHOP ROUNDUP

CAPE TOWN ADVENTURE

This summer I traveled to South Africa, hosted by a coaching colleague interested in business change and development. I spoke with an Executive Training group at Old Mutual, one of South Africa's large financial services companies.

We started by exploring where they are now. They identified universal corporate issues of politics, ineffective peers, supervisors, and subordi-

nates – however, played out against the backdrop of a country recovering its balance and re-integrating a majority of its population, the pressure to deal with such internal issues is impacted by larger social issues. More on this in future articles – people in South Africa are doing interesting work which they have agreed to share.



I then offered the Bigger Game model (Vol. 4, Iss. 2 of this newsletter or www.DancingStar.com/biggergame.htm), and my experience mirrored what creator Laura Whitworth found taking it into a Fortune 100 company. The Bigger Game model puts sense and structure around the undertaking of major initiatives, and is welcomed eagerly by corporate audiences. Hence, I will be writing a series of articles which will flesh the model out more fully, so watch this space! – Deborah Huisken

ARE YOU UP FOR IT?

For executive coaching or consulting services, to enroll in our leadership development workshops (Dimensions of Leading, Power at Work, Dare to be Seen and Heard in the Workplace), or to find out more about our Catalysts for Change retreat for leaders, contact Dancing Star Productions, phone: +1 413.367.9416, email: info@DancingStar.com, or on the web at www.DancingStar.com.

Why not go out on a limb? That's where the fruit is. – Will Rogers



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One must have chaos within to give birth to a dancing star - Nietzsche

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Deb's Corner



Recently, one of my colleagues spoke of how often his CEO clients' working relationship with their bosses, wherein the putative leader becomes a follower, is not good. His comment reminded me of an interesting dynamic I experienced in a leadership group in which I recently participated.

One of the leaders, a particularly strong individual, did something controversial. Although everyone in the group considered themselves to be leaders, no one raised the issue with or even questioned the leader directly. Instead, comments were made in one-on-one conversations outside the group, or in jokes people told each other later in an associated social situation. Humor was used as a "safe" outlet for people's discomfort with the situation. Sound familiar?

Once we discussed it within the group, there turned out to be strong feelings on many sides of this complex issue which needed airing, so we could come to some sense of alignment (if not agreement) as a group then move on (which we did).

The experience clarified for me two of the particular challenges leaders face – that of being a strong follower, and of cleanly challenging others during conflict or controversy.

One thing my group realized is that we, whether leaders or followers, tend to see ourselves as separate from each other. As leaders we might say "oh, they don't understand"; or "it's my responsibility";

"if I let myself be seen as vulnerable they won't respect me"; "I can't admit I don't know this – it's my job to know this", etc.

As followers we might say of our leaders "oh, they don't have time to talk to me"; or "they aren't interested in my perspective"; "they've been doing this so long/are so experienced that my experience pales by comparison" or even "hey, that's his/her job – let them sink or swim".

All of which may sound like reasonable responses, until we start looking further.

For instance, what is the impact of keeping silent during controversy, and what is the cost? Silence might feel safe – but what if speaking up might have resolved an issue that left alone will cause your project, even your company to fail – how safe are you then? What if your values – and others' – are being trod upon? What is both the impact and the cost to your integrity? To your reputation?

Something I continually see in working with people is how much is gained from sitting down together, establishing a connection, identifying the core issue, then honestly and openly talking through options for resolution. It is the quickest, most ethical way I know of to identify the widest range of possible solutions.

The key is to connect with others authentically, without hidden agendas, for the good of all involved. This takes courage. The payoff is the self-esteem of knowing you have behaved ethically and honestly, and done what is right.

AND I QUOTE...

Never apologize for showing feeling. When you do, you apologize for the truth. – *Benjamin Disraeli*

If no one ever took risks, Michelangelo would have painted the Sistene floor. – *Neil Simon*

Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us act, just once, with beauty and courage. Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence, something helpless wanting our love. – *Rainer Maria Rilke*

A MESSAGE FROM COACHING IN PRISONS – OPEN YOUR EYES!

An update on the Coaching into Prisons project, which entered San Quentin this fall to teach coaching skills (read life skills as well as career training) to prisoners in this high-profile, short-stay prison. To quote one of the prisoner participants, "I was in Vietnam and I was a jungle expert. This [e.g. breaking down barriers between each other, being open and authentic] was harder." And to quote my colleague Amy Ferguson, "the concept of having a stake takes on a whole new meaning with these guys. I was a practice 'client' for an inmate who asked me what was getting in the way of my achieving my goals. His eyes widened and his face got puzzled as I answered. They seemed like good reasons to me until he told me how many resources are available to me that he doesn't have – like that I only have to go to the library to access the Internet. I sheepishly told him I only had to go downstairs. It made me realize how much these men have to teach us about what it is to succeed in the face of adversity."

Funding is needed to continue this work – please go to www.TheBiggerGame.org for details or to help.