31 Questions

A Leading Questions blog series by Ed Brenegar

31 Questions

Questions have always been the lifeblood of what I do. It is where I start and finish everything. It is why my blog took the title Leading Questions. Over the past few months, I've been thinking more about the questions that are either implied or asked by people in organizations. As a little exercise in creativity, I began to write down questions about leadership.

Then I decided to do a little exercise for the readers of my blog. I asked the questions that I've been asking myself; for my readers to ponder the answers. As you read through this series, and you have something to say, you can leave a comment at my blog, http://edbrengar.typepad.com. First click on the series link on the right, and then find the specific questions that interest you.

These questions were posted each day during the month of July 2008.

As I approached this task of asking questions, I began to think about the assumptions that I make about leadership. I arrived at 10 Assumptions about leadership that guide my thinking. This is where I begin. Nothing written here should be considered as my last word. The purpose of this exercise was to think more clearly and specifically. I'm still learning, and much of that comes through the interaction that I have with people. Hope you enjoy the series.

10 Assumptions

Here are 10 Assumptions that I bring to the practice of leadership.

1. Leadership is both a role and a responsibility.

2. Leadership is role specific based on position within the organizational structure.

3. Leadership is a responsibility when it is a matter of influence and impact.

4. Leadership occurs in the context of human relationships.

5. Leadership is measured by Impact. Impact is the change or difference that comes from decisions made and actions taken.

6. Leadership is everyone's responsibility.

7. Leadership originates in the act of personal initiative. Initiative is the action that follows a decision to act.

8. Leadership initiative is an action that everyone can take, regardless of role, experience or skill.

9. Leadership development helps people understand how to think, relate and act to make a difference.

10. Leadership can take place within an organizational structure or within an informal relationship of people.

Learn

1. How do Leaders learn to lead?

Simple question.
Not intended to be complicated.
Rather, I just want to understand how people actually do learn.
Any stories?
Examples?
Please share.
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Learning is different than the acquiring of knowledge. Learning is a transformational process. Learning changes the learner.

Learning for leading is more than reading books and being inspired. It is learning that transforms the leader.

My own learning process has been two-fold.

First, I'm intensely curious, asking lots of questions, wanting to understand how people think about leadership. I want to make sense of their ideas, and see how they can come together in some grand or complete picture that is also at the same time practical and realistic.

Second, I learn the hard way, by trial and error. I go with my intuition, and learn what works and what doesn't. This real world experience fuels my curiosity, and makes me highly skeptical of simplistic formulas and approaches.

Leadership is not simply one thing or another. It isn't simply working with people, or effective decision-making or being visionary. Leadership incorporates all facets of being a person into a context that requires people to work together to achieve shared goals.

Learning to lead from this perspective is therefore a discovery process. I hope this series will prompt you, the reader, to discovery new avenues for transformation in your role and responsibilities of being a leader.

Different Levels

2. How is Leadership conducted at different levels of an organizational structure?

Is the shop steward's leadership role different than the CEO's? If so, how is it different?
Look at your organization.

Try to identify these differences.
How does organizational authority and peer relationships factor into these differences?

What does your leadership mean in your role in your company?

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The leadership role within an organization is different based on the requirements of that role. Therefore, we must think clearly about what our responsibilities are within the role we have. The CEO's role is different than a middle manager. They share certain responsibilities of leadership, like communication, coordination and decisiveness. However, they work in different contexts, so the specifics of what their leadership role requires will different. It is important to remember this as we look at the nature of leadership in organizations.

Skills & Values

3. What are the Leadership skills and values that apply to all people in an organization?

Are there skills that leaders regardless of their place or role within the organization need to have to be successful?
In your opinion, what are the two or three core values that leaders must have to be effective in their role?

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When you think about these questions consider that the fulfillment of our leadership responsibilities is to a great degree determined by our personal character. Honesty, integrity, and courage are three such character strengths that are important for leaders.

What others can you identify?
What do you think your own character strengths are? By identifying them, you can then envision how your leaders impacts those you lead and influence.

Different Skills & Values

4. What are the Leadership skills and values needed for different organizational roles?

I'm really asking two questions.
What are the skills needed at different levels?
Are the leadership values of a middle manager different than that of a CEO? If so, what are those values?

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What you may find as you look more deeply into this question is that the values are not different, but the skills for being effective in one's role are different.

What role, then, do values have in uniting leaders at all levels of a company in a common focus for achievement?

Human Development

5. What are the areas of human functioning that an organization should develop?

Human functioning is how well we work in a specific environment.
For example, some people work better in environments where there is structure, while others want more personal autonomy.
What does it take to be an effective person in an organizational context?

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My assumption is that every person develops within an organizational context. The development can be an advancement through training and achievement or a decline through unresolved struggle and failure.

How do you want to develop as a person within the context of your role within your company?

Performance Standard

6. Is there a standard for leadership performance?

Standards can take two forms.
One is a measurement of effectiveness.
The other is as a goal to achieve.
Is there a standard for leadership performance that applies to every leader everywhere?

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The great difficulty that leaders face is knowing when they have done well. Leadership is such an all encompassing phenomenon, it is difficult to know precisely what aspect of leadership made the difference. It is, therefore, important that we set goals that are achievable, and require us to fulfill the responsibilities of leadership that we have identified.

Talent

7. What role does talent play in leadership ability?

How do you define talent?
How do you recognize it?
Is talent related, at all, to experience and learned expertise?

Are the most talented people in your organization the best leaders?
Explain your perspective.

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Where do you find talented people?
Are talented people more similar or different?
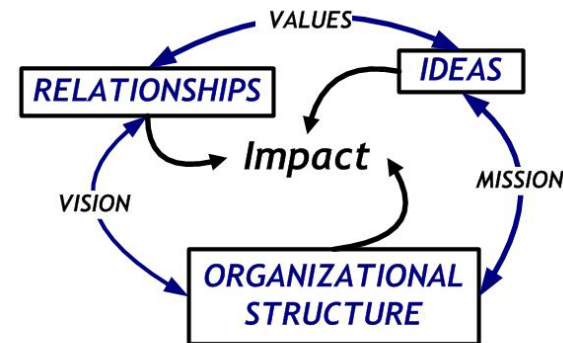

Three Dimensions of Leadership

8. What are the Leadership responsibilities within the Three Dimensions of Leadership?

The Three Dimensions of Leadership is a perspective that I've developed within a larger scheme called The Circle of Impact. See diagram below.

The Three Dimensions are not separate, but are interrelated aspects of leadership and organizational life. Most leaders and organizations treat each dimension as a separate entity. The on-the-ground reality in every organization is that all three are in constant interaction.

For example, the idea of leadership impacts not only how the structure of the business is designed, but also who is thought to be the leader of the organization. In some cases the leader is the CEO, in others, that person who is most effective in creating impact.

My question, therefore, is about how to bring these three dimensions together in simple, coherent ways so that a business' leadership has the greatest opportunity for impact.

The Three Dimensions of Leadership

Or, to ask it another way …

How do leaders lead with ideas, through relationships and within the structure of their organization?

From my experience, from the leaders I've encountered for over 35 years, each is better equipped in one or two of the three dimensions, and is deficient in one or more. They end up leaning on the one where they feel comfortable. As a result, their leadership is inadequate.

To restate, "How do leaders integrate the three dimensions of leadership in simple, coherent, practical ways?"

Teach / Train

9. What is the best way to teach/train leaders to think strategically and practically?

This is a more complicated question than the others. So, let me simplify it a bit.
Think that teaching and training are different aspects of the development of people.
To teach is one kind and training another.
How are they different?

To think strategically is not the same as to think practically. What does it mean to think strategically, and how should leaders provide for that development of people?
How do people learn to think practically?
What does it mean for a leader to think both strategically and practically?

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How do people learn to take an idea, an abstract concept, and apply it within their sphere of responsibility? My experience is that having a mentor or guide is really helpful. They provide encouragement and perspective.

Are their mentors operating within your training programs? Develop peer mentor teams and you develop people to think like real-time trainers and developers. The time space between learning an idea and its practice is reduced as training and development becomes integrated into the functioning of the organization. When we don't treat learning as separate from what we do, but as an integral part, our learning has a greater impact on our ability to make a difference in the role and with the responsibilities that we have.

Team Development

10. How do leaders learn to develop leadership teams?

This is one of the hardest lessons to learn. Translating lessons from books and training events is part of the difficulty. Ultimately, the lessons are less about the team, and more about who we are as the leader of the team.
What then is required to be an effective team leader?

Trust

11. How do leaders build trust with those whom they lead?

What is trust?
How is it built?
How is trust lost?
When it is lost, how can it be regained?
Is trust that important?

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What is the relationship of respect to trust?
Is being trustworthy all that matters in leadership?
What else is needed?

Governing Policy

12. How do leaders develop governing policy for the organization?

Governing policy are rules, standards, boundaries and values that guide the company. Typically, they are the responsibility of a board or the senior leadership of the company.

How should policies be developed? Are they in reaction to what is happening? Are they developed through a broader perspective of the long-term development of the business? Or, both?
Is there a definite process in your business for identifying and adopting new policies?
How are policies enacted and governed in your organization?
What happens when you don't have clear policies?

Passing Leadership Down

13. How do leaders pass leadership down through the organization?

One of the most critical weaknesses that I see in organizational leaders is their inability to develop leadership in the people who work for them.

How do you flip the leadership structure of an organization so that leadership rises from the bottom?
What should the senior leadership do on a regular basis to support, equip and enable leadership to be developed in all their employees?

The assumption going back to my 10 Assumptions is that leadership is both a role and a responsibility. As a responsibility, it is everyone's to accept and act on.
So, to put the question in different terms, "How does the senior leadership pass the responsibility for leadership down through the organization?"

Leadership Sustainability

14. What do leaders need to sustain leadership performance?

Look back at question #6 -Is there a standard for leadership performance?
How, then, do we sustain that standard over time?
Here are some of the issues that I see factoring into this question.
1. What is our standard?
2. What are the systems or processes that insure that the standard is met?
3. What is the relationship of sustainability to the kind of adaptation that needs to happen as changing circumstances bring changes to the business?
4. Is the standard a fix point, or a constantly moving point?
5. Does sustainability have more to do with the values embedded in the standard, than the measurement of the standard?

For example, as I discussed with a CEO the other day, how does employee turn-over factor into sustainability? Does too much or too little create complications that hurt sustainability? In other words, if you are constantly training new people, then a sustainable culture of leadership performance is more difficult. If your turn over is too low, then quite possibly, there is no infusion of new ideas that elevates performance to keep pace with changes in the industry.

6. Is sustainability more a measure of adaptability than it is fixed measure that is suppose to transcend changes in circumstances?

What we think about sustainability and performance is critical to understanding what the responsibility of leaders for sustainable performance is.

Perspective

15. What is a leader's perspective, and how is it developed?

A perspective is a point of view.
It is a vantage point from which to observe and understand what takes place within a given context.
A perspective is not simply a product of the role that someone has within an organization. It is also a matter of self-perception.

If you don't perceive yourself as a leader, then it is difficult to develop a leader's perspective.
The implication through many of these questions is that there is a developmental process that takes place in organizations when the senior leadership decided to develop employees as leaders.
How do leaders develop a leader's perspective in their people?

Communication

16. What is the role of communication in being a leader?

To what extent is being a successful leader dependent upon being a capable communicator?
What aspects of communication are important for effective leadership?

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My experience is that communication is one of the two or three most important, and most neglected functions of leadership.
Listen to the problems and conflicts in any business, and you'll hear that communication is at the heart of the problem, and one of the chief means of resolution.

What, then, does it mean for a leader to be an effective communicator?

Learning to Communicate

17. How do leaders learn to communicate well?

Unless they have some natural talent, leaders learn to communicate by trial and error.
Communication development is universally needed by everyone.

Two questions:
If we learn by trial and error, how can we take those less-than-satisfactory experiences and turn them into exemplary ones?
In other words, how do we learn from experience?

Also, assuming that communication is a two-way process,
what must leaders do to develop the other side of the communication experience?
In other words, how do leaders develop an environment where people are able to freely share and listen.

Ethics

18. What does it mean for a leader to be an ethical person?

Let me state up front that ethics is not primarily about right and wrong. It is convenient to characterize it this way because it actually removes the obligation to be ethical. In other words, keep your nose clean and you are ethical. That is not how I understand ethics.

My friend Tom Morris, a philosopher, writes in his book, If Aristotle Ran General Motors ☐ …

Ethics is not first and foremost about staying out of trouble. It's not primarily about avoiding problems at all. Ethics is mainly about creating strength, in an individual person, a family, a community, business relationships, and life.

Starting from this perspective what then does it mean for a leader to be an ethical person?
If you see yourself as an ethical person, how do your decisions reflect your ethics?

How does your behavior demonstrate your ethics?
How does being an ethical person create strength in an organization?
Got any examples to share?

Mentoring

19. How do leaders mentor other leaders?

My experience has been with older men and women who took me under their wing and helped me to learn to manage many aspects of my professional and personal life. Almost all of them are deceased. So, whatever they passed on to me, I hope still lives on through what I do.
How does a mentoring relationship work?
Please be very basic in describing it.

Decision-making

20. How do leaders learn to make decisions?

Decision-making is a critical skill for leaders.
It is not simply an analytical process.
Analytical skills in decision-making can be taught by using a formula method. It is the basis of modern science.

However, how are the intuitive skills for decision-making acquired?

Intuitive skills are those gut-checks that tells us either something is wrong or now is the right time. They represent a series of connections made through various sources that gives us a large picture of what is happening. The clearer that picture is, the clearer the decision.

How do we learn to listen to our intuitive side in decision-making?

Thinking & Interaction

21. What thinking-human interaction skills do leaders need?

I know this is an odd construction - "thinking-human interaction".

Much of leadership takes place at the moment of interaction with people. The face-to-face meeting in a hall way, on the phone or at a conference table.

Many leaders at that point of interaction have the arrogant expectation that the other person has to get on board with their agenda at the moment.

Better leaders learn how to get in the moment with people and understand not just what to say, but how to say it based what signals the other person is giving.

This is called situational awareness. It is a very important human relationship skill.

To a great extent, this interaction is a thinking process. But it is not an analytical process. It is a process of synthesizing all sorts of scraps of information to know what is going on.

How do leaders learn to think on their feet in this way?

Is this a natural ability that some have? Or is this something anyone can learn, if they are willing.

If you understand what I'm driving at here, you'll understand that I'm talking about the intersection between intellectual/thinking skills and the relational environment that the leader creates.

This isn't something they teach you in school. But they should. It is a defining skill of leadership that is rarely discussed.

Personal Character

22. How do organizations develop the personal character required for leadership?

What are the characteristics of personal character that are needed by leaders?
Here's a short list.
Integrity, courage, humility, resilience, commitment, magnanimity, empathy and honesty.

When you think about organizational leadership, what aspects of personal character do you look for?
Here's what I want to know.
> "How have you suffered professionally and in relationships? What obstacles, hurdles, crisis or failures have you had? How have you dealt with it? Where are you now?"

The reason I ask this is that suffering either narrows or broadens a person.

If it narrows, they have taken that suffering and turned into bitterness. They see themselves as victims. Sure we can all claim victim status in some way. The way of the victim is not out, but into a world of bitterness and self-deception.
Suffering can broaden a person. We can learned from it, grow from it, and find wisdom and perspective from it. In so doing, we become better equipped to deal with ambiguity in business.
As Nietzsche wrote, "What does not kill me, makes me stronger." This is a mindset that is not easily acquired. It means that we must look into ourselves and see what it is that I can control, deal with it and place the rest at an emotional distance.

How many times in our professional lives have we suffered the loss of an important contract or the betrayal of a colleague? How many times have we suffered from the deceitfulness of others or simply their incompetence?

In other words, what we must understand related to suffering and our personal character is that our lives are indelibly connected to others. We don't live in isolation. We may suffer, be victimized by their actions, but we choose whether to act the victim. The kind of character that triumphs in those situations is the kind that takes each day as a lesson in the school of life, and transforms that lesson into wisdom to be applied the next day.

How can this kind of character be developed in people in the workplace?

It starts at the top. It is learned by example and commitment.

Conflict

23. How do leaders learn to handle interpersonal conflict?

Different kinds of relationships require different approaches.

What do you do as a leader when a peer in a parallel leadership role is in conflict with you?

For example, what do you do when that conflict becomes an issue on a leadership team.

How should you approach a conflict that ultimately could involve your boss?

What do you do when the conflict is with a direct report?

For example, when an assistant disagrees with a policy decision that has a direct impact upon her. The decision is the right one, yet the assistant persists over a number of days to persuade the leader to change his position. The leader refuses, and the assistant decides to make her case to the rest of the office. In essence, she is not only challenging the leader's authority, but seeking to undermine his position.

What would you do?

What do you do when the conflict is with your boss?

Each of these situations require a different approach.

What should a leader do resolved the conflict in each instance?
Is there a standard or a common value that should govern workplace interpersonal conflict?

Initiative

24. How do leaders learn to take initiative?

My working definition of leadership is
> **"Leaders take initiative to create impact with Ideas, through Relationships and in Organizational Structures."**

After many years of reflecting on the nature of leadership, I came to the conclusion that leadership begins in the act of initiative. Initiative is the product of a decision and action. So, when I say leadership is a responsibility, as well as a role, I'm saying that taking initiative is how that responsibility is carried out.
How do people learn to take initiative?
How do they learn this in their business and professional life?
How do people learn to think for themselves to the extent that they make their own decisions and take action to create impact?
From what I see on a daily basis, most organizations discourage initiative. They encourage compliance. As a result, most organizations are deficient in leadership. They are deficient because they are utilizing maybe 30% of their employees abilities.
What would an organization characterized by this kind of personal initiative look like?
Here's a short list.
Better communication because people are taking the initiative to communicate.
Quicker reaction times in dealing with crisis situations.
Better processes as the people who do them take initiative to make them better.

Shorter meetings because issued get resolved and action steps identified much quicker.
The cream of the leadership pool will rise to the top faster.
What sort of structure is required for an organization to be characterized by leadership initiative?
What sort of structure is required for leadership initiative to be found from top to bottom?
How does having an organization of characterized by leadership initiative throughout the company mean for the senior leadership? How does it change what they do?

Impact

25. How do leaders learn to measure their impact?

Measuring leadership is not an easy task.
Measuring a company's profit and loss is relatively easy.
Measuring leadership impact, more difficult.
There are many intangibles that go into a measure of leadership.
I look at the leadership from the perspective of identifying the impact that they have had.
Impact is a way of understanding change. It is change. It is the difference that change brings.
If we can see the change that takes place, we can see the impact that leaders have.
Impact could be change in financial or sales numbers. Impact could be the difference in attitudes and behaviors of people.
Impact could be higher levels of quality.
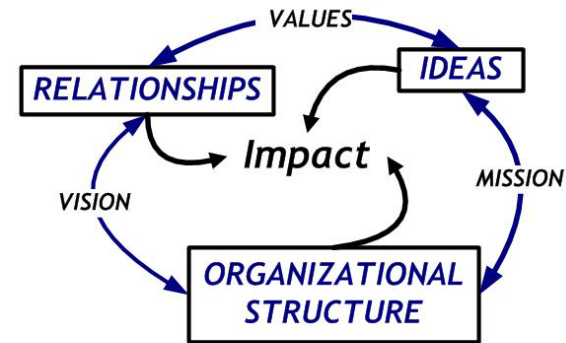
The Three Dimensions of Leadership

The key to understanding impact is recognize that it takes place within the **Three Dimensions of Leadership - Ideas, Relationships, and Organizational Structure.** Not only with each one separately, but also in a coordinated manner.

To measure leadership in this way is to understand how the three dimensions create impact.

Or, rather, that leadership is not simply about ideas or relationships or managing processes and setting policies and strategies.

To understand leadership as a system for achieving impact is to understand also how to involve the whole business in the leadership enterprise. This is not an analytical thinking process. It is an intuitive, synthesizing thinking process that gives you the big picture.

Peter Drucker wrote, **"Efficiency is doing things right; effectiveness is doing the right things."**

By this he means that you can be very efficient and still not know what is going on in your business. Yours and your whole company's perspectives is so siloed that no one has any clear idea about the impact (effectiveness) that you are having. Everybody is defending their turf, looking for scape goats, and hoping to hold on until retirement or a better offer comes along.

As any B-school grad will tell you, "what gets measured gets done." Understanding what to measure with the three dimensions of leadership leads understanding that leads to better decision-making that produces the changes that I call impact.

So, how do you measure your organization's leadership impact?

Mission

26. How do leaders develop an organization's mission?

Before you can answer this question, answer what is the purpose of a mission?

A mission can be a how we see our purpose. This means that it is a concept, an idea that guides an organization or a person. In my **Circle of Impact** perspective, mission is one of three concepts that guide an organization. There are also Values and Vision. They are different and are addressed in separate questions in the **31 Questions** series.
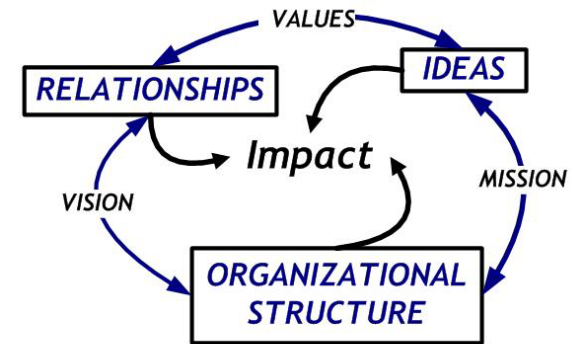
The Three Dimensions of Leadership

See the connections in this diagram. Mission is a way we give purpose to an organizational structure.

It is a statement of identity. A purpose statement is an identity statement. When we say that our mission is "___." We are saying this is what I hope to achieve and who we are is identified by this purpose.

It is important, also, that the structure of our organization fits with the mission of our organization.

For example, I read somewhere this week a comment about Southwest Airlines mission. I'm paraphrasing - **"We are a customer service company who happens to be in the airline business."** This is a mission that gets translated into how they do business. It determines how they structure their business.

Mission, therefore, is more than a purpose or an identity. It is an idea that guides how the business is organized. This may seem rather simplistic. It is until you begin to look deeply into your business practices, and realize that all sorts of structures and processes run counter to your mission.

Without regular attention to the connections seen in the above diagram, your business will devolve into a self-perpetuating organizational structure at odds with your espoused mission, regardless of what it is.

This is not a statement about the people, nor the value of the mission. It is a statement about what happens in organization that lose sight of the connection between their mission and their organizational structure.

With this background in mind, how should leaders develop their organization's mission?
What are the steps that should be taken?
What's the first one?
How do you know when you are on the right track?

Values

### 27. What role do values have in the development of leadership teams?

The role of values in organizations is changing. The simplest way to understand it is with my notion of Values 2.0.

Values 2.0 is analogous to Web 2.0. Web 1.0 is websites that function as online brochures distributing relavent information about a business. Web 2.0 is websites that are focused on the interaction between people, between businesses and their customers. All the popular social networking sites are Web 2.0.
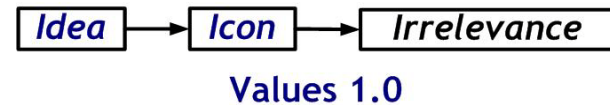
Values in a Values 1.0 perspective are ideas that are meaningful, but serve a more symbolic purpose. They are like the icons on your computer desktop. They are a reference point to some meaning that has value. The are Iconic because they can serve a branding function to point to a characteristic that the business would like its audience to identify. The problem with Values 1.0 is that they are largely irrelevant to the functioning of the business.

Values 2.0, like Web 2.0, function in an interactive environment. They are not simply ideas posted on the wall or website
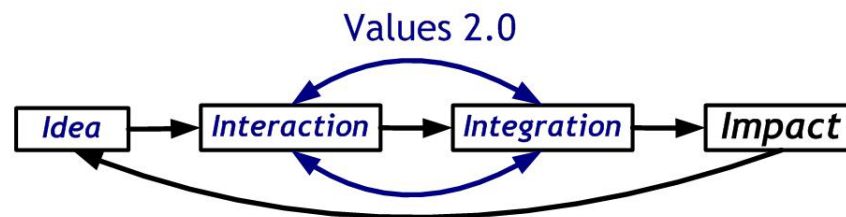
for all to see and admire. Instead, they are ideas that are injected into the conversation that takes place in every organization. This interaction begins with questions. "What are our values? How do they fit into our culture? How do they help us or protect us?"

In a Values 2.0 organization, values are integrated into the organization through the relationships of people, and then into the operational processes of the company. Values become a tool for understanding where opportunities and problems are, and more importantly how to make strategic decisions.
Umair Haque regularly writes about the DNA of organizations as being the source of its life. Values are key elements in that DNA. When values are iconic, they are a reflection of the past than the present. Values that have impact are active agents in the DNA of a company.

With this background to my thinking about values, let's restate the question where we began.
What role do values have in the development of leadership teams?
Or, if values are to have a place at the table in your team interaction, how should they be introduced?
If you don't know, you need to ask.

Why?

Because there are values integrated into your organization and your team work. Enron, the poster child of companies that failed because of their values, had values, just one's that were unethical and ultimately destructive to its life as a company.

What role do you want values to have in your teamwork? Start with that question, and ask it over and over until you get an answer that makes sense.
Before you ask it of your team, ask it of yourself.
What role do I want values to have as I lead?
And, what values should they be?

Visionary Leadership

28. What does visionary leadership mean?

This is a popular way to look at leadership.
I have had people tell me that they see themselves as visionary leaders.
What does that mean? To be a visionary leader?
What is a vision? Is it a picture of the future? Or is it something else?

In business literature the idea of vision has long been connected with the idea of seeing the future.
I have growing skepticism that we can actually predict the future. Read Nassim Taleb's two books, **Fooled By Randomness** and **The Black Swan**, and you'll understand why my change in perspective. I'm not saying we can't look into the future with some predictability. I am saying that it is quite limited.
Vision, as I see it, is the ability to see the change that needs to be made and the effect or impact of that change. If mission is an identity or purpose statement, a vision is really a future results statement.
One way to characterize the difference is that a mission is like a snapshot, where a vision is more like a video of what is happening in the future.

A visionary leader is a person who can see the changes that need to be made and articulate them in such a way that people visualize the accomplished change.

For example, let's say you need to move from a traditional hierarchical business structure to a more flat, distributed leadership model. A visionary leader sees the functioning of that change, and knows how to develop people into that change.

Let me, therefore, reframe today's question.
How do leaders learn to become leaders who can envision the changes that need to be made in order to be prepared for whatever the future brings?

Partnerships, Collaborations, Coalitions

29. How is leadership developed in partnerships, collaborations, and coalitions?

The business world, and especially, the non-profit world are filled with organizations that are structures based on relationships between individuals or other organizations.

My experience has been that these are some of the most difficult, complex, problematic organizations in existence.

I've written about business partnerships needing both trust and confidence on by blog.
Trust is a belief in the moral integrity of the person or business.
Confidence is the belief that they are competent to do the job. In partnerships, collaborations and coalitions we need both.

Collaborations and coalitions have the added problematic dimension of each party representing their own group's interests. These are relationship filled with potential conflict.

Partnerships, collaborations and coalitions require a high level of clarity of purpose and expectation for participation, contribution and execution. They are high maintenance organizations. The benefit comes from the ability to leverage talent and resources to achieve goals that are beyond any one person or group's ability to meet.

There is a place for partnerships, collaborations and coalitions. They require a higher level of commitment than other organizations require.

Therefore, what kind of leadership is needed for these unique organizational structures?

In an organization of equals, how should leadership be understood and conducted?

If, today, you and a group of people were to set out to establish a collaborative partnership, what would your first steps be in establishing the leadership structure of the group?

How would you measure the trust and confidence that you will need to be a healthy, successful group?

Servant Leadership

30. What is servant leadership?

Servant leadership is an idea first conceived by Robert Greenleaf, and now led by a center in his name.

> "The servant-leader *is* servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is *leader* first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions...The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature."

Much has been written on servant leadership, and I encourage you to read and absorb as much of this perspective on leadership as possible.

However, I'd like to place this question in the context of my first four Assumptions about leadership.

1. Leadership is both a role and a responsibility.
2. Leadership is role specific based on position within the organizational structure.
3. Leadership is a responsibility when it is a matter of influence and impact.
4. Leadership occurs in the context of human relationships.

These ideas assume that leadership is much more than an institutional role within an organizational structure. It is not simply a set of tasks and activities that one conducts.

Leadership is much more a product of the character of an individual. The underlying assumption is that every member of an organization is in a leadership relationship with someone. Each one of us influences someone by our actions. That influence, properly understood, is leadership.
Therefore, servant leadership is a way to understand how to fulfill our leadership responsibility.
What, then, does it mean to serve first within the context of our relationships in business?
The question that rarely gets asked in this context is "Is our business structured - organized - to produce servant leadership? Or, does how we function force people into decisions and actions that encourage self-interest over against action for the greater good.

Servant leadership is not an organizational system. If it is to make a sustainable difference in your business, you must take the time to look at how you are organized to determine what policies and structures inhibit the development of this leadership practice.
How, then, do business develop servant leadership throughout their business?

Inspiring Ideas

31. How do leaders move their organizations from an inspiring idea to impact?

My office is filled with shelves of books whose authors are experts at inspiring me with innovative ideas.
The left-hand sidebar features some of my favorites.
The dilemma that I discovered in myself, and have seen it in so many other people is a tendency to move from one inspiring idea to the next without any real significant integration of the idea into my life or practice. I came to feel like an inspiring idea junkie. I was constantly in the bookstore looking for the latest, greatest breakthrough idea to change my life and business. I didn't want to be left out of the

inspiring idea loop. What I discovered after a great investment in books that I didn't know how to make the transition from the idea that inspired me to its application.

For example, I am very interested in networking. I first came to my interest in reading Everett Rogers' **Diffusion of Innovations**, then Malcolm Gladwell's **The Tipping Point** and Ron Burt's **Structural Holes**. I understood the theory, but didn't see how to move from where I was to something resembling the picture each of them described. So, I kept reading. Alberto Barabasi's **Linked**, Emanuel Rosen's **The Anatomy of Buzz**, and Burt's **Brokerage and Closure** and many others.

What I have learned is that most books are organized to describe what something looks like. Few describe how to create it. Understanding how something is created is very interesting because it can teach us how we can do the same. Look at Dan Roam's **The Back of the Napkin** or Garr Reynolds' **Presentation Zen** or the fascinating **Designing Interactions** by Bill Moggridge. These are books with inspiring ideas that are also ones where you can learn how to move from idea to practice.

Learning to move people from a fixation on the inspiring idea of the day to the application of that idea requires a process that leads people to discover the practical application of ideas.

One of the ways leaders can do this is by asking questions. Questions can open up avenues of practical creativity.

Ask questions that help people to visualize an idea in action.

For example, what would developing a network look like? We'd exchange contact info. We'd talk about areas of interest, people we know, connections and commonalities that link us together. And we'd make a commitment to stay in touch and introduce other people to us as the situation arises.

Moving from Idea to Impact

Idea → Interaction → Integration → Impact
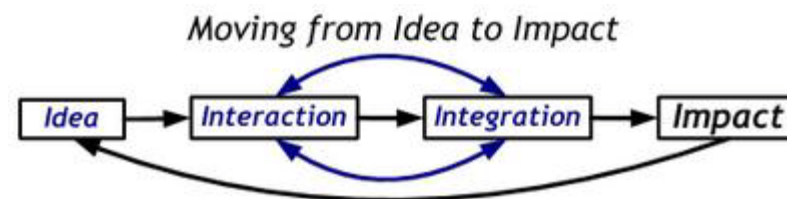
Another approach is to follow a simple process that I've created.

Simply identify the idea. Talk about it with others. Look at way to integrate the idea into what you are already doing. Finally, determine what the impact should be. If you can define the impact, then you can figure out in conversation with others how to structure a process of application.

The reality of this process is that you can't do this with every inspiring idea, and that it takes time to do this well. The benefit is that the more you do this the easier it becomes. The goal is to become an expert at quickly seeing the application of an idea and moving into action with it.
Let's end by practicing this idea. Take a book you are reading or recently completed that has some inspiring ideas in it. Select one idea and commit to finding a way to apply it in either your personal or professional life. Chart the process of learning. Write a brief narrative about what you learned, share it with some friends or colleagues. Send it to me. If you want I'll post it along with some follow up conversation we can have.

By doing this, we model how to discover the practical application of an inspiring idea. Or, we discover why many inspiring ideas aren't very practical.

31 Questions: wrap up
Over the past 31 days, I have posted a daily question about the practice of leading organizations. I've learned a lot from this process. I appreciate the comments that have come during the series.

Share the questions with colleagues. Talk about them. Don't keep it to yourself. Conversation is the key to growing our awareness of what we can do to be better at leading our organizations.

If you have other questions that you think should be added to this series. Send them along and we will tackle them together.

Thank you for reading and I wish you well in all your leadership endeavors.

Author Bio

Ed Brenegar mentors leaders through organizational transitions serving as a catalyst to help them grow from where they are to where they see themselves in the future.

Ed Brenegar works as a columnist, blogger, speaker and leadership development specialist and planning consultant. He is the founder of the organizational development consultancy, *Community of Leadership*.

Ed offers leadership workshops and presentations that inspire leadership initiative for impact in organizations and communities. *The Four Questions Every Leader Must Ask* presentation/workshop enables participants to learn how to achieve Impact in their business and personal life by focusing on four simple, yet comprehensive questions. Ed's *Leading Through Times of Transition* workshop provides a practical methodology for managing the competing demands of change. Ed is the founder of the *Say Thanks Every Day* network that celebrates the transformative power of gratitude in relationships and business.

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