



## The Blake Group Not Just Consulting. Solutions.™

January - February 2009 Newsletter

In this newsletter and several other editions this year, I will respond to reader comments and requests for more information and advice. Several requests came in after the last newsletter about success in current job situations. With those concerns in mind, this is Jerry's story.

### Reframing - forming new perspectives

Most people want to be successful. At least, that is their intention. However, sometimes our thinking can get in our way and the resulting behavior betrays our intention. We can be vassals to our thinking: The more we think about situations in the same way, the more entrenched the problem becomes. Reframing is a way of releasing ourselves from mental feudalism.

Jerry, a young manager, was told that he needed to work more creatively with his team. His style was very prescriptive. Jerry left very little for his team to contribute to how things were done. There was just one way – Jerry's way. I was asked to coach him and I discovered that he was driven by results. He really enjoyed getting things done. Creativity was very low on his value index. He didn't believe that he was creative nor did he believe that creativity would lead to better results. Even though his thinking was getting in the way of his promotion, the more he thought about it, the stronger his beliefs became.

Everyone has creative ability. Jerry had to find his. I used a reframe to help Jerry. I suggested that Jerry hold the next meeting in the Natural History Museum around the corner from his office. Jerry was not too sure about this idea and he thought it a bit odd. However, I wanted him to get away from his environment. As we walked to the museum, he began to talk to me about how he really enjoyed archaeology as a college student. In fact, had he not gone into business, he wanted to be an archaeologist. He went on to tell me that he really enjoyed the *Indiana Jones* movies, recounting some of the characters, storylines, locales in the films, and the special effects.

We were moving toward a more creative conversation. As we walked through the museum into the courtyard, we stopped for coffee. I looked out into the courtyard where displays of different artifacts and explorations were on exhibit. I asked Jerry how the exhibits could be used to describe one of his problems at work. He began to create a rich metaphoric link between the exhibits and a technical problem he was dealing with. Now it was time to offer the reframe. I said, "That was very creative. You made a creative link between something you are facing now and solved it using a metaphor. Does your manager and team know that you have this kind of creative thinking?"

In order to process this reframe, Jerry had to accept the presupposition that he is creative. Then he had to realize that he had not shown his creative ability in the context of the workplace. The remainder of the coaching consisted of helping him to identify opportunities for using it with his team. I wanted Jerry to experience his creativity and diminish his limiting belief.

### Learning to Reframe

Reflect on the entrenched thinking that may go on in your organization and the way people communicate. You may have heard some of these statements that are presented below. You may have thought of them yourself. Here is how to reframe:

"My people don't like change."

Reframe: "I know people like that. Isn't it reassuring to know that you can rely on them being consistent when you want them to be?"

“He makes me so angry.”

Reframe: We all have the right to be angry when we choose. What causes you to choose anger in response to him?”

“I get too involved with the details.”

Reframe: “Details can be involving I know and you wouldn’t have made it this far in the company had you not known when to get involved in the details.”

Reframing also involves understanding what the resistance points are in the thought or belief. If we want to change and be open to new understandings, we need to:

- Understand our entrenched view
- Define our entrenched view
- Point out its weakness
- Then develop ways of undermining that view
- Bolster a more constructive one

Fundamentally, we are:

- Searching for resonance to a new frame or belief
- Stamping out resistance to letting go of the old frame or belief

Our entrenched views can be changed to ones that are more productive. Here are some additional examples from organizations that I have worked with. It provides examples of how you can reframe:

“Bigger is always better.”

Reframe: “It all depends, sometimes small is beautiful. Assets of scale are often at odds with flexibility, comfort, innovation. The behemoths of one era may well become the dinosaurs of the next.”

“If you don’t like your situation, scream, quit, or do both.”

Reframe: All niches have pros and cons. If you act shrewdly, you may be able to improve your situation. You may benefit yourself and also improve the environment for others. It is also important to listen to what others are saying because you might not grasp the whole situation.”

“I’ve done it this way so long that I know it is right.”

Reframe: There is merit in the tried and true. But sometimes, and particularly during times of rapid change, those practices can become dysfunctional. Inferior products that are less expensive may dislodge quality products. Keep an open mind, be willing to experiment, and blend the best of the old and the new.”

Reframing is a technique that I learned when resolving organizational and interpersonal conflicts. I also learned that there are good reasons why we have entrenched views. Yet there are times they should be abandoned because they are counterproductive – there is a need for a “counterstory.”

Only if someone is convinced that bigger is not always better, that all niches have their advantages, that experimentation can be empowering is she likely to begin to think and behave differently.

As leaders in organization and as leaders of our own lives, we need to determine the best way to challenge our early thinking and slavish views. We need to examine limitations that we put on ourselves and embody alternative ways of seeing. That is how we update our minds.

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