



The Blake Group
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April 2008 Newsletter

Learning to Grow

“Truly creative people make many false starts. They continually waver between irresistible dreams and methodical attack.”

Orlando Blake, Ph.D.

Most of us were conditioned to accept the “teacher” as an authority who would tell us what to think and how to think it and what to do. However, to make truly meaningful personal change, learning must be self directed. Self directed learning embodies values that respect the knowledge and skills you have developed through your life experience. The following story is an example from our Leaders Path program.

Tom (not his real name) came to Leaders Path after 15 years as a manager in a Fortune 500 consumer products company. He was on a fast track with his company but had hit a plateau – personally and professionally. Tom was confused about some of the messages he was receiving from his boss, direct reports, and peers. He was also tired of the politics of the organization. Tom believed he was being set up to fail. The company asked him to go to Leaders Path for leadership development and coaching.

As with any change effort - personal or professional - we begin by evaluating the current situation. I spoke with Tom’s boss and human resources. It was important to understand his challenges, reaction to people, and his behavior. The initial information indicated that he had retreated from interacting with people. Tom’s verbal and written communication had become stilted and terse. However, he was not missing deadlines and his work product was excellent. He was however, “making a few enemies” in the process of achieving company goals. His career was slowing as a result.

We asked him to complete three assessments prior to attending the retreat. He was surprised by the assessment results and reports. There were common threads running through all the assessment results. Upon deeper reflection during the retreat he learned and finally accepted that, his struggling with people was his personal projections. Tom had retreated into his type preference for introversion and focus on technical talents. However, his job required more people interaction than his personal preference for technical work prepared him to handle.

Tom’s comment to us, “It’s like, someone is saying to me, ‘What is that duck on your head all about.’ And I am saying, “There’s no duck on my head, are you crazy!” Guess what, there was a duck on his head!

Tom had hit a plateau; or should I say a brick wall. He just could not see a way around, through, under or over it. I suggested we use the metaphor of the wall. A wall is something that is constructed; made by people. Just as people make it, it can be demolished. It is possible to find the path on the other side.

The First Step

For Tom, this was the first time in 20 years of his career that he stopped to take stock of what track he was running on. Therefore, the first phase of Leaders Path helped him get through the fear and

uncertainty. Step one in the “Ten Steps” Leaders Path process asked Tom to assess himself. Below is Step One from the Leaders path workbook:

- 1) Assess yourself. Skills, knowledge, interests, strengths, communication style, and learning style.
Ask yourself:
 - a) What am I aiming for?
 - b) What is compelling me to change?
 - c) Which areas in my own transformation trouble me the most and why?
 - d) Who can help me? How can I collaborate with someone during this change process?
 - e) How can I best share my experiences?
 - f) What happened the last time I tried something like this? What went well and what didn't go so well?
 - g) Look at how you can use your strengths best.
 - h) Determine how you can get a clearer picture of yourself. Can your friends and family help you?
 - i) Look deeper to your self after the initial assessment; you will achieve greater and deeper clarity.
 - i) Who will be affected by your changes?
 - ii) Who should and need to be involved in your development and change?
 - iii) What will they expect, bring, hope to give or be prepared to share?

We unpacked Tom's assessment results. Then we discussed his answers to Step One. Tom discovered that his behaviors were rooted in fear and uncertainty. When Tom reflected, he began to realize that his worry and fear was holding him back. Tom's fear of the unknown was the myth he was living. He was living the problem and not the solution.

Learning Results

This is what Tom and others have unearthed in the Leaders Path process:

- Planning for personal or professional growth and change is not a linear sequence. Typically, it is back and forth drifts of identifying issues and concerns, problem solving and decision making.
- People usually choose their techniques for change before deciding what it is they are going to do. Frequently, people decide the length of the change process, “I will take no more than three months to change.” Then people make decisions and end up filling their time with activity without the end in mind. However, I strongly suggest don't start by just filling time. Many folks miss the opportunity to sit with the feedback they receive and evaluate the information.
- The first time many people begin their sojourn to self awareness and developing a keener sense of their values – they fill one week. As Tom reflected, “Coming from a business background, we are impetuous.” I believe the results are always disastrous because they change little and frustrations are large.
- Keep the results of your evaluation – in the long run; they will be your best measure of how you are developing as a person and a leader.
- For some the most frustrating issue - Where do you start? Perhaps you have had the same issue. Tom was committed to **completely understanding** his current situation. That meant he had to sit with the results of his assessments and Step One findings and not rush to action.

In Step One of the process, Tom learned to:

- Evaluate everything. Tom learned to appreciate the nuances of what he was seeing and hearing; without immediately reacting.
- Sometimes we are living the problem and not living in the solution. Tom learned that his fear came from his projections and that became his myth.
- Tom developed a clear path based on understanding of the current situation.
- Never start by filling time. Tom's action without clarity and purpose was activity without end. That was part of dis-ease with his situation.
- Learn the longer view. You didn't get to where you are in three months. You won't completely

change in three months - unless you have your chromosomes rearranged. Tom was able to make better decisions about what he wanted, how he reacted, and behaved once he took the longer view for his career and personal life.

As leaders, we have a real freedom to be creative decision makers in our daily lives and to clarify values - our own and our workplaces. Tom's "learnings" created freedom for him and truly empowered him to become master of his destiny. That is truly meaningful personal change.

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**Thank you,
Orlando E. Blake, CPT, PhD**