

Beyond Leadership



2006

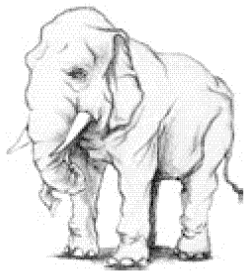
True North presents Beyond Leadership. Have you discovered the fundamental contradiction of leadership training? Have you been stacked up like cord wood in some hotel conference room, innocently expecting the people in the front of the room to teach you how to become the leader you aspire to be, only to find that they are more clueless than you? If so, you might be ready to take charge of developing your own leadership practice. Beyond Leadership is a week-long experience introducing you to a life's work. Consider joining us in Sante Fe in September. For more information see www.projectcommunity.com.

Deadline for registration: July 15th!!

Beyond The Blind Men

At length, the men of Indostan
growing weary of their fate,
Resolved to see that elephant
before it was too late.
In spite of animosities
and blindness to a man,
They chose to set their past aside
and carry out this plan.

The first, this time,
he touched the tusk, saying,
"Oh what have we here?
I can see how you, the second man,
could think this beast a spear!"
"At last," replied the second man,
"You've seen just one thing clear!"



Then the second stumbled into the tail,
more like rope than spear,
And he, with insight rare to him,
Saw something 'xtremely queer.
"I see," said he, "How number four
could say what he saw here."

The third blundered into the side,
which caused the beast to flinch.
This third, confused beyond belief,
administered a pinch.
Whate'er this elephant might be
he's more than snake, I cinch!"

The fourth, who last had touched
the animal's great knee,
was tickled this time by the trunk,
most unlike any tree.
"I see, at last," they heard him say,
"Beyond my wildest dreams!"

The fifth was skeptical of the sounds
His fellow blind men made,
Until he fell beneath the beast
and happened upon a leg.
"Most curious," this deaf and blind one
mused,
"This fan's become a keg!"

The sixth, befuddled to his bones
by everything he'd heard,
was brushed by something broad and
flat
and left without a word.
"God Bless," this muted blind man
thought,
"My certainty WAS absurd!"

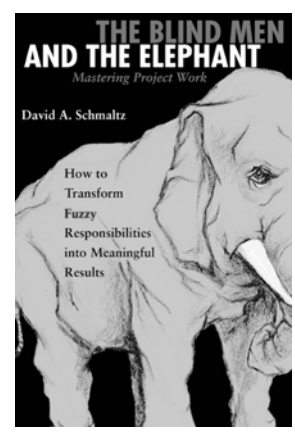
And so these men of Indostan

Transformed their sorry fate,
By seeing their world through others'
eyes,
They stilled their long debate.
Though all were left less certain,
Not one could still berate!

MORAL:

Usually, when theologic wars
conspire to seal our fate,
Certainties blind us from seeing the
hook
hiding within our bait.
How rarely do we then conspire
to hear the ones we hate?

David A. Schmaltz (1951-)
with homage to
John Godfrey Saxe (1816-1887)



<http://www.powells.com/biblio/62-1576752534-0>

True North Unexplained

"Longevity results from a series of little deaths and rebirths"

I founded True North ten years ago.

Since then, we've struggled through the usual crises: creating products, finding clients, finding partners, satisfying clients, ... satisfying the founder!

We must have been successful. But it's clear that True North, like every other successful consulting firm, has not simply succeeded, we've evolved. We are very different than I first imagined.

We forgive any business falling for the seduction that longevity emerges from unending success. Longevity results from an endless series of little deaths and subsequent births. A series of unconnected short lives.

Each death demands that something be left behind. Each rebirth brings discoveries and new frustrations. We don't invent our future, we stumble upon it.

Few of these little deaths happen on purpose. Some are accidental. Some are suicidal, deliberate acts of self destruction, initiated without proof that anything more useful or delightful will result. We roll dice. We toss coins. No guarantees.

I chose the name True North as the result of an exercise in strategic synchronicity. I left Ontara, my previous consulting firm, after making a simple comparison. I could work like a madman for five years and then, perhaps, have the consulting company I wanted, or leave and have it that day.

I left. I thought I needed to know what direction to head, but was clueless. So I threw an I Ching reading, which suggested that in the face of a shock, I could trust my own, personal True North to guide me.



So I headed North, but not always True North. Navigating a true course doesn't require constant vigilance. Course corrections are not always evidence of error, but confirm simply that the world is working as it works. Adjusting and then adjusting again confirms that we're working the way the world works, too.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

True North has made its reputation as one firm who looks at work differently. The difference isn't so much about projects as it is about people.

This difference has been difficult to describe.

The originating metaphor explains the mystery well enough. What is True North? The compass reading adjusted for magnetic deviation. This difference is different for every point on this planet. The closer to either pole, the greater this difference. The challenge has always been to become so skilled at discovering this unique difference that one can reliably, repeatedly second guess their instrumentation.

Instrumentation surrounds us. We have metrics for darned near everything in business today. But none of these guides are useful for navigation unless the readings are adjusted for the local deviation from True North.



Every client we've ever worked with contacted us to help them fix their unreliable compass.

We knew from the beginning that no one could satisfy such requests, and that fixing anyone's broken process, method, or tactic could not prevent later difficulties. Learning how to make endless, small course adjustments—mastering adjusting— helps.

If we have made any difference over the last ten years, each difference sprang from this one small acknowledgment.



We believe that we each carry within us a unique-ability for finding True North. Meaningfully using this personal ability usually requires no learning, since we each already know how to use it. It requires not more know-how, but a healthy injection of know-when.

Every organizational difficulty is first and last a personal one, often rooted in a little bit of normal human forgetfulness. We sometimes forget to use this capability we each possess. Most of our consulting work had involved reconnecting people to their inherent ability, of giving them permission to do what they have always known how to do.

The results are powerful and "stickier" than any new know-how could ever be. Also more surprising. Imagine that you discovered that you already knew how to resolve that nasty difficulty which had been haunting you. How would that feel?

How would you explain what happened?

I wouldn't be able to explain it either.

We recently worked with a group who's co-workers had attended one of our workshops. They were curious why no one who had participated would explain what happened there. "We want to learn the secret handshake," one of them remarked.

After the week together, we asked them how they would explain their True North experience, and no one had a freaking clue. One said, "Whatever it was that made such a difference was very personal to me. I take away something different than anyone else takes away. There are no words to describe this."

As an author, I humbly acknowledge that I help create experiences which no words can describe. Yet the effect of the difference is observable. People engage differently, more powerfully, when they are more fully connected to their own True North.

The Hero's Journey

Every day, I receive a few email messages inviting me to become the leader I aspire to be. Most invite me to attend a workshop, buy a book, or subscribe to a magazine. I delete most of these invitations without even reading them.

Joseph Campbell, who studied hero myths in many different cultures, properly named my response Denial of the Call. He reported that every eventual hero starts their journey by denying several invitations, what he calls The Call To Adventure. Deleting emails is easier than rebuffing an annoying troll or fleeing from some alluring temptress, but really no different than either response.

A dear friend called recently to report a remarkable discovery. His path to professional competence had, to his complete surprise, followed Campbell's stages of The Hero's Journey. He, too, had responded to his Calls To Adventure by first Denying Those Calls. When, as Campbell's model predicted, he finally accepted the Call, he stumbled upon some seemingly supernatural aid which helped him make that first, terrifying step.

But stepping into his adventure left him facing a series of trials, where he felt like he had been framed, presumed guilty with no clear proof of innocence.

Eventually, having been tried and convicted, retried and found innocent, then retried again to yield a hung jury, his ability to maintain strict dualities eroded. His good characteristics and bad ones merged into ambiguity. He was tempted to end his journey there,

"In the moment between perception and action, belief and behavior, lies the power to change the world."

Amy Schwab



distressed with the irresolution his striving had created.

As Campbell said, "we tend to perfume, whitewash, and reinterpret; meanwhile imagining that all the flies in the ointment, all the hairs in the soup, are the faults of some unpleasant someone else." But at this stage of the journey, he could not but acknowledge his own complicity in his apparently sorry fate.

This experience set the stage for a great transformation, the discovery of whatever had been and would become the true source of power in his life. He discovered the real purpose of his quest, then began considering his return, which, not surprisingly, proved at least as challenging as his journey to find his purpose.

His return began with another act of denial, stiff-arming the unavoidable requirement that he bring back what he learned into service of an unknowing and uncaring, perhaps undeserving world.

Campbell wisely points out, "the returning hero, to complete his adventure, must survive the impact of the world."

I cannot count the number of people who've come to our workshops struggling to deploy their greatest strength within an indifferent world or the number who left accepting the challenge

to do exactly that. The challenge, as Campbell again sagely notes, is to

become a master of both worlds, the idealized one highlighted when you discovered your true source of power, and the discouraging one within

which each must deploy this sublime capability.

The hero's journey resolves into a freedom to live. A freedom bounded by empowering insights as well as disquieting acknowledgments. We are wise to deny the call, and magically blessed whenever we answer it.

What does this journey look like in the real world? See the sidebar!

The CIO at Lloyds of London asked. "What did you DO to my people? They returned from your workshop on fire!"

What HAD we done? Well, rather than tell them how they should work, we had invited them to experience themselves at work—to observe, consider, and more deliberately choose how they engage. The fire their boss noticed had always been smoldering. We just fanned the spark.

We noticed that the CIO could fill up a room with his presence. His questions could be intimidating, so we suggested a little helper.

When he assembled the workshop participants for a debrief session, rather than riddle them with questions, we suggested that he observe himself, much as the participants had remembered how to do in the workshop.

We gave him three matches, instructing him to take them to the meeting and forfeit one whenever he spoke. "Only three?" he replied forlornly. "I'll try it!"

His ebullient email said it all. He had experienced a True North experience, too. "When the meeting started," he recounted, "I had two questions I just had to ask, and I dropped two of my three matches. Then, I didn't feel moved to ask anything else, so I found myself listening as if I was a fly on the wall. I learned more in that meeting than I ever remember learning in a meeting before!"

What happened? Now the CIO seemed to be on fire!

In that moment between perception and action, belief and his usual meeting behavior, he had found the power to change his world.

We received a few emails from people attending the CIO's debrief. "What did you do to the CIO?" They noticed the world changing, too.

Harvard MBA candidates, she disclosed, have to get over their management training to become leaders. They are more interested in professional advancement and tend to focus more upon making a lot of money than the typical social scientist, for instance, yet these poorly-suited candidates are where Harvard focuses most of its leadership training energy. How curious.

Our companies send us off to leadership training, where we are stacked up like cordwood in some hotel conference room and spoon fed someone else's rational model for how we are supposed to lead. Have you ever had a profound learning experience while stacked up like cordwood in a hotel conference room? I know I haven't.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO?

Though I've for over a decade been facilitating leadership workshops which leaders say elicited transforming experiences, on closer examination, I have to admit that I don't know how to create anyone else's personally transforming experience any more than Harvard does. Transformation, if it is the key to developing leadership (and I believe it is), isn't in anyone else's hands. Transformations, like contradictions, surround us. We cannot avoid them—and we gratefully miss most of the opportunities for upsetting our carefully ordered apple carts. We encounter the possibility for transformation on those rare occasions where we truly lose our balance, but even at these times, we seem more concerned about recovering our rational status quo than moving into any new paradigm.

As unlikely as it might seem, your daily routine presents endless, perfect opportunities for personal transformation. If you want to become a more powerful leader, pay attention to what you do when you don't know what to do.

Your experience is trying to teach you. Simply acknowledge it. There's really no need to head off to a hotel conference room and stack yourself up like cordwood to find the opportunity for personal transformation, though these side trips might later spark your most meaningful learnings. Should you mistake someone else's model, insight, or experience for your own, you might later stumble over a personally transforming moment when you discover that you've

About *Compass*

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This issue was authored by David A. Schmaltz, founder of True North, and edited by Amy Schwab, True North's President and Jennifer Castro, True North's esteemed office manager.

Logo by Jeffrey Townsend at Fancylogo.com. Original layout in Gil Sans font using Pages.

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Since 1996, *Compass* has been publishing dangerously sane ideas to a community numbering in the thousands.



been leading by following rather than by taking your own lead.

Take a tip from Apple Computer and more fully acknowledge the contradictions surrounding you.

Consider your most profound learning experience. Where were you? Who else was there? What came just before and just after? When did you recognize it as profound? Now, consider another ex-

treme moment and compare the two. What did they have in common? Chances are pretty good that the only thing they had in common was that they blind-sided you, happening at the least convenient time. Could they have been transforming otherwise? Probably not.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS HAPPEN AT THE LEAST CONVENIENT TIMES

Yet, if you're anything like me, you might catch yourself trying to create profound learning experiences without fully acknowledging that you never created any of the ones you've had so far. Or anyone else's, either. This is a humbling admission. We have been poisoned by the old adage reminding us to expect the unexpected. As a contradiction it fails to fully acknowledge the paradox it carries. Of course, it is wisdom incarnate. But even fully acknowledged, this sage advice offers little direction. How do I expect the unexpected?

Transformation, like all of the most important experiences in life, happens at the least convenient, most unexpected times. There could be no real preparation for such events. Because of this, how we respond might matter more than how we prepare. What do you do when insight blindsides you with broader perspective?

Here's what I do, and perhaps you will recognize a bit of your own favorite strategy within mine. I deny obvious truths for as long as possible. What a contradiction! The longer I spend in denial, the more powerful the transforming potential of the eventual acknowledgment. Rather than fully embracing these events, I ignore them. I hum louder and tap dance faster until I fully exhaust every alternative except acceptance. Then—only then—do I ever begrudgingly release what I can no longer grasp and embrace what ever's been embracing me. This is how transformation works over here.

I won't tout this as the recipe for your success, but I can acknowledge (on my best days) that I have paved my path to my own expanding professional competence with just such behavior. What paves your path?

CATCHING YOURSELF BEING YOURSELF

Self help books embody the same deep contradiction as leadership training. We can become self-helpless when we read

7 another's book in the hope of discovering ourselves there. Surprisingly, we sometimes do discover ourselves there—in others' stories. But we should never mistake another's transforming experience for our own, lest we lose our best leverage over our own transformations.

Your interaction with the book creates your transforming experience. In discovering yourself in the author's story, you discover yourself. The author does not discover you any more than your teachers create your transforming experiences. You remain in the driver's seat. Where ever and from whom ever you take your inspiration, you take your inspiration. You are unavoidably the author of your own unexpected insights. And you can choose to learn from whatever you do then.

The key transforming experience in my own leadership training did not happen in a hotel conference room. No teacher was present. No clever exercise guided my discovery. I just caught myself being myself, and in that moment, I recognized a deep and unshakable contradiction. I realized that my teams always performed better when I was not present. I won't suggest that I did not, in the period immediately following this experience, try everything in my meager power to shake this blinding acknowledgment. I failed to shake it, and in failing, found myself, eventually, working a whole lot less, leading ever more capable teams.

NO FREAKING IDEA

A colleague of mine who served on Hewlett-Packard's Board of Directors confided his secret of leadership. "Whenever one of my subordinates came to me with a big, hairy problem, I responded, 'I have no freaking idea what you should do.' This created the conditions within which my subordinate could figure it out for him self and become a great leader. Had I taken responsibility for resolving his difficulty, I would have undermined my primary responsibility as a leader." How's that for a dandy contradiction?

The transforming experiences which become the foundation for powerful leadership occur in just such unexpected ways. We approach the powerful only to find that they cannot help us. How we respond will determine whether we become the leader our company desperately needs or just another disenfranchised

follower. Only in the face of such contradictions do real leaders ever appear.

If you are in a management position, the chances are pretty good that your organization will send you off to some hotel conference room for leadership training. Take a tip from leadership guru Gerald Weinberg, who, attending a class designed for "the 25 smartest people at IBM," asked the instructor if he was one of those 25 smartest people. When the teacher replied, "No," Jerry asked, "Then what are you doing here?" The students chased the instructor out of the room, designed their own curriculum, and conducted their own class, demonstrating



their true leadership potential by fully acknowledging the contradiction before them.

Acknowledge your contradictions. Each one carries the potential to become the next transforming experience your leadership practice requires. When you next find yourself stacked up like cordwood in a conference room being spoon-fed someone else's rational model for leadership, rather than fall under a self-helpless trance, acknowledge the contradiction. Then watch what you do next. Whatever you do could become the teacher you innocently expected the fellow in front of the room to be.

Become a walking contradiction, partly truth and partly fiction. No one finds their leader lurking within another's rational model for leadership. You won't find yours there, either. Only when you acknowledge this paradox and choose to take responsibility for discovering the leader lurking within can your company ever hope to satisfy their most pressing strategic imperative.

Need a Speaker?

I presented this piece at a TechNet event in Spokane, Washington. Give your next event a True North experience. Info@projectcommunity.com

Appreciations

This issue of Compass could not have been published without the generous help of a remarkable community.

Thank you:

Vince Bozzi for first publishing Leadership Contradictions in Inland Catalyst magazine.

Jennifer Castro for bringing order to the office. We're already missing you!

Mark G. Gray of Los Alamos National Laboratory for recognizing your Hero's Journey.

Projects@Work's **Aaron Smith** for publishing my overlong pieces and for tolerating my over-short critiques.

Amy Schwab for making everything work.

Sean Dickinson of Lloyds of London for making space for difference.

Chris Rawson of Lloyds for inviting me to speak to London's IT Club.

Louis Cauffman for inviting True North experience into his classroom in Amsterdam.

Eric Parsons of The Standard for sharing stories.

Adrienne Tainer for passing on the legacy.

Dan McConnon for wearing the funny hat.

Sonja Radatz of Vienna's ISCT for inviting the panhandlers.

Eileen and Wayne Strider for the sweet visit.

The Art

Some of our clients characterize what we do as "the art" as opposed to science, as if the so-called state of the management art were somehow more scientific. This is most certainly not the case.

Much of what the management sciences proclaim as science is not rooted in science, but pseudo-science and misapplication of sturdy science. The now widespread application of so-called personality testing in organizations presents a terrific example.

It's common for modern corporations to predict job applicant performance using instruments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, though the authors never intended MBTI to be used in this way.

In order to be certified as a Myers-Briggs practitioner, one must swear never to use the instrument for predicting. Yet the seduction clearly exists. If you believed you had found a means for predicting job performance by asking fifty questions, could you resist? Many cannot.

Using Myers-Briggs for these purposes creates a self-fulfilling outcome. Once you're convinced that it works the way you think it works, what could ever convince you otherwise?

We seem to mistake fine measurement for science, but science is comprised of much more than fine measurement. It also includes, quite explicitly, studied skepticism and relies almost entirely upon unexpected insight for forward progress.

In a work world infused with fine measuring supported by the tenacious belief that we are engaged in science, where do skepticism and insight belong?

These are usually classified under the heading of "the art" and seen as peripheral rather than essential elements. Science requires much more than a lab coat and a Bunsen burner, it requires a special, go-ahead-and-call-it-artistic frame of mind.

Some don't understand this and engage as if their fine measuring made them scientific. The real practitioners recognize the cultural imperatives that make focusing upon fine measurement necessary, and slip some skepticism and space for insight into their lab coat pocket.

We encourage them.

Beyond Blindness

Continued from page one

The most disturbing theological wars never make the headlines. They insidiously encumber the world's economy. They smolder between boss and subordinate. They flare up between competing departments.

As unlikely as it might seem, you are the hero capable of initiating the peace which will sustain your organization. The heroics you engage in require no death-defying actions, though you might feel more threatened by engaging in them than you ever would facing mere bullets and bombs.

What about your theological opponents? First, they will ignore you. Next, they will ridicule you. After that, they might attack you. Then, only then, will you help them win the peace your collective efforts require.

Great Reads!

Stumbling on Happiness by Daniel Gilbert 2006 Alfred A. Knopf, NY ISBN 1-4000-4266-6

"...if our bigfooted brains do not allow us to go surefootedly forward into our futures, they at least allow us to understand what makes us stumble."

Us and Them - Understanding Your Tribal Mind by David Berreby 2005 Little Brown NY and Boston. ISBN 0-316-09030-1

"...the feeling that someone is part of us does not require that you find him or her pleasant to be around. Rather, usness is a sense that someone is fit for the respectful exchanges of goods, services, information, and emotions that constitute life in a human community."

A Different Universe (Reinventing Physics From The Bottom Down) by Robert B. Laughlin 2005 Basic Books NY ISBN 0-465-03828-X

"The transition to the Age of Emergence is also characterized by the increased menace of antitheories, bodies of thought that stop inquiry and thus impede discovery."

Get Connected

If you'd like to catch up on our latest writings, we offer several possibilities:

MasteringProjectWork Yahoo! Discussion Group:

I started this group after *The Blind Men and The Elephant* was published to consider real-world application of the book's ideas. The Group is open to any interested in sharing their experiences.

MasteringProjectWork-subscribe@yahoo.com

Pure Schmaltz Blog:

I recently started a prototype blog called Pure Schmaltz: Rendered Fat Content. In it, I post selected bits of past and new writings.

<http://www.projectcommunity.com/PureSchmaltz/index.html>

Taming Wicked Projects

The Project Management Audio Library has released an audio book of Amy's ProjectWorld presentation Taming Wicked Projects. Are you managing a cat or a dog project? <http://tinyurl.com/cdwhp>

Projects@Work

I've written two series for the Projects@Work e-zine, Free Market Project Management, six-installments about how innovators create remarkable results

<http://www.projectsatwork.com/content/Articles/230215.cfm> and Discovering Project Community, five installments explaining how to discover your project's community.

<http://www.projectsatwork.com/content/Articles/231894.cfm>

