



talking about...

February 2008

... *designing better relationships for better outcomes*

Spatial Leadership

"Leadership is the ability to lift and inspire."

... Paul Dietzel (1924 -) US football coach

Continuing our recent theme about leadership, this month we would like to explore the link between meaning and leadership.

One of the key drivers for a human being is to make sense out of his or her world and create meaning in life. Meaning comes from the things that are important to us – the people and things we value. As we have seen in previous articles, human beings can be seen to make sense of what they observe based on the context within which they observe it. This context can be seen in part as our existing beliefs, stories and feelings of how things are and how we would like them to be. At an organisational level, this can be defined as organisational culture.

One way of looking at how this space is best created is to break it into four distinct yet mutually supporting domains – what we want to achieve; our self-story; our personal growth and development; and our relationships with others. If leaders are to lift and inspire, then they have to create a common sense of meaning for the people they lead. To do this, they have to constantly work on creating an appropriate and shared context in these four areas so that people are more likely to create common meaning. This is the idea of Spatial Leadership – to create the space or context within which people move towards a common goal, feel good about themselves, optimise their potential and generate synergies and cooperation within the group.

The nature of today's workplace is such that there is a focus on getting things done. This approach has tended to create "transactional leadership" where the focus is on what is done and not the context in which it is done. If this approach is used to the exclusion of working on the organisation's "space", then people lose a common purpose and sense of meaning. This can be most easily seen in the way in conversations happen each day. Those engaged in transactional leadership will simply look at what has to be done – how the key performance indicators are tracking for example. Those with an eye to spatial leadership will seek to create conversations to directly build context and take the opportunity to put transactional activity into a broader context to create meaning.

If you lead people in the workplace, consider how well you observe, design and seek to influence the space within in which others work. Listen to your conversations – the answers will lie there.

"Leadership should be born out of the understanding of the needs of those who would be affected by it."

... Marian Anderson (1897 - 1993) US singer

Appreciating Others ...

Thanks to our friend Julie Botten who sent us this one...

One day a teacher asked her students to list the names of the other students in the room on two sheets of paper, leaving a space between each name.

Then she told them to think of the nicest thing they could say about each of their classmates and write it down. It took the remainder of the class period to finish their assignment, and as the students left the room, each one handed in the papers.

That Saturday, the teacher wrote down the name of each student on a separate sheet of paper, and listed what everyone else had said about that individual.

On Monday she gave each student his or her list. Before long, the entire class was smiling. "Really?" she heard whispered. "I never knew that I meant anything to anyone!" and, "I did not know others liked me so much," were most of the comments.

No one ever mentioned those papers in class again. She never knew if they discussed them after class or with their parents, but it didn't matter. The exercise had accomplished its purpose. The students were happy with themselves and one another. That group of students moved on.

Several years later, one of the students was killed in Vietnam and his teacher attended the funeral of that

Talking About Pty Ltd

PO Box 6652,
St Kilda Rd Central,
Victoria, 8008.

Ph: +613 9507 2464

info@talkingabout.com.au
www.talkingabout.com.au

special student. She had never seen a serviceman in a military coffin before. He looked so handsome, so mature. The church was packed with his friends. One by one those who loved him took a last walk by the coffin. The teacher was the last one to bless the coffin.

As she stood there, one of the soldiers who acted as pallbearer came up to her. "Were you Mark's math teacher?" he asked. She nodded: "Yes." Then he said: "Mark talked about you a lot."

After the funeral, most of Mark's former classmates went together to a luncheon. Mark's mother and father were there, obviously waiting to speak with his teacher.

"We want to show you something," his father said, taking a wallet out of his pocket "They found this on Mark when he was killed. We thought you might recognize it."

Opening the billfold, he carefully removed two worn pieces of notebook paper that had obviously been taped, folded and refolded many times. The teacher knew without looking that the papers were the ones on which she had listed all the good things each of Mark's classmates had said about him.

"Thank you so much for doing that," Mark's mother said. "As you can see, Mark treasured it."

All of Mark's former classmates started to gather around. Charlie smiled rather sheepishly and said, "I still have my list. It is in the top drawer of my desk at home."

Chuck's wife said, "Chuck asked me to put his in our wedding album."

"I have mine too," Marilyn said. "It is in my diary"

Then Vicki, another classmate, reached into her pocketbook, took out her wallet and showed her worn and frazzled list to the group. "I carry this with me at all times," Vicki said and without batting an eyelash, she continued: "I think we all saved our lists."

That is when the teacher finally sat down and cried. She cried for Mark and for all his friends who would never see him again.

The positivity/negativity (P/N) ratio – the ratio between the amounts of positive to negative feedback – has been clearly linked to the effectiveness of teams. Marcial Losad, from Meta Learning, found that high performance teams have a P/N ratio of 5.6; medium performance teams have a P/N of 1.9 and low performance teams have a P/N of 0.36. Clearly one way of enhancing team effectiveness lies in an increase in the positive feedback compared to the negative feedback they receive!

"Feedback is the breakfast of champions."

... Kenneth Blanchard (1939 -) US writer, lecturer, success author

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ACN 112 307 892
info@talkingabout.com.au
Telephone: +61 3 9507 2464