



HOW PERCEPTIONS
SHAPE REALITIES

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In our daily existence, we are constantly on a trip, going from one place to another.

It is true whether we are faced with a situation threatening our survival, simply following our daily routine, or met with an unprecedented opportunity to thrive. Our journey is a needed activity that we too often view as a burden, as obligatory and forced. We thus make our journey a monotonous routine, depriving ourselves of memorable experiences and the enjoyment that we really deserve. A large majority of us do not understand that our perceptual view of our journey has a powerful influence on the enjoyment (or lack of it) and the feeling of accomplishment (or lack of it) we could receive from it. The variety of that perceptual view and its consequential impact on our focus during the journey is outlined below.

Perceptual Dimensions of Journey

View	Focus
An Unavoidable Trip	→ Compliance
An Exciting Opportunity	→ Interest
An Essential Mission	→ Commitment
An Adventurous Quest	→ Inspiration

We have a choice! We can perceive our journey either as a forced trip or a learning opportunity, as an essential mission or an adventurous quest for a meaningful purpose. Whatever mindset we establish at the very beginning will define how we are going to think, act, relate, and achieve.

If the journey is perceived as an **Unavoidable Trip**, or a forced necessity, our mind will focus only on compliance. In this mode, we will do only what someone is asking us to do. There will be no initiative or interest from our side. We will be impatiently awaiting the end of this dreaded journey. This will lead to sub-optimal results and broken spirits.

If the journey is perceived as a **Exciting Opportunity** to learn, our mind will stimulate our interest. In this mode, we will be excited to learn and add to our skill-set. We will be more inquisitive and more participative. This will lead to improved results and increased self-esteem.

If the journey is perceived as an **Essential Mission**, our mind will demand commitment. Since commitment is an integral blend of desire, determination and discipline, we will treat the task at hand as urgent, necessary and critical for our welfare. Our interest will quickly change into a keen desire to get involved, demonstration of a winning attitude, and an act to contribute. This will lead to desired and consistent results.

If the journey is perceived as an **Adventurous Quest** for a meaningful purpose, our mind will unleash the power of our inspiration. Unlike commitment, which is reflective of our mindful acceptance of the cause (goal), inspiration encompasses both mindful acceptance and passionate dedication to the cause. Whereas the mindful acceptance makes us embrace the cause logically, the passionate dedication inspires us to become a true believer in the worthiness of the cause.

In other words, the inspiring view gets its full power from both the mind and the heart. The net result is a thrilling and lasting success. In my professional career of over 40 years turning around struggling organizations around the world, I have seen a lack of this basic understanding in the operating modes of most leaders.

Whenever they were preparing their teams to face critical situations or unprecedented opportunities, their starting emphasis was always on the methodology, milestones and measurements. By doing so, they made others (as well as themselves) perceive their problems/opportunities as a critical must-do. Since perceptions shape realities, the net result was a mindset of compliance, dependence, and fear for their team members.

Although methodology, milestones and measurements are extremely important for any journey of achievement, and they have their place in the execution stage of the journey, what is required in the earliest stage of the journey is to make the participants of the journey perceive the worthiness of the task at hand. This is where the true leadership skills are put to a test. How effective the leader is in forging the right perceptions at the very start will shape the realities (results) of all future efforts.

Making leaders understand this simple truth and educating them to develop skills to forge inspiring perceptions in their teams has been the most thrilling experiences of my professional life. Not only has it made my job of turning around organizations easier, but it also made a meaningful difference in the lives of many.

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How can leaders learn to forge an inspiring perceptual view of the transformational journey—from sincere desires to positive outcomes—right at the onset of the journey? Over the 40 years of my professional life spanning many countries and cultures, I have learned, reinforced, and propagated the following two simple avenues to help leaders forge this perceptual view:

1. **Inspirational Leadership Review of the Opportunity/ Problem**
2. **Inspirational Communication of the Opportunity/Problem**

Inspirational Leadership Review. I have universally observed that, irrespective of the location, size, type, and purpose of the organization, leaders of poorly/averagely performing organizations conduct an initial review of the opportunity/problem with their immediate staff in a monolithic and scripted form. That typical approach in terms of the sequential order of the items discussed and the approximate time spent on those items is depicted below:

Typical Leadership Review: Sequential Priority and % Discussion/Debate Time

Sequential Priority	% Discussion/Debate Time
Clear understanding of the opportunity/Problem	10%
Potential Solutions	15%
Budget/Technology	35%
Milestones & Measurement Indices	30%
People needed	10%

This traditional approach puts a strong emphasis on managing the process of resolution by speculative solutions, technological options, budget allocation, and a well-defined follow-up system. Over 80% of the discussion /debate time are devoted to these items, leaving only 15-20% time to gain a real understanding of the issues and the needed human effort.

On the surface it looks like an innocent, widely accepted and a good methodical approach, but in reality it severely reduces the probability of success to capitalize on an opportunity or thwart a threat. It sends a strong message that a few people at the top fully understand the opportunity/threat, are quite capable of knowing how to resolve it and will provide the necessary resources (money, technology, human effort) so that the rest of the organization can follow and implement their speculative solutions. Whereas the leadership team congratulates itself for laying down this manifesto, they are quite ignorant about the fact that they have initiated an invitation to a disaster. They have unknowingly sowed the seeds of a Compliance Culture.

In contrast, progressive and inspiring leaders do exactly the opposite. Their approach, which I call as Inspirational Leadership Review, is outlined below:

Inspirational Leadership Review: Sequential Priority and % Discussion/Debate Time

Sequential Priority	% Discussion/Debate Time
Clear understanding of the opportunity/Problem	30%
Right person(s) to lead the charge.	40%
Potential Solutions	10%
Technology/Budget	10%
Milestones and Measurement Indices	10%

What a stark difference from the typical leadership review! In this approach, approximately 70% of the discussion time is spent on understanding the situation more precisely, and extensive exploration and selection of the right human effort. Whenever I introduced this type of leadership review in struggling/average performing organizations, the initial reaction of their leaders was nothing less than a shock, utter disbelief, and fear. They strongly expressed their feeling by pointing out that without discussing extensively the methodology, financial needs, technological options, completion milestones, and measurement indices to gauge and control the process, this approach is not only a risky gambit but also a proven prescription for a miserable failure. I could clearly understand that misconceptions like this are always the cause of struggle and lusterless performance of such organizations, and as such I insisted upon institutionalizing this radical approach.

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This inspirational leadership review sends a strong message that the leadership team is quite conscious of the critical opportunity or threat through adequate information, has taken time to identify the right person(s) to lead the charge, has strong belief that creativity of the chosen person(s) will identify and refine the right enablers (methodology, milestones and measurement indices) to bring the resolution of the issue to a fruitful end, and it trusts the organization at large to provide support through enthusiastic involvement and passionate commitment. In this approach, the leadership team has taken a calculated risk but they have consciously sowed the seeds of Inspiration.

My professional experiences are a testimony to the fact that, barring a few exceptions, this radical approach has always resulted in forging an inspiring perceptual view of the journey of transformation at the very onset and has been highly instrumental in achieving the desired (or better) results. The benefits achieved through this approach vastly outweigh the risks associated with it.

Inspirational Communication. How leaders share the issues and strategies with others has a profound impact on the understanding, involvement, commitment, and contribution of others. Most leaders are quite ignorant about this fact and as such they treat sharing as a formality and a necessary evil. Sharing can be extremely inspirational, depending upon the sharing skills of the leader.

Observing behaviors of inspiring leaders over a long period of time coupled with my own experiences, the following is a comparison of the sharing behaviors of typical and inspiring leaders:

Differentiating Sharing Behaviors

Typical Leader	Inspiring Leader
Relates like a <i>Superior</i>	Relates like a <i>Storyteller</i>
Expresses in <i>Complex Terminology</i> reflecting ego and mastery	Expresses in <i>Simple Words</i> reflecting humility
Focuses on strict <i>Compliance</i> from others	Encourages <i>Imagination and Creativity</i> in others
Treats sharing as a <i>Formality</i> and a necessary evil	Considers sharing as a <i>Fun</i> activity and a learning booster

Let us discuss very briefly these differentiating behaviors:

Storytelling vs. Superiority Projection: In superiority projection, the leader projects himself/herself as the epitome of knowledge and an agent of fear. This behavior fosters forced attention, compliance, and dependence. In storytelling behavior, the speaker sets an emotive stage for learning for the speaker as well as for the listeners, raises curiosity and facilitates attention. In storytelling, there is a sort of rhythm that both the storyteller and the listeners float in. There is a lack of fear and an excitement to know more. This storytelling behavior fosters interest, enthusiastic involvement, and passionate commitment. This is a practical face of true inspiration.

Simple Words vs. Complex Expressions: How sharing is articulated has a direct impact on how it will be received. Inspiring leaders have an obsession with simplicity and they are usually quite humble. They speak softly, use simple words instead of business jargon, and the words come smoothly from them. With this style, they make others feel that he/she is at their level. This is a powerful catalyst for undivided attention and willing participation of others. On the contrary, typical leaders use complex words and terminology to sound more knowledgeable or important, which is their way of showing that they are at a higher level of expertise and hierarchy. The net result is that their listeners feel inferior, detached and bored.

Compliance vs. Creativity Focus: In the sharing exercise of typical leaders, their focus is always to make sure that listeners understand what the issue is, how critical the issue is, and the methodology that they have to follow. This laser focus on communicating criticality and methodology makes the listeners feel like robotic slaves. This shuts the door completely on any creativity and imagination from them as compliance and fear take over. On the other hand, inspiring leaders emphasize more on the worthiness of the cause (issue) and the adventure of harnessing the opportunity together. This emphasis on worthiness and collaborative adventure makes the listeners curious, enthusiastic, and willing—the essential ingredients of imagination and creativity.

Fun vs. Formality: The last but not least differentiator for leaders on the opposite side of the sharing spectrum is fun versus formality. Typical leaders consider sharing information as a necessary evil and treat it as a formality. On the contrary, inspiring leaders consider sharing a fun activity and a real booster for learning. These differentiating attitudes are clearly reflected in their day-to-day behaviors in organizational functioning. Inspiring leaders are always eager to find and create sharing avenues, and enjoy participating in them. Typical leaders always avoid sharing avenues and will participate only if it is utterly necessary or politically wise. In general, inspiring leaders are more eager, more visible and more participatory in sharing experiences, and have

fun doing it. Typical leaders on the other hand shun them, despise them and consider them as a necessary waste of time.

Inspirational Sharing sets an emotive stage of adventure, provokes enthusiasm and stirs passions which lead to willful participation, winning attitudes, passionate commitment, and authentic pride. Four differentiating behaviors of inspiring leaders discussed above are the ingredients to develop the skills of an inspiring leader.

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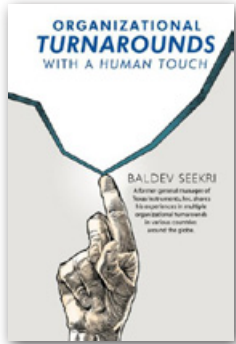
Let me ask you a simple question? How difficult is it to be that simple and soft spoken storyteller who encourages imagination and creativity in others and, by doing so, makes life and work a fun activity? For some, it may look like a mission impossible or a herculean task, but in reality it is not that difficult. What is required is humility to get started, sheer determination to develop these four behaviors of inspiring leaders, and firm discipline to practice them honestly in day-to day-

functioning. Take my word, I have done it and helped many others to do it and it is a source of real fun and genuine thrill.

Leaders can do themselves a great favor by exploring and embracing these two simple avenues (Inspirational Review and Inspirational Communication) and by continuously developing and displaying four differentiating behaviors of true inspirational leaders. By doing so, they will be pleasantly surprised to notice how quickly their opportunities will materialize and their problems will flee.

Blinded by their hierarchal position and hubristic pride of their expertise/mastery, most leaders of struggling and average performing organizations will find these two avenues as too simple, too philosophical, too risky and beneath their expertise. **The fact of the matter is that within these two avenues lies the spark which can ignite true inspiration in them and their team members right at the very start of their transformational journey.** 📌

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Baldev Seekri is a retired General Manager of Texas Instruments Inc. with over 40 years of management experience in many countries with diverse cultural philosophies, and is currently advising a prestigious think tank to turnaround critical situations. You can keep up with him online at baldevseekri.com.

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