

# The Center For Modeling Optimal Outcomes® LLC

“The Think Tank for Creativity & Innovation”®

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## **The Foundation of Leadership: What Is It?**

What step must every leader master in their quest to transition from being a good leader to being a great one? Why don't the best leaders have to work extra hard to become even better leaders? One of the secret ingredients these leaders have is selflessness – the state of mind where an individual sheds their “me” and develops the attitude of “we.”

As strange as it may seem, selflessness can only be achieved after a deep, sincere introspective examination of our own “self.” So, either knowingly or unknowingly, somewhere during the career of the “best” managers or leaders, they stepped inward to assess themselves. It was this step that allowed them to cross the bridge to move toward managerial success. As part of the seven year study into the application of neuroscience in business, The Center for Modeling Optimal Outcomes®, LLC created an innovative process, Reflective Meditation®, which will enable business people and others who work in various environments to be trained by clinical coaches/counselors to practice this intrinsic exercise.

Anyone who has practiced this exercise recognizes the feeling of having moved up to a level of existential leadership, not one categorized by a martial arts designation popular in business today but a personal feeling of accomplishment. Regardless of where we think we are in the journey toward being a truly proficient leader, the real proof of success will be a personal experience. It will come when we feel our employees and peers respect us and appreciate our efforts, regardless of our title or our position in the hierarchical structure. The internal feeling of truly helping others is the real reward for having attained the level of existential leadership. So, if someone strives to have others compliment them on their leadership skills, they continue to live in the world of “me” – the transformation hasn't happened and, for some, it may never happen.

An ideal method to determine how far we have traveled on our journey toward leadership mastery is to assess our accomplishments regarding self-assessment. The fact is, as Jim Collins called it in “*Good to Great*”, we have to learn to deal with BFR – brutal facts of reality (especially with ourselves). Accept it - if we can't understand and learn how to manage and lead ourselves, how can we expect to be effective at leading other people?

Whether we want to admit it or not, when it comes to leadership, everyone watches to see if they “walk the talk.” This simple fact is the most critical point for laying the foundation for leadership; establishing trust. Effective leaders are experts at getting people to “buy” the changes they are selling. Would you buy anything from someone you didn't trust?

If you have read Stephen Covey's book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, the concept of self-assessment isn't foreign to you. In fact, his mantra of “beginning with the end in mind” was addressed when he wrote, “The most effective way I know to begin with the end in mind is to develop a personal mission statement or philosophy or creed. It focuses on what you want to be (character) and to do (contributions and achievements) and

on the values and principles upon which being and doing are based.”<sup>1</sup>

While Covey doesn't specifically mention it, in our opinion, he encourages us to conduct our own personal SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats). Of course, Steven Covey isn't the only management maven to recommend self-assessment. However, since most scientists would rather use someone else's toothbrush than use another scientist's nomenclature, they may not refer to it by the same name. As a result, to the unsuspecting casual reader, understanding the concept of self-assessment might be vaguely similar to an encounter with bystanders at the Tower of Babel. For example, Peter Senge, arguably one of the world's leading experts in organizational development and systems thinking, refers to the concept as personal mastery. In his national bestselling book, *The Fifth Discipline*, he writes, "...personal mastery is not something you possess. It is a process. It is a lifelong discipline. People with a high level of personal mastery are actually aware of their ignorance, their incompetence, and their growth areas. And they are deeply self-confident. Paradoxical? Only for those who do not see that the journey is the reward.”<sup>2</sup>

Getting interested in exploring more about the discipline of self-assessment? Consider what Howard Gardner, one of the world's leading psychologists, wrote about the concept in his book, *Changing Minds*, (although he called it 'self-knowledge' as part of 'intrapersonal intelligence'), "...I would hazard, accurate self-knowledge is worth at least 15 to 25 IQ points – and that's a lot!"<sup>3</sup> Gardner also offered, "The interpersonally intelligent person possesses a good working model of herself; can identify personal feelings, goals, fears, strengths, weaknesses; and can, in the happiest circumstances use that model to make judicious decisions in her life.”<sup>4</sup>

From the aspect of neurobiology, most of one's thoughts relative to decision making, including how we relate to our employees, co-workers and superior, are embedded in our neural architecture through a process known in neuroscience as neuroplasticity. Once one's neural architecture (wiring) is established as a result of habitual thought processes (experiences), our seemingly intuitive decision making is really an outcome of "wiring" that functions at a subconscious level.

Our work with neuroscience in business involved comprehensive research into many of the critical studies in science that prove the only way to "unwire" thought patterns embedded into one's mind is for the individual to consciously and knowingly want to change these subconscious patterns of thought. In the world of neuroscience and remediation, this aforementioned process is often referred to as "neuroplastic surgery." As we refined the clinical process and adapted into sub-clinical applications, the new service we created was named Neurohormone Reconfiguration®.

Call it by any name you wish, self-assessment is a process which can be an invaluable practice for anyone, especially someone aspiring to become a more effective leader.

While many people presume to have a heightened awareness to their own thoughts and

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Free Press, New York, NY, 1989

<sup>2</sup> Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, Currency Doubleday, New York, NY, 1990

<sup>3</sup> Howard Gardner, *Changing Minds*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA, 2004

<sup>4</sup> Howard Gardner, *Changing Minds*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA, 2004

actions, most of us can still make huge strides to enhance our effectiveness at using the process of Reflective Meditation® as a tool to facilitate Neurohormone Reconfiguration®.

For example: how well do you listen? It is interesting to note that a person with a MBA will have had sixteen years of education in reading, writing, and verbal skills but little, if any, education for proper listening. Of course, real listening should not be confined to the auditory mode. Practitioners of effective listening are skilled in non-verbal communication, meta-talk (hidden meanings - both verbal and written), proxemics (the study of the nature, degree, and effect of spatial separation individuals naturally maintain in various social and interpersonal situations and how the factors are subject to environmental and cultural differences) and paralinguistics (resembling or similar to language). In addition, they practice listening carefully to themselves and neutralizing negative mental models. What might seem like ordinary training and education for sharpening one's skills, practiced properly, will enable an individual to "rewire" their neural architecture to enable themselves to overcome "weak" subconscious thought patterns that limit effective skills needed to become an optimal leader.

Two of the many other highly beneficial practices which can be derived from honing our self-assessment are our ability and willingness to accept change and truly make effective use of our time (time management). With regard to change, Senge wrote about an organizational development consultant who commented to him, "People don't resist change. They resist being changed." Only by a deep, personal understanding of our motivations and rationale as well as the impact of neural wiring, can we begin to maximize our own effectiveness, minimize our stress and focus on our objectives. The success of any manager or leader will be determined by their ability to get others to want to give them what they want without coercion. The degree of that success will be measured by the leader's ability to get their personnel to want to exceed the minimum requirements specified in a job description or a set performance standard. Only by understanding our own barriers for accepting change can we expect to be able to have others do the same. Only by understanding and appreciating our own individuality and quirks can we begin to understand, accept and respect the individuality and opinions of others.

#### Surviving in a sea of stress

Stress – who has stress? The second of the other valuable byproducts of self-assessment is the ability and willingness for us to conduct a time management assessment. Typically, unless we have taken that all important step backward into our own thought processes, our first impulse is to deny the fact that we can enhance our productivity and effectiveness by at least 20% while dramatically lowering our level of stress. Often, it is being in this state of denial that limits our ability to take the time to make a self-assessment. Accordingly, while we are often stressed at home and at work, we feel powerless to change our circumstances.

Despite the fact that there are hundreds of books available on the subject, don't fall victim to the trap of believing anyone can or should be able to tell you how to manage your time. Such books, however, can be valuable tools to educate you on the principles of time management. In fact, Steven Covey's concept of the four quadrants in, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* is one of the better concepts available. Another excellent book which has a fantastic ROI for the investment of 1½ hours is *Eat That Frog* by Brian Tracy (Barrett-Koehler, 2002).

Devoting the time and energy to self-assessment can be quite rewarding, not only from a personal perspective but also an organizational one. In *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge explains the five dimensions of organizational learning: personal mastery, mental models, systems thinking, shared vision and team learning. While your first impulse might be to think, “I do not have the time to read that book”, are you listening to yourself? (Apparently, if such thoughts race through your head you have not yet identified the limitations embedded in your mind through neuroplasticity – nor have you completed your time management assessment). If the book offers that much information and insight, shouldn’t you make the time? Minimally, take some of the advice Brian Tracy offers in *Eat That Frog* by, per se, taking a bite of the frog by reading Chapter 9 of Senge’s book – Personal Mastery. You’ll probably develop a taste for that savory amphibian and consume it in a relatively short period of time. Then, you may find yourself encouraging your direct reports to hone their self-awareness skills. You may even find yourself becoming an advocate of using personal mastery as the seed to grow an entire “learning organization”. The whole issue of “self” has been gaining in popularity within the past several years but the topic isn’t new. Scientific studies since the early 1980s have proven the value of emotional intelligence (EQ) in relation to the cognitive (IQ) measurements traditionally viewed as an indicator of performance. In fact, numerous scientific studies indicate IQ as being attributable to only 4-25% of job performance. However, according to that same source, Van Rooy and Viswesvaran (2004) claim that IQ is a good indicator for work and academic performance while EQ serves as an indicator for “star performers” and outstanding leaders.

In *Primal leadership*, Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee describe the following four domains of EQ and divide them into a total of 18 categories.<sup>5</sup>

### **Self-Awareness**

Emotional self-awareness: being aware of inner signals, learning to listen to and interpret your “inner voice”

Accurate self-assessment: having conducted a personal SWOT analysis enables understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses

Self-confidence: the ability to exude an aura of self-assurance without being egotistical

### **Self-Management**

Self-control: being able to neutralize, manage and control stressful situations

Transparency: the ability to openly communicate feelings and opinions; including when to admit to errors or the need for assistance

Adaptability: being able to juggle multiple demands, prioritize tasks, and proactively shift priorities in anticipation of environmental changes

Achievement: the ability to execute strategies as well as having the desire to learn continuously and transfer knowledge to others

Initiative: self-starters who create opportunities rather than wait for them

Optimism: the ability to find a positive solution to every problem

### **Social Awareness**

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel Goldman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee *Primal Leadership*, Harvard Business School Publishing, Boston, MA, 2002

**NOTE: The domains and categories are those listed by Goldman et al, but the interpretations / explanations are those of The Center For Modeling Optimal Outcomes®, LLC.**

Empathy: the ability to sense and understand the unspoken feelings of others  
Organization awareness: systems thinking as it pertains to interfaces and structural collaboration in an organization  
Service: remaining customer centric by focusing on outcomes, even over incomes

### **Relationship Management**

Inspiration: having the ability to create a vision which can be embraced by individuals as well as heterogeneous or homogenous groups

Influence: being adept at creating win-win scenarios to persuade others to give us what we want

Developing others: being selfless in one's efforts to train, coach and mentor others

Change catalyst: the ability to use the principles of the psychology of change to overcome barriers which prevent change acceptance.

Conflict management: the ability to remain neutral to find a resolution for disagreements which are suitable to all parties involved

Teamwork and collaboration: the ability to utilize group dynamics to create a cohesive unit built on a foundation of trust and dialogue

While EQ is just becoming popular as a concept for individuals, very little has been published on its impact on teams. However, in his article, 3-D Chess: Boosting Team Productivity through Emotional Intelligence,<sup>6</sup> Steve Barth addresses the value of EQ to catalyze the productivity of teams. Obviously, creating a team capable of learning the value of EQ, focusing its learning on the enhancement of these Skill Set attributes and maximizing their use will surpass anyone's vision of an effective and dynamic team.

### **Summary**

One of the most rewarding exercises we can do is to step back into our own thought processes, including but not limited to identifying our own habits. Assessing the results of our personal SWOT analysis will enable us to see over the valleys created by our own mental rivers. Having control of our "self" though the use of tools such as Reflective Mediation® and Neurohormone Reconfiguration® will enable us to take control of our decision making processes rather than allowing them to be on subconscious auto pilot that has been created by neuroplasticity. Only when we can convert tacit thoughts into explicit deliberations will we be able to become masters of leading ourselves in order to move to the optimal level of being able to lead others.

One of the ideal objectives of a true leader is being able to consciously determine when it is appropriate to "outsource" (delegate) certain aspects of our duties, not to merely pass-the-buck but to allow the outcome to be enhanced by recognizing our limitations. Existential leadership is the ability to lead ourselves to know and acknowledge our "center" and, through this process shun any thoughts of self-centeredness. Only when we fully understand and admit to our weaknesses (through Reflective Meditation®) can we be open to seeking the assistance of others to obtain the balance necessary to deliver optimal outcomes. Of course, identifying our weaknesses is important but it is only meaningful when it results in using the information to develop and act on a plan to improve these deficiencies.

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<sup>6</sup> Steve Barth, Teams that Click, 3-D Chess: Boosting Team Productivity through Emotional Intelligence, Harvard Business School Publishing, Boston, MA, 2001

Mastering self-assessment is the critical first step in the journey toward helping others by establishing our personal expectations, understanding our view of our “self” and why we need to improve our interpersonal skills. The second critical step is to gauge our own EQ. Since these skills can be acquired, we should work diligently to enhance our own EQ and to encourage all of the individuals who report directly to us to do the same.