



NINE LESSONS & THREE TAKE AWAYS

About Leadership and Large Scale Cultural Change Initiatives

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One way to define Transformational Leadership is to quote Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart who famously said, “I know it when I see it.” This is a true statement regarding many things, including leadership. If you have known a transformational leader then “you know it when you see it.” However, it is so rare that many think they have known such leadership when in reality they have not.

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To build on Potter’s quote, Transformational Leaders do things because it is the right thing to do and coincidentally what is in the best interests of the organization. They are continually surprised by what they do not know and relish the challenge of figuring things out. They are not engineers or financial analysts or process experts, and yet they are all of these things. More importantly they intuitively excel at the people side of the equation, and yet are completely comfortable at holding people accountable for achieving the hard things. They are driven to find and build the best team, filled with people that are smarter, more accomplished, quicker and adaptable than they are. They know that such a team gets the best results and getting those results makes for better teams.

What follows are 9 lessons learned and 3 take aways regarding Change and Transformational Leadership.

1. Successful large scale cultural change initiatives, in a zero sum, win/lose sense, require a transformational leader. ***This is an obvious observation – right, but in reality, not so much.***
2. Finding a transformational leader is almost impossible. They are just not out there. ***You are more likely to be struck by lightning than to find a transformational leader in your organization.***



3. Most leaders in most organizations believe they are transformational, and most organizations believe they have such leaders. ***Both perceptions are dangerously warped!***
4. If you have the great good fortune to work with a transformational leader you are incredibly fortunate. ***If you have this experience two or three times in your lifetime you have hit the lottery.***
5. If you believe you have had this experience more than three times we need to have a conversation about what it means to be a transformational leader. ***An MBA from an elite school, a fancy title, or a big IQ does not mean you are transformational!***
6. In a technologically driven company the reality is even bleaker. ***A transformational engineer is essentially an oxymoron.***
7. On the rare occasion when you find a transformational engineer, a blend of the logical and the intuitive, the organization itself freaks out! ***This person is so strange, so different, other leaders just do not know how to take them. A transformational leader drives most other leaders' nuts!***
8. Transformational leaders just do the right thing because it is the right thing to do and, more often than not, everything works out. ***This drives most organizations nuts and usually the organization reacts by marginalizing, transferring, or eliminating the irritant.***
9. Transformational leadership is a vocation, a calling, yet such leaders are completely fluent in the technical aspects of the process and the financial analytics of the business. They are trilingual. They speak the psychological, the financial and the technical. ***However, they viscerally understand the critical questions in cultural change initiatives are always psychological.***

The following **3 Take Aways** are intended to drive effort toward what will actually help in a major change initiative. One, start with the reality that you probably will not find a transformational leader. Two, you are now free to realistically pick and choose talent from what you have, not what you wish that you had. Three, the outcome is not a matter of getting the project up, on time and under budget; the important matter in today's competitive landscape is bringing it up with an empowered workforce capable of owning the process and safely wringing every advantage possible out of it.

Take Away 1: If you cannot find a transformational leader – don't have a panic attack. Reality bites, the truth hurts, but starting any place other than what is real is truly a bad mistake.



Take Away 2: *Lack of a transformational leader is not the kiss of death and in fact can be liberating.*

Take Away 3: *Leaders who are principled, humane, non-linear thinkers, with thick skins and steel for a spine will do just fine!*



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A results-oriented organizational effectiveness practitioner, with over 35 years of hands on experience in designing and implementing sustainable work system/cultural change initiatives. Intellectually knowledgeable enough to know what might work. Experienced enough to know what will work. Have coached and mentored leadership, from Front Line Supervisors to Superintendents to VPs. Have a real knack for quickly establishing, strong trust-based relationships.

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