

THE TRANSFORMATION TIMES

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William Diedrich and Rob Curtner, editors

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What is *The Transformation Times*?

The Transformation Times is a monthly publication from Transformative Leadership Systems and Robert Curtner - Consultants. Our purpose is to provide insightful information about issues and opportunities for leaders, and to engage in dialogue with thoughtful readers. We welcome your comments. See next month's issue for thoughts from our readers.

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Bill Diedrich owns Transformative Leadership Systems, a management consulting firm. Bill is an experienced process consultant, speaker, and coach who has served over 60 organizations in education, banking and finance, manufacturing, health care, the public sector, and not for

profits. His public work-shops include topics such as Leadership, Spirituality, Change, and Personal Responsibility. Bill is the author of *The Road Home: The Journey Beyond The Spiritual Quick Fix*, available through the above website. E-mail Bill at Theroadhome@voyager.net



Rob Curtner is an independent consultant with 17 years experience with corporate training and OD. Rob developed critical people and leadership skills through his earlier career experience managing human services organizations.

Rob's areas of expertise include: Developing Problem Solving Teams, Technical Training System Implementation, Performance Consulting, Developing the Learning Organization, and Facilitation of Training and Organizational Change Activities. He is currently working on a safety initiative with UAW/Daimler-Chrysler and a TPM implementation with Technicolor Video Services. Recent curriculum development efforts include Process Mapping and Problem Solving courses. Email Rob at – curtner.robert@acd.net

Lessons from the Problem Solving Classroom, by Rob Curtner

Starting in 1994, I have been teaching problem solving, facilitating problem solving meetings, and conducting independent research on problem solving education and methods. The lessons of this experience are summarized here in order to assist other problem solvers and those wishing to improve organizational problem solving effectiveness.

Help Strikes Again

Where do problems come from? This is a basic question having to do with causality. The specific cause or causes happen in some type of space or system. The complexity of the system leaves us unable (or unwilling) to try to predict systemic outcomes of actions. The action or inaction which caused a problematic event to occur is important to identify so we can avoid reoccurrence and establish or re-establish control over the situation. In a systematic view, the solutions of the past can often cause the problems we face today. One part of the organization takes action that causes problems for another part. I call this "help strikes again".

Problem Finding, Denial and Getting Lost

In the organizational context, events defined as problems have to do with both perceptions of leadership, (What gets measured is what gets done) as well as our expectations about what is expected. When expectations are met...no problem. When change messes with expectations, we get interested in doing something to restore the (sometimes false) sense of steady state. Denial is easy and collective denial is pervasive. This is why we have to measure the right stuff. Short term profits, false measures of productivity and quality can hide problems which are potentially fatal. The organization that is chronically in crisis, putting out fires, is hard pressed to define problems well.

The Value of a Methodology – "Why am I at this Meeting?"

At work, we go to lots of meetings. Most meetings involve some stage of the problem solving process. But when different people at the meeting are not at the same step in the process, the result is another meeting, guaranteed. For example, person one attends to try to get a definition of what is wrong and how that affects the big goals of the organization. Person two wants to know the facts, what, where, when and how much. Person three insists on knowing why this has happened. Person

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four knows why and wants to decide what action to take. Person five wants to prevent reoccurrence. Person six wants to plan the implementation of the solution. Another person wants to see the big picture of all the problems facing the group. In my experience they are all at the right place, but the effectiveness of their efforts can best be improved by taking the problem solving steps in order and documenting them. This develops consensus and focus at each step and actually saves time. Agreement provides buy-in for making the solution work.

The Five "Whys?" and Root Cause

I define problem solving as the process of gathering, sorting, organizing and analyzing information to make wise choices. One error is to use the "Why?" question incorrectly. The wisdom of asking "Why?" up to five times in order to determine the limits of our understanding about the causality in a system is a well known tool. Often the 5 Whys becomes the 5 Whos. Our tendency is to find someone to blame. Often the best answer after 5 Whys is, "I don't know why." Then, solving for root cause is only necessary after we first agree that we don't know why. When we determine the root cause, we may be surprised at how simple it is or confounded by how expensive it is to fix. The boundary we place on the problem's surrounding frame often limits our ability to determine the best course of action.

Getting Unstuck – The Creative View

- ✓ Purposefully pause and notice things.
- ✓ Focus your creative energies on just a few topic areas that you genuinely care about and work on these for several weeks or months
- ✓ Avoid being too narrow in the way you define your problem or topic area; purposefully try broader definitions and see what insights you gain.
- ✓ Try to come up with original and useful ideas by making novel associations among what you already know. When you need creative ideas, try to focus your attention, escape the boundaries, and create movement within the problem definition.
- ✓ Pause and carefully examine ideas that make you laugh the first time you hear them.
- ✓ Recognize that your streams of thought and patterns of judgment are not inherently right or wrong; they are just what you think now based primarily on patterns from your past.
- ✓ Make a deliberate effort to harvest, develop, and implement at least a few of the ideas you generate.

Good Problem Solvers Are...

What makes good problem solvers good?

1. Good problem solvers know more, and what they know, they know differently -- their

knowledge is well connected composed of concepts, experience and patterns.

2. Good problem solvers tend to focus on structural features of problems; poor problem-solvers focus on surface features.
3. Good problem solvers are more aware of their strengths and weaknesses.
4. Good problem solvers are better at monitoring and regulating their efforts.
5. Good problem solvers tend to be more concerned about obtaining elegant solutions versus quick fixes.

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Practicing Positive Political Skills by William Frank Diedrich

A school superintendent is fired because he refused to go after a competent principal who certain school board members did not like. A director of a county agency is targeted by local politicians who don't like his style. A manufacturing senior management team cannot correct poor service to customers because no one is held accountable. The key manager in the issue is a favorite of the chairman of the board.

This is politics. As a leader, you cannot rise above it, stay out of it, or ignore it if you want to be successful. Every leader, whether the organization is public or private, profit or non profit, must deal with politics. The trick is to learn and practice positive political skills.

The first skill is relationship building. Bob Moore, Director of Parks for Ingham County, Michigan, says: "Get out there and talk to people. Stay in touch with the people who have political power. Make presentations." As a leader, you need the support of others, especially those who have position power. Greet them and meet them. Discover what they care about--their dreams, their fears, their family, what motivates them, and what displeases them. Be a listener. Find ways to help and to compliment them.

Relationship building does not end with those who have position power. Talk to people who are doing the work of the organization. Listen to their concerns. Make sure that managers, supervisors, and employees know that you are there to support them and that you care about their well being. Building strong bridges to the people you work with motivates them to care about and respect you.

Teach people about who you are. Make presentations to those in power in order to inform, educate, and gain support for your efforts. If people don't know who you are, they will make it up. You

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want the picture people have of you to be framed by you. You don't want it to be framed by rumor and speculation.

The second skill is called visioning the highest good for all concerned. "Vision without question, is the driving asset for leadership. Vision incorporates the ability to see the world and recognize opportunities for growth for your organization, its members, its customers, and its potential partners--win-win opportunities in a sea of perpetual change," says Dennis R. Koons, Chief Executive Officer for the Michigan Association of Realtors. The ability to see what course will be most beneficial for all concerned requires a leader to step outside of his personal point of view and stand upon a viewing point.

By consistently seeking what will serve all of us, you will develop a sense for what is highest and best. Once you are clear on the vision, everything you think, say and do must be in alignment with it. You are the vision holder. Everything you do either leads the organization to the vision or away from it. Ask yourself: "Does this action or this comment I'm about to make help us or hurt us?" Promote the highest good for all and you will quickly become trusted. Leaders who create and promote hidden agendas are not trusted. You need the trust of people around you in order to get their support.

The third skill combines honesty, integrity, and compassion. In other words, be straight with people. Honesty means that you are clear about your expectations and boundaries. Everyone knows where you stand. Integrity is doing what you say, being your true self, and living your core values. Compassion means that when you are honestly speaking to someone, you are empathetic toward his situation. You say it in a way he can receive it and use it.

Effective practice of this skill has you keenly aware that everything you say and do communicates something. Dr. Howard Heitzeg, Superintendent of Waterford School District (Michigan) states: "When you are in a leadership position it's always show time. There is no time when you are off duty." That time you rolled your eyes; you sent a message. That time you weren't paying attention to a speaker; you sent a message. The leader who consistently sends the same message, privately and publicly about who she is and about what is important, will gain influence and respect.

Honest feedback to others is essential.

About the Book: *The Road Home* is a profound and moving story of spiritual growth. It journeys beyond quick fixes for success to the inner reaches of the soul. The author seeks answers, not on some mountain top or in a remote monastery, but in the midst of everyday life. His own life struggles in relationships, finances, work, health, and self-image become a map to find a treasure within. "I loved this book's courageous honesty and shimmering passion" **Dr. Wayne W Dyer**

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Constantly search for good things to say to people about their talents and their work. Sincerely let people know how much you appreciate their efforts. Appreciation communicated with integrity creates positive energy in relationships. Enemies will become friends and friends will become better friends.

Some leaders may say: "Right. This all sounds good, but it won't work in my organization." If this is you, then you underestimate your power. A focused, skilled leader is more powerful than a whole group of unfocused, reactive people.

It takes courage and confidence to practice these skills. Courage doesn't mean that you don't feel fear, and confidence doesn't mean you are always right. It means that you don't allow fear and doubt to drive your behavior. A fear driven leader is reactive and ineffective. Allow your values, your vision, and your spirit to drive you.

Competency comes with practice. Practice these skills and practice using courage and confidence. Don't wait for others to change their ways, treat you differently, or see it your way. It's not likely to happen. You take the lead and you set the political tone in your organization. Reach in and reflect on who you are. Reach out and touch others with the best of who you are. You will discover greatness you never knew you had.

Comments or questions for Bill? Contact Theroadhome@voyager.net

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