

Paradigm Shifts--Valuable Insights for Leaders

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2009, published in the *Houston Home Journal* on October 17, 2009

What value is there to being open to new insights? “Awareness” is extremely important for leaders.

Increased awareness helps you realize your limitations and motivates you to improve. Increasing your awareness also helps you understand that you have some natural skills. Knowing how you do what you do allows you to contribute to the skills of others, including future leaders in your organization.

Paradigm shifts are one way of increasing your awareness. “Paradigm” is a word that describes the way you uniquely “see” the world. Synonyms are many: perspective, viewpoint, belief, mindset, outlook, perception, understanding, assumption, mental image, theory, model, interpretation, frame of reference.

A “paradigm shift” occurs when you receive a piece of information that causes you to question the way you’ve seen the world in the past. There’s usually a feeling of surprise, accompanied by an excited “Aha!” or a contemplative “Hmm!” You wonder, “How could I have lived with such a ‘wrong’ viewpoint?”

Remember that none of us sees the world as it really is. Our outlook, no matter how experienced, is always incomplete. A paradigm shift merely expands our awareness of what exists.

We all see the world through filters such as our experiences, our habits and tendencies, our motives, and our preconceived beliefs about what is and what should be. Sometimes, the more familiarity we have in a given topic--like leadership--the more blind we become to insights that are obvious to others.

Abraham Maslow, American psychologist and philosopher, observed, “If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail.” I find that most leaders experience the world through their technical specialty, whatever it may be. Ah, but there’s so much more to influencing others.

For that reason, I encourage leaders to welcome paradigm shifts. New insights give you an expanded appreciation for the information you’ve already mastered. And they stimulate you to explore further.

To encourage openness to new insights, I invite my clients to share their paradigm shifts with me. Let me reciprocate, sharing some examples of my new insights.

--I recently read that Henry Rosovsky, economics professor, dean, and twice acting president of Harvard University observed, “Our A students become professors. Our B students go to law school. Our C students rule the world.” Hmm. It’s not necessarily the best students who become the leaders in life, is it? For example, Dwight Eisenhower, General of the Army in WWII and 34th President of the United States, ranked 61st academically and 125th in conduct in his West Point graduating class of 164 cadets.

--I recently learned that Lance Armstrong, at the age of 21, entered his first professional bicycle race, the 1992 Classico San Sebastian in Spain. He finished dead last, behind the other 110 entrants in the race. Armstrong nearly quit the sport. Of course, he went on to victory over testicular cancer in 1996 and won seven consecutive victories in the Tour de France (1999-2005). Hmm. I guess frustration in your early efforts doesn’t condemn you to failure in your subsequent attempts.

--In his book, *The 4-Hour Workweek*; Timothy Ferriss reports that in his first full-time job out of college, the norm was to work telephone sales from 9am to 5pm. He chose to make calls from 8:00-8:30am and 6:00-6:30pm, avoiding the secretarial gatekeepers. This simple adjustment allowed him to reach more decision makers, achieving twice the results of the senior sales executives while working only 1/8 the total time. Apparently, following what everyone else does isn’t necessarily the most effective way.

Last week my article was entitled “Are You on a ‘Truth’ Quest or a ‘Feel Good’ Quest?” If you, as a leader and influencer of others, desire the truth, I strongly encourage you to become more aware of the opportunities for paradigm shifts. They present themselves to you every day. All you need to do is recognize and appreciate them. I find that sharing them with a trusted friend or colleague helps, too!

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