



LEADERSHIP
LANDING

TOP TEN INSIGHTS

Our Ten Biggest Takeaways
From the Last 15 Years





We are honored to be able to share what we have learned in supporting our wonderful clients over these last 15 years.

We'd like to share our top ten insights with you!

Top Ten Insights

We are honored to have worked with so many amazing leaders on their journey to greatness. Our work continues to be a partnership with you all, for which we are deeply grateful. For every piece of advice, encouragement, or council we offer as coaches, our clients inspire us with their brilliance, commitment, and willingness to try new things. In celebration of this insight, and the truly amazing work of our clients, we are sharing the 10 most important insights that we feel have shaped our work together in the last 15 years. We offer these to you now in an e-book format with the hope that they will support you as well.

May these insights, gleaned from direct work with our coaching clients, inspire you as they have us.

Yours on the journey,

The Leadership Landing Team
Hal, Joanna, Kim, Denise, Pam, Andrea, Venice



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1 Moving from Judgement to Inquiry

Great leaders are curious. Curiosity usually manifests as a genuine interest in the ideas of others, and the ability to ask good questions, and lots of them. Questions help leaders to skillfully discern between good ideas and great ones, and also help identify pitfalls, often before they happen.

It's important, though, to distinguish between questions that build trust, and those that break it.

Problems can occur when leaders communicate their questions in a critical or cynical way. "What were you thinking?" for instance can be articulated in a condescending, judgmental tone, or in a curious and inquiring one. The problem with choosing an accusatory or negative tone is that the other person is much more likely to shut down or become defensive, robbing you both of an opportunity to collaborate. Adopting a tone of genuine curiosity makes it more likely that others will trust your intention is positive, and they will be more likely to be open and transparent in response.



Choosing to shift from judgment (taking an irritated, negative tone) to inquiry (taking a genuinely curious tone), allows us to ask important questions of people, while maintaining an expansive, generous mindset. It is by asking questions in this way that we're more likely to

engage others in a collaborative hunt for solutions, and build trust rather than break it down.

What might it mean for you?

As you meet with questionable situations, take a moment and reflect on the nature of the tone you want to set with others. You can ask "what were you thinking" – if that is the right question – but allow it to come from a place of true inquiry and curiosity. We bet your conversation will build trust with others and be more productive if you do so!



2 Don't Just Do Something, Sit There!

We love this useful twist on a well-known phrase: “Don’t just do something, sit there”. Sylvia Boorstein, mindfulness meditation teacher and author, coined it (and even wrote a book with that title), and we think it’s a great way to encapsulate how the most effective leaders we’ve worked with meet challenges.

Ingrained in our collective leadership consciousness is the notion that action oriented leaders win the day. See a problem, pounce on it. Identify a challenge, take action! To that, we say yes, and...

Taking action is actually pretty easy, but taking skillful action is much more difficult.

This is where Boorstein nailed it for business leaders. Perhaps the hardest thing imaginable for a busy executive is to consider inaction as productive. And yet, it is in moments of stillness that one can actually determine: first, what is actually happening (the situation occurring outside of myself and within), and second, what the best or right action seems to be.



Don't just do something; that'd be too easy. Sit there; take a moment or two. Consider, what is happening, and how do I feel about it? Must something be done immediately, or might it actually be best to wait and



observe? Think about whether or not you are reacting appropriately to what is happening. If you choose to respond, what is the most helpful response?

What might it mean for you?

Think about the difference between a reaction and a response. A reaction is simple, immediate, and often unskilled. Responses are deliberate, thoughtful and usually more skillful. So, take a moment to not do something. Take the time to consider- what is needed here? Is your voice or action necessary and helpful? If you were to do nothing, what results might you expect? If action is necessary, sit in stillness long enough to consider your intentions, your approach and your plan.

3 When B+ is better than A

No doubt, part of being a great leader is having a strong point of view and confidence in one's ideas. But the role that a leader plays in the optimal execution of a plan should have less to do with a leader's individual vision and more to do with cultivating the ideas that will drive optimal execution and results.

Some leaders believe that their team is only there to implement projects, while the leader is responsible for generating ideas and plans. But what are the options when a team member has a different idea than the leader for how to reach a goal?

Sometimes a team member's idea may not come with the experience or perspective that is unique to the leader, and therefore, the team member's idea may not always seem as strong. But, the key to remember is: It's not the best idea that yields the best results, it's the quality of the execution of the idea that does.

So, what creates high quality execution? From what we've seen, across the highest functioning teams, it's buy-in and commitment. And one sure way to build buy-in is for leaders to relinquish control and allow the ideas generated by the team to drive direction. This not only encourages engagement, it allows team members the opportunity to learn and grow their capacities, expanding the capability of the team.



Why does this work? Let's look at the math.

As a leader, if your idea is the "A+" idea, and your team member's idea is a "B+", how can you decide, in the moment, which direction to go? Remember, outcome is all about execution. Build that notion into the equation. Ask: What direction will yield the best outcome? Is the best path your idea with compliance but no team buy-in (A+ idea, B+ execution)? Or is the best path your team member's idea with total commitment and ownership (B+ idea, A+ execution)? Try weighing execution more heavily in the equation and see where you land.

What might it mean for you?

As a leader, as you're engaging with people in your organization, weigh your choices carefully. Remember that your job is to cultivate the ingenuity on your team, and support your team members in their learning process. Allow them some space to experiment, and relinquish your control, remembering that facilitating the highest quality execution is paramount. There is always more than one good way to reach the results you are hoping for. Be open to alternative approaches.

There are times when it is helpful to defer to others, even if the quality of their idea doesn't look quite as stellar to you as your own. Allow your people to learn through trying out their own concepts. Celebrate their ideas when you can. We bet that the result will be beyond what you'd hoped for, and the math will prove itself out.



4 Follow Up and Follow Through

It's the little things that matter the most. Regardless of how quickly you ascend as a leader, or how important you have become, your choice to follow up and follow through on the commitments you have made signals to others that you remain a grounded, trustworthy leader.

Taking on more responsibility usually means moving away from the tactical and into the strategic. For some, this shift can open a tendency to let go of some of the rigor in dealing with the "little" things. Things like following up and following through with what you say you're going to do can fall to the wayside.

The cost of behaving this way is high, however. Your strategies are only as strong as the foundation of trust from which you deliver them.

It doesn't matter how brilliant you are if you can't show up on time for a meeting. Why?

Because your lateness communicates that others are not your priority. They begin to wonder things like, "Does this leader not respect me?" Or, "Does this leader lack discipline or focus?"





Following up and following through boils down to doing the simplest, most rudimentary parts of business well: respond to emails; return phone calls; arrive on time for meetings; acknowledge breakdowns; honor your commitments.

Of course, sometimes you'll have five meetings before noon and find yourself late for your 2 o'clock. That stuff happens. But when the basic principles of respectful interaction are regularly abandoned, your credibility drops, the narrative changes, and others may begin to question your commitment.

What might this mean for you?

Making a purposeful effort to follow through and do what you say you will do shows others that no matter how lofty your position has become, you will stay dedicated to your team and the intention of your organization.

Honor your commitments, explicit and implied. Challenge yourself to recognize where you may no longer be showing up in a way that is respectful to others. If you find your commitment to your organization has faded, consider taking the time to renew or reset your intention, we suggest you might try these: to be helpful, be respectful, and be of service.

5 Love and Fear

In every relationship and interaction, even those that are at work, we are motivated by either love or fear. This may sound like an oversimplification - and in some ways it is - but it's true.

Think about it.

Pick a recent difficult interaction you have had with someone, perhaps at work. Give yourself a moment to be curious, and trace the feeling you had in the interaction back to its root inside of you. Were you coming from a place that was expansive, trusting and kind, even though the interaction was difficult? If so, you were able to meet that interaction from a place of love. Or were you coming from a place of constriction, holding back, or even anger? Well, then you were probably coming from a place of fear.



Making a choice takes mindfulness.

Mindfulness is a way of focusing your awareness in the moment, in order to be aware of the choices you are making. Mindfulness allows you to be curious about how you are approaching your engagements with others. It is important to wonder: are you choosing to operate from love or from fear in your interactions?

Although we all have painful experiences that might lead us to think that closing down or reacting defensively might be helpful, the truth is that it is actually never best to react to a situation from a place of fear. Fear is a reaction that closes down our capacity to think clearly about our next move in any situation. It prevents us from being able to discern what is truly happening, and how to best respond to it.



Mindful self-awareness allows for some gracefulness in moments of fear, because it slows things down. It allows us to begin to be curious about how we are operating. The time between a stimulus and reaction lengthens. There is time to choose - where do I want to come from right now? What is the best way for me to contribute at this moment? With

mindful awareness, you have the opportunity to choose to be your best self - and respond from love.

What it might mean for you?

In moments like these, it's useful to remember insight #2 (Don't Just Do Something, Sit There). Bring attention to your interactions, and be self-reflective. Are there times or places where you constrict or tighten, where fear takes over?

If so, you are not alone!

Here are some suggestions. If you find yourself feeling tight, or shut down, or anxious, take the time to stop and be curious. Pay attention to your



breath. Slow down. Allow yourself to wonder what you are feeling and why. And then, allow yourself to return to your best intentions. Allow your loving nature to surface. Breathe this openness and kindness into any tightness you may be feeling. Give yourself some time to relax and focus here.

Interceding like this won't stop your fear reaction every time. But letting yourself be curious about what is motivating you allows you to ultimately choose how you relate to others. If you are hoping to be constructive and productive as a leader, even in difficult situations, we suggest choosing love.

6 Applying Productive Pressure

Pressure—by definition—can be a great thing. Applying pressure as a leader can make things move and create momentum.

But how much pressure is good pressure?

The right amount of pressure makes things go, and when applied to people or teams, it is generally experienced as helpful and constructive. But if pressure isn't calibrated appropriately, problems can arise.



While too little pressure can lead to no movement at all, too much pressure can feel harsh or forceful, and can actually create resistance rather than



movement. Too much pressure can result in an organizational narrative about a leader who pushes too hard or is seen as a bully. Ultimately this takes the focus away from where it needs to be: on the tasks at hand.

So, what is productive pressure?

Understanding the difference between unproductive pressure, which is not calibrated correctly to the situation, and productive pressure, which is carefully considered and applied, requires discernment.

We coach our clients to take the time to consider what might be the right amount of pressure in any given situation. Determining the right amount of pressure—and how to articulate it—requires patience and mindfulness.

In general, a leader is most successful when the pressure he/she is exerting is only a small amount greater than the energy the person or team is spending on resisting or standing still.

Much less does not move anything (in fact it may communicate that the task or issue is not that important to you). Much more creates bigger problems (for example too much pressure can make others feel you don't trust them).

What this might mean for you?

If you are facing inertia or resistance, consider how deeply rooted this current state might be. Are your colleagues just needing a slight, helpful push? Or is there a greater dedication to inaction that needs to be addressed? First (as we suggest in Insight #2) make sure to take the time to understand what is happening inside you as well as for others. Be curious: are you moving from a place of fear or constriction (as we talked about in Insight #5), for example is the way you are applying pressure a reflection of the pressure you are putting on yourself? Or is the pressure you are applying actually calibrating clearly to the outside situation? When you feel clear about your intention and motivation, do your best to apply pressure that is just slightly greater than the current state of affairs, and observe. The time you take to calibrate your approach will pay dividends in not having to repair damage that may result from an uncalibrated response.



7 Owning the Time in Between

One of the misconceptions about mindfulness that I run into regularly is the idea that living mindfully takes too much time.

But, the truth is that incorporating mindfulness into a modern professional life doesn't mean you need to sit formally in meditation for hours. In fact, integrating mindfulness effectively can be as easy as taking a stroll down the hallway.

The time we spend in transit—between calls and commitments—belongs to us. We can waste these times, as people often do, or we can use them as an opportunity to refocus and restore ourselves.

How many transitions do you have each day?

Sometimes a transition is simply a few moments between phone calls - or it could be a walk through the building or to another floor. Most of us have many of these transitions throughout a day. Let's say that you have 10 transitions in a workday. Even if each one is comprised of only two or three minutes each, this would mean you actually have 20 to 30 minutes at a



minimum that you can choose to use mindfully each day - and that's not even counting your commute time!

Imagine the good you could do if you claimed this time for yourself.

Typically during transition times, people are thinking back over their last meeting, or anticipating future meetings (or planning meals or weekend chores, or, or, or...) Instead, consider using this time for restorative breathing, walking



mindfully, or simply settling your mind so it can reset. If you do, studies show that you are much more likely to be able to prioritize effectively, to be proactive about choices, to communicate with clarity, and ultimately to be more productive.

What might it mean for you?

Starting today, when you have transitions between things, try moving with awareness. Use the time to clear your mind, restore your focus, and set your intentions.

Here are some simple techniques you can try:

- Set your intention to relax and focus – aim for the sweet spot where you are both engaged and at ease
- Become aware of your breath – is it shallow or deep? Short or long?
- Become curious about the sensations in your body in this moment
- If walking, slow down enough that you can feel your feet in your shoes as you move
- Settle
- Set the intention to be helpful and compassionate – for yourself and for others

Protect the little times ‘in between’ and we bet that you will notice the difference in your focus, your productivity, and your well-being too.

8 No Trust-Neutral Interactions

Whether you know it or not, every interaction you have at work either builds trust or breaks it.

How much trust is in your trust piggy bank?

Every interaction is an opportunity to build trust.

I first heard the idea that there are “no trust-neutral interactions” in 2005 at a Great Place to Work annual conference. Brooke Huston, the then VP of



Consulting was on a panel where she was asked about best practices for companies on the journey to greatness. Her answer has stayed with me all this time. All interactions (yes all!) either build or tear down trust - there are no trust-neutral interactions.

Want a great place to work with great business results? Start with trust.

For the last 30 years, Great Places to Work® survey data has pointed to the same theme: Trust at work is one of the clearest drivers of company success. According to Great Place to Work, high trust organizations have lower turnover, stronger innovations, and better business results across the board. Trust is clearly a very important aspect of building a strong organization.

Creating trust takes time and effort, and happens one interaction at a time.

Here's the tricky part: processes and planning are not what create trust. Trust is built in the way you interact with others - through the quality of in person discussions as well as over email, the phone, and even voicemail. Even more unexpectedly trust can be won or lost when you're sharing an elevator, walking next to someone in the parking lot, casually crossing paths in the hall, or in how you show up at the company barbecue.



Make it easier on yourself!

What if you consider every single interaction you have with others as an opportunity to build trust? Not just the obvious ones, but literally, every interaction. Operate as if there is no such thing as a trust-neutral interaction. You're either making a deposit in your trust account or making a withdrawal.

What might it mean for you?

It is of course important to deliver on the big stuff. Be truthful and deliver on your promises. But take care with the passing interactions too.

Use everyday communications to build trust.

- Add an extra word or two to an email that demonstrates warmth, positive intention, or a personal connection.
- Make eye contact as you pass or share space with others. Look up, smile, say hello, check in, say thanks, pay attention, and show gratitude.
- While you're leaving a voicemail, smile. It will affect your word choice and cadence.
- Be authentically genial and kind.

Interact with others as if there are no trust-neutral interactions, work to build your trust account, and as others begin to respond in kind, the strength of your organization will build too.

9 Strong Opinions Lightly Held

This penultimate insight comes from a client that I worked with almost ten years ago.

This client was an accomplished executive on the leadership team at her company. Clearly she hadn't needed an executive coach in order to succeed. She approached us, however, because she understood there is always room for growth, and she simply wanted to be the best she could be.

The board of directors at this leader's company was recommending a reduction in headcount as a cost cutting measure. The leadership team was



preparing to follow through on these layoffs, without considering other options. My client had another idea.

The problem my client knew she was facing as she tried to advocate for her employees became clear as we explored the culture of the leadership team. They had a last-man-standing kind of environment where each person would attempt to dig-in and defend their own position. She agreed that this typical approach to conflict resolution was exhausting, so we began to brainstorm alternatives she could try.

“What if, instead of brute force, I take a different tact?” she mused. “What if I come in strong with my idea, but leave lots of room around it for others? That way, maybe I’ll see less defensiveness from others... You know, strong opinions lightly held.”



Her idea was brilliant.

We talked through her approach, and she was able to present her ideas to the team in an open, mutual way that welcomed others to come together and collaborate. And it worked. The team came up with a series of alternatives rather than simply eliminating jobs. She had succeeded on all fronts.



What might it mean for you?

As you form your opinions, especially on controversial matters, acknowledge any possible objections to your view, and be ready to address them respectfully.

Consider holding your ideas lightly and in an unattached way, recognizing that everyone at the table has something important and helpful to contribute. This doesn't mean you back off of your beliefs, but that you present your opinions in a welcoming and inclusive way, acknowledging that you may not have all the answers. Be open to the possibility that another person's idea may have more buy in (refer to insight #3), or at least an equal chance of success.

Remember: collaboration leads to better execution, a factor that will always lead to the best outcome for the organization. Modeling flexibility always builds trust.

Have strong opinions, lightly held.

10 Be Self Aware, Be Curious, Be of Service

As a leader, you're known to have strong, well-informed opinions. You know what you're doing and you know what to do next. That's awesome, yet sometimes, though you understand exactly what needs to happen, you encounter resistance from others.

Does this sound familiar?

Other: "I hear your point, but I don't see how that will get us where we need to go."

(You to yourself: "Are you kidding me? This is the most obvious answer. How can you possibly be thinking anything else?")

If it does, welcome to the club! The challenge here is to be able meet resistance from others gently, without getting your back up, and still move towards the goal.



What might it mean for you?

Next time you're working through resistance from others, here's a suggestion.

Be self-aware –

Be very clear about where you are “in reaction” to others. Breathe and slowly let go of any defensiveness, judgment, anger, fear or tightness that you might be carrying. These things will only render you incapable of seeing things in the most constructive way. (Refer to Insight #2 for more)

Be curious –

Really try to understand the perspective of the other person. Ask questions that you actually want to hear the answers to. Look for places in yourself that you may be judgmental, and shift your attitude to one of inquiry. (Refer to Insight #5 for more)

Be of service –

Recall the most true aspect of the situation or circumstance. You (and the other) should be working in service to others. Ask yourself, if my primary role is to serve, what action can I now take that is in the highest and best good of those involved?

Celebrating our Top Ten Insights!

Thank you so much for taking the time to read and think about our top 10 insights of the last 15 years. We are incredibly grateful to be able to share them with you.

If any of these insights has sparked questions or thoughts for you about your workplace or your leadership goals, we'd love to hear from you.

Yours on the Journey,
Hal and the Leadership Landing Team

Hal.Adler@leadershiplanding.com