

# Are You Sabotaging Your Career?

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My experience working with thousands of leaders worldwide for the past two decades teaches me that most leaders are screwing up their careers.

On a daily basis, these leaders are getting the wrong results or the right results in the wrong ways.

Interestingly, they themselves are choosing to fail. They're actively sabotaging their own careers.

Leaders commit this sabotage for a simple reason: They make the fatal mistake of choosing to communicate with presentations and speeches -- not leadership talks.

In terms of boosting one's career, the difference between the two methods of leadership communication is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.

Speeches/presentations primarily communicate information. Leadership talks, on the other hand, not only communicate information, they do more: They establish a deep, human emotional connection with the audience.

## *Why is the latter connection necessary in leadership?*

Look at it this way: Leaders do nothing more important than get results. There are generally two ways that leaders get results: They can order people to go from point A to point B, or they can have people WANT TO go from A to B.

Clearly, leaders who can instill "want to" in people, who motivate those people, are much more effective than leaders who can't or won't.

And the best way to instill "want to" is not simply to relate to people as if they are information receptacles but to relate to them on a deep, human, emotional way.

And you do it with leadership talks.

Here are a few examples of leadership talks.

When Churchill said, "We will fight on the beaches ..." That was a leadership talk.

When Kennedy said, "Ask not what your country can do for you ..." that was a

leadership talk.

When Reagan said, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" That was a leadership talk.

You can come up with a lot of examples, too. Go back to those moments when the words of a leader inspired people to take ardent action, and you've probably put your finger on an authentic leadership talk.

Mind you, I'm not just talking about great leaders of history. I'm also talking about the leaders in your organizations. After all, leaders speak 15 to 20 times a day, everything from formal speeches to informal chats. When those interactions are leadership talks, not just speeches or presentations, the effectiveness of those leaders is dramatically increased.

How do we put together leadership talks? It's not easy. Mastering leadership talks takes a rigorous application of many specific processes. As Clement Atlee said of that great master of leadership talks, Winston Churchill, "Winston spent the best years of his life preparing his impromptu talks."

Churchill, Kennedy, Reagan and others who were masters at giving leadership talks didn't actually call their communications "leadership talks," but they must have been conscious to some degree of the processes one must employ in putting a leadership talk together.

Here's how to start. If you plan to give a leadership talk, there are three questions you should ask. If you answer "no" to any one of those questions, you can't give one. You may be able to give a speech or presentation, but certainly not a leadership talk.

## *Do you know what the audience needs?*

Winston Churchill said, "We must face the facts or they'll stab us in the back."

When you are trying to motivate people, the real facts are THEIR facts, their reality.

Their reality is composed of their

needs. In many cases, their needs have nothing to do with your needs.

Most leaders don't get this. They think that their own needs, their organization's needs, are reality. That's okay if you're into ordering. As an order leader, you only need work with your reality. You simply have to tell people to get the job done. You don't have to know where they're coming from. But if you want to motivate them, you must work within their reality, not yours.

I call it "playing the game in the people's home park." There is no other way to motivate them consistently. If you insist on playing the game in your park, you'll be disappointed in the motivational outcome.

## *Can you bring deep belief to what you're saying?*

Nobody wants to follow a leader who doesn't believe the job can get done. If you can't feel it, they won't do it.

But though you yourself must "want to" when it comes to the challenge you face, your motivation isn't the point. It's simply a given. If you're not motivated, you shouldn't be leading.

Here's the point: Can you TRANSFER your motivation to the people so they become as motivated as you are?

I call it THE MOTIVATIONAL TRANSFER, and it is one of the least understood and most important leadership determinants of all.

There are three ways you can make the transfer happen.

\* CONVEY INFORMATION. Often, this is enough to get people motivated. For instance, many people have quit smoking because of information on the harmful effects of the habit.

\* MAKE SENSE. To be motivated, people must understand the rationality behind your challenge. Re: smoking, people have been motivated to quit because the information makes sense.

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\* TRANSMIT EXPERIENCE. This entails having the leader's experience become the people's experience. This can be the most effective method of all, for when the speaker's experience becomes the audience's experience, a deep sharing of emotions and ideas, a communing, can take place.

There are plenty of presentation and speech courses devoted to the first two methods, so I won't talk about those.

Here are a few thoughts on the third method. Generally speaking, humans learn in two ways: by acquiring intellectual understanding and through experience. In our schooling, the former predominates, but it is the latter which is most powerful in terms of inducing a deep sharing of emotions and ideas; for our experiences, which can be life's teachings, often lead us to profound awareness and purposeful action.

Look back at your schooling. Was it your book learning or your experiences, your interactions with teachers and students, that you remember most? In most cases, your experiences made the most telling impressions upon you.

To transfer your motivation to others,

use what I call my "defining moment" technique, which I describe fully in my book, *DEFINING MOMENT: MOTIVATING PEOPLE TO TAKE ACTION*.

In brief, the technique is this: Put into sharp focus a particular experience of yours, then communicate that focused experience to the people by describing the physical facts that gave you the emotion.

Now, here's the secret to the defining moment. That experience of yours must provide a lesson and that lesson is a solution to the needs of the people.

Otherwise, they'll think you're just talking about yourself.

For the defining moment to work (i.e., for it to transfer your motivation to them), the experience must be about them. The experience happened to you, of course. But that experience becomes their experience when the lesson it communicates is a solution to their needs.

### *Can you have the audience take right action?*

Results don't happen unless people take action. After all, it's not what you say that's important in your leadership communications, it's what the people do after you have had your say.

Yet the vast majority of leaders don't have a clue as to what action truly is.

They get people taking the wrong action at the wrong time in the wrong way for the wrong results.

A key reason for this failure is they don't know how to deliver the all-important "leadership talk Call-to-action".

"Call" comes from an Old English word meaning "to shout." A Call-to-Action is a "shout for action." Implicit in the concept is urgency and forcefulness. But most leaders don't deliver the most effective Calls-to-action because they make three errors regarding it.

First, they err by mistaking the Call-to-Action as an order. Within the context of The Leadership Talk, a Call-to-action is not an order. Leave the order for the order leader.

Second, leaders err by mistaking the Call as theirs to give. The best Call-to-action is not the leader's to give. It's the people's to give. It's the people's to give to themselves. A true Call-to-action prompts people to motivate themselves to take action.

The most effective Call-to-action then is not from the leader to the people but from the people to the people themselves!

Third, they error by not priming their Call. There are two parts to the Call-to-

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action, the primer and the Call itself. Most leaders omit the all-important primer.

The primer sets up the Call, which is to prompt people to motivate themselves to take action. You yourself control the primer. The people control the Call.

The primer/Call is critical because every leadership communication situation is in essence a problem situation. There is the problem the leader has. And there is the problem the people have. In many cases, they are two different problems. But leaders get into trouble regarding the Call-to-action when they think it's only one problem, mainly theirs.

For instance, a leader might be talking about the organization needing to be more productive. So, the leader talks PRODUCTIVITY.

On the other hand, the people, hearing PRODUCTIVITY, think, YOU'RE GOING TO GIVE ME MORE WORK!

If the leader thinks that productivity is the people's problem and ignores the "more work" aspect, h/she's Call-to-action will probably be a bust, resulting in the people avoiding committed action.

Let's apply the primer/Call dynamic to the productivity case. The leader talks

PRODUCTIVITY: but this time uses a PRIMER. The primer's purpose is to establish a "critical confluence" - the union of your problem with the problem of the people.

In this case, the leader creates a critical confluence by couching productivity within the framework of MORE MEANINGFUL WORK.

The primer may be: LET'S GET TOGETHER AND SEE IF YOU CAN COME UP WITH AN ACTION PLAN THAT WILL ENSURE THAT THE PRODUCTIVITY GAINS YOU IDENTIFY AND EXECUTE WILL ENABLE YOU TO WORK AT WHAT'S REALLY MEANINGFUL TO YOU.

Note what we've done: The primer is LET'S GET TOGETHER AND SEE IF YOU CAN COME UP WITH AN ACTION PLAN.

The actual Call is from the people to themselves: LET'S INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY BY WORKING AT WHAT'S MEANINGFUL.

With that Call, the leader moves from just getting average results (YOU MUST BE MORE PRODUCTIVE: i.e., you're going to solve MY problem) to getting great results (YOU COME UP WITH WAYS TO TIE PRODUCTIVITY INTO MEANINGFUL WORK: i.e., you're also going to solve your problem.)

So, here's what the leadership talk

Call-to-action is truly about: It's not an order; it's best manifested when the people give themselves the Call, and it is always primed by your creating the "critical confluence" -- they'll be solving their problem as well as yours.

The vast majority of leaders I've worked with are hampering their careers for one simple reason: They're giving presentations and speeches -- not leadership talks.

You have a great opportunity to turbo charge your career by recognizing the power of leadership talks. Before you give a leadership talk, ask three basic questions. Do you know what the people need? Can you bring deep belief to what you're saying? Can you have the people take the right action?

If you say "no" to any one of those questions you cannot give a leadership talk. But the questions aren't meant to be stumbling blocks to your leadership but stepping stones. If you answer "no," work on the questions until you can say, "yes." In that way, you'll start getting the right results in the right way on a consistent basis.

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