



## DOING THE WORK OF LEADERSHIP

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*“Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better.” Samuel Beckett*

### ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP AND TOUGH PROBLEMS

Adaptive leadership is about causing a shift in values, habits or beliefs. Adaptive challenges are those that have no known solution and can't be solved by an expert – these challenges must be taken on by the people with the problem.

The OCL Group has developed a five-stage process to help you to know how to focus your attention and to navigate your most complex challenges.

1. **Frame** the issue. *How do you want to focus attention on what is going on?*
2. Identify and understand the **stakeholders** and their factions. *Who is experiencing loss? What do they value? Where are your allies and confidantes among them?*
3. Listen to the **dissonant voices** and engage them instead of silencing them.
4. Openly identify and **work with conflict** and find **common ground**.
5. **Steward** the process – this is not done alone. Enroll others to lead.

### AUTHORITY AND LEADERSHIP

Often people think that authority is a requirement of leadership. We believe that **formal authority** can be both an asset and a constraint and that there are abundant opportunities to lead from the middle – or from wherever you are. Expectations of those with formal authority include:

\* Direction   \* Protection   \* Role orientation   \* Controlling conflict   \* Norm Maintenance

These expectations of authority are ingrained in many of us, in our experiences growing up, in our cultures and our histories. They suggest what we want from our leaders – and from ourselves.

The question we might ask is, *“How can I exercise leadership and not simply meet expectations of my position?”*

Consider the following options:

- Identify, diagnose, and inquire into the adaptive challenge, instead of defining it for others. (Direction)
- Dislodge the external threat instead of protecting others from it. (Protection)
- Disorient roles and interrupt patterns and equilibrium, instead of orienting. (Role orientation)



- Expose conflict instead of restoring order. (Controlling conflict)
- Challenge norms or allow them to be challenged instead of maintaining them. (Norm maintenance)

Without formal authority, we have to get creative and lead from the edges or the Inside. We need to be “creative deviants” by:

- Knowing what is at stake – having a clear sense of purpose.
- Reading the clues from authority figures and finding ways to both challenge and partner with those in authority
- Exposing the issue without becoming the issue
- Finding ways to gain and sustain informal authority and to stay alive
- Building allies with those who see things differently and those who can help you to hold steady

## DOING THE WORK OF LEADERSHIP

- Use **self as data** – notice thoughts, emotions, and body. This work comes from head, heart and gut.
- Notice **mirroring** of self, group, environmental cues.
- Turn the **heat** up and down – create a “**zone of learning**”
- Frustrate people’s expectations at a rate they can stand.
- Listen to the **dissonant voices**.
- Put yourself in experiences where you gain experience in being “**high concept**” (detecting patterns and making connections) and “**high touch**” (gaining empathy) Use left and right brain!
- **Pace the work** for yourself and others.
- Be intentional about where you **draw others’ attention** – possibly the greatest currency of leadership.
- Find **partners** across lines of authority and other boundaries. Help one another **see “blind spots”** through open feedback and input.
- Have **compassion** for yourself and others – encourage incompetence!

Adapted from “Leadership Without Easy Answers” by Dr. Ronald Heifetz and “A Whole New Mind” by Daniel H. Pink



## **SOME RESOURCES ON LEADERSHIP**

Leadership Without Easy Answers - Ronald Heifetz

Leadership on the Line – Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky

How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work – Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey

Orbiting the Giant Hairball – Gordon MacKenzie

Leadership Can be Taught – Sharon Daloz Parks

A Whole New Mind – Daniel Pink

Presence – Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, Betty Sue Flowers

Solving Tough Problems – Adam Kahane

Real Leadership – Dean Williams

The Berkana Institute and books by author Margaret “Meg” Wheatley

The Kennedy School of Government Center for Public Leadership

The Center for Creative Leadership

Your favorite childhood comic books -- archetypes for leadership?

Your own “successes” and “failures”

*“How can I remain unmoving until the right action appears all by itself?” Lao Tzu*

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