

By Madeleine Homan, MCC

What's Your LPoV?

Your attitudes and beliefs about leadership create your Leadership Point of View

In the spring of 2000 I started a coaching business with two partners. I held the title of Chief Coaching Officer, easily my favorite title ever. I was responsible for defining the processes we used to deliver coaching; recruiting, hiring and training our coaches; and overseeing the design and delivery of large-scale coaching intervention for our clients. About a week before we were to get together in person with 40 carefully chosen coaches, my CEO called me:

“What are you planning to say to all our new coaches?” he asked.

“Uh, I guess I thought I would talk about how excited I am to have them aboard, and the vision for the company,” I replied.

“OK, that's good. But since you are their leader, I think you should share your Leadership Point of View.”

“What's that?”

He explained that my Leadership Point of View (LPoV) would be a credo that encompassed not just my vision for the work, but my attitudes and beliefs about leadership. It would express what was most important to me. Moreover, he explained, it would outline what I expect of myself; what, as a leader, I expect of others; and what they could expect from me. Sharing my LPoV with our new coaches would set an example and encourage them to think about their own. It came as a blinding flash of the obvious that coaches who are coach-

ing leaders should be role models for that kind of clarity. Finally, my Leadership Point of View would serve as my road map for actions I would choose in a crisis.

I was stunned. In all the leadership training I'd had, no one had challenged me to address these questions. I had held several leadership positions in the past and would have loved to have undertaken this assignment before getting in over my head as I often had. Thrilled, I embarked on the task of articulating my LPoV. It was, of course, much harder than I initially thought – I was not nearly as clear as I assumed myself to be. The brilliance of the process, though, is that it provides a starting point for anyone who is passionate about being a fine leader.

It turns out that Ken Blanchard, my CEO's father, was sold on this idea after reading Noel Tichy's book, *The Leadership Engine*. Tichy's extensive research has shown that the most effective leaders have a clear, teachable LPoV and share it with others, particularly the people they work with. Blanchard created an exercise to perform with leaders at all levels. When I had the experience of using it for myself it became clear that this was a perfect activity for coaches to engage in with leaders. I have come to think of it as a tool to deepen reflection that is useful for



absolutely anyone in a leadership position.

A Coach Prepares

One of my most influential mentors, Thomas Leonard, used to say that coaches do their best work with clients who are either one step ahead or one step behind them in their development. I have found this to be consistently accurate. So when I work with coaches who want to coach leaders, I am adamant about making sure they are role models for best leadership practices – hence the necessity for coaches who coach leaders to develop their own LPoV. Coaches then have the personal experience of having done the work. This is not much of a stretch as coaches tend to love to this kind of self-exploration. The interesting thing is that even if a coach has a great deal of leadership expertise, there is a good chance they haven't done it quite this way. In addition, if a few years have gone by since the last time he or she has checked in with their leadership self, a lot may have changed.

The Process

To develop your LPoV you need to answer some questions – the answers

to which generate more questions, require a great deal of thought, and yield, in the end, rich and varied answers.

→ Start the LPoV exploration by asking: Who are the leaders who have inspired you? They can be from the past or the present, real or fictional. They can be famous like Abraham Lincoln or known only to you like your Aunt Marie. Create a list of these leaders.

→ Look at each of these leaders on your list and ask yourself: What quality did this person have that is compelling to you and why? What did they do that you find so impressive? The answer may surprise you. I have had several people identify Hitler because he was so masterful at mobilizing people to do what he wanted. One of my personal examples is Atticus Finch, the protagonist of the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. Atticus Finch was a car-

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ing and committed parent, yet he chose to stand up for justice in his small town at great risk to himself and his children.

The list of qualities and actions reveals what you think is important for a leader – your leadership values, if you will. These will be different from any ‘corporate values’ your company might have. These are personal and they will drive your behavior, so it is critical to know what they are and tell others. One client, a VP of operations in a fast-growing pharmaceutical research firm, realized that she was never going to be able to be the leader she wanted to be in

Elements of a Leadership Point of View

- Who are the leaders who are compelling to you? What qualities do they possess? What did they do that you found inspiring?
- Do you possess these qualities and abilities? If not, can you develop them? If not, what will you do about it?
- What do expect of yourself and others?
- What can others expect of you?
- How will you share this information with others?

her current firm. Although she had gathered plenty of reasons to leave, this was the one that galvanized her to mount a new job search.

→ The list of qualities and actions will also provide a way to do a gap analysis as you can then ask yourself: To what extent do I have this quality or do these things? If I don’t, can I? Can I learn or develop to close the gap? If not, how will I manage the discrepancy? For example, through this work it became clear to me that although I believe a leader should be

can feel risky to share with one’s clients exactly what they can and cannot expect from you – it gives implicit permission to call you on it when what is promised goes undelivered.

→ The next question is equally risky and forces clarity: What do you expect from your people? This can go from the explicit, like a detailed job description with clear areas of responsibility, to the implicit, like, “I expect my people to do what they say they are going to do.” Research and experience show that people like to know what is expected of them – a clear picture of what a ‘good job’ looks like provides them with a sense of safety.

→ The final product is usually something in writing. My first attempt was 20 pages long, then whittled down to a two-page letter for our coaches, and now (eight years later) is a short poem format that I have glued into my diary. I use it as a reference when I have a hard day and forget who I am. It is not critical to know your LPoV when business flows and people behave, but when the inevitable unsolvable problems arise, it comes in handy. Don’t wait until you need it to work on it – think of it as an emergency kit you keep on hand even if you don’t need it right now.

Putting The LPoV To Work

Once a coach has done the initial work for themselves, it is time to

introduce the Leadership Point of View to clients. The work can be done in a number of ways. Each client is going to have a different thinking and learning style. Your visual folks are going to want to see the questions in writing; the auditory ones will want you to talk them through it. No one will be able to answer the questions off the top of their heads; many will want time to reflect and jot notes. One client who worked insane hours and went home to three kids designated a couple of her driving commutes to thinking through the questions, then she left voicemails for her assistant to transcribe and email back to her. Another highly extroverted 'think out loud' entrepreneur hosted a dinner party with his

most interesting friends during which he conducted a lively guided discussion. He gleaned amazing thinking and some keen insights into what leadership attributes he already had. Another achieved best results from long solitary walks after which she wrote up some notes. There is no right way to generate answers, but the coach can help each individual find their own best way. Once the process begins, it will be a work in progress over the course of the leadership tenure – for some that means life.

Once the leader has something that feels true, they can and must share it with their followers. Not just to clarify, but to inspire the next generation of leaders to do the same. One CEO of a global manufacturing

firm recently shared his LPoV with his team by telling a series of stories about the leaders he admired and some experiences he had in his youth. His team was inspired to do the same and share with their own groups. This one activity alone has been credited with increasing the frequency and quality of dialogue across the entire organization.

What is your Leadership Point of View? And who will you share it with? •

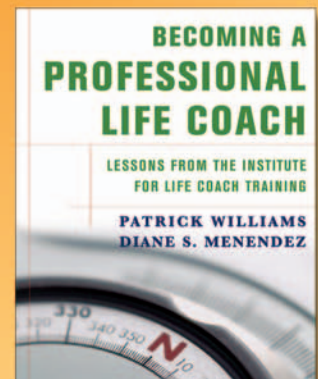
As vice president of Coaching Services at The Ken Blanchard Companies® Coaching.com™, Madeleine Homan is responsible for process development, hiring staff, and training and certifying coaches. Madeleine recently coauthored the book Leverage Your Best, Ditch the Rest with Scott Blanchard.



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