

Coaching “Triple A” Leaders to Become More People-Focused

I love coaching. I coach friends, family, and clients all the time. Whether it is a paid relationship or not, I love to help people explore how their thinking is unintentionally getting in their way of creating what they want professionally and personally, for themselves as well as for the systems of which they are a part.

I often end up coaching leaders who are good at making stuff happen and have been promoted quickly as a result, but who often are a bit lacking in people skills. Instead of calling them “Type A” personalities, I like to call them “Triple A” personalities. They are extreme: Turbo-charged, great to have working for you, but not so good to work for.

In order to continue their fast track to the top, they ask me to help them be more politically savvy, to help them have better relationships with their peers, to become better managers, to be less aggressive, and/or to be better with people. Sometimes they are already at the top and are burnt out. They are tired of working all the time and sacrificing everything for work. They want to do something different. They want more meaning.

For all of these clients, introducing them to the distinction of the different kinds of conversations one can participate helps them to see what they are missing.

The types of conversations, developed by [Fernando Flores](#), based on the work of [J.L. Austin](#) and [John Searle](#), include: *Conversation for Results* (What are we trying to accomplish?), *Conversation for Action* (What do we need to do?), *Conversation for Relationship* (Who are you? What do you care about? What do you worry about?), and *Conversation for Possibility* (What more

is possible if we accomplish our goals? What is the bigger game we want to play?).

Most of these Triple A leaders spend the majority of their time in Conversations for Action. They don't get to know the people with whom they are working. And those people don't get to know them. In fact, they often don't really care about the people who work for them and consider socializing with others a hassle.

So I give homework to have more Conversations for Relationship. I tell them, "Find out what the people you work with are committed to. What are they concerned about? Take notes every day at the end of your day. Come to our next coaching session prepared to tell me what you have learned about them and how it was for you to have these kinds of conversations." It sounds so simple – simple to ask for, not simple for these leaders to do. They respond, with an uncharacteristic confused, vulnerable, and sometimes pained look in their eyes, "What do I say? How do I talk to them? How long do I have to engage in this kind of conversation with them?"

When we next meet, sometimes I hear that the homework went really well. "Wow! I have some really interesting people who work for me. I had no idea that 'so and so' loves opera or that 'so and so' is a volunteer referee for a kid's baseball league on weekends."

Sometimes I hear that it didn't go well. "People didn't want to talk to me." We explore what a shift this is for the people who work for them as well as for themselves. I ask them to get very specific, "What did you say? What did they say? How did you feel before, during and after the conversation?" Based on their answers, we may discover that how they were feeling in the conversation was impatient, "This is so unproductive." Or we may discover they were feeling bored. Or we may discover they were feeling fake.

We further explore whatever they name, and then we brainstorm new homework for them. It might be additional ways for them to try to engage in Conversations for Relationship. It might be doing something “unproductive” for a half hour a day, like going for a walk in the middle of the day, to help them get more comfortable with just “being.” Once they make progress with just “being,” we can return to the homework of them practicing being with others in Conversations for Relationship.

As they learn to appreciate their colleagues for more than the results they produce, and as their colleagues learn to bring more of themselves into the relationship, change happens all around. The Type A leader softens a bit; in response their colleagues relax a bit. In an atmosphere of reduced fear, their colleagues’ intelligence and creativity show up more easily, their results naturally improve and everyone enjoys the themselves a whole lot more.