



Quiet
Leadership

David Rock

Six Steps to Transforming
Performance at Work

Quiet LEADERSHIP

Help People Think Better—
Don't Tell Them What to Do!

DAVID ROCK

 HarperCollins e-books

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There is a woman at the beginning of all great things.

ALPHONSE DE LAMARTINE (1790–1869)

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INTRODUCTION

*When will the way we relate to each other catch up
with developments in technology?*

THEODORE ZELDIN (2003)

In 2004 I met with a large technology company in Singapore that was desperate to understand how to improve its people's performance. A woman named Anna who headed up the learning and development team took me on a tour of the group's purpose-built operations center. While wandering through their offices, Anna pointed out remnants of various performance improvement initiatives they'd rolled out over the last few years. They had been trying to improve the performance of their call center and reduce a crippling 40 percent turnover rate of employees.

Four years ago, consultants told them the problem was no one could define good performance. So the organization invested substantial resources into identifying some performance indicators. They decided to track three things: the number of seconds until a call was picked up; how many calls were picked up under sixty seconds; and the number of calls that hung up before being answered. They began sharing this data widely at monthly meetings, yet this made no difference to performance, and had no impact on retention.

The next year, new consultants declared the problem was a lack of

immediate feedback about performance; getting data at the end of the month was too late. This seemed logical to the organization, and further resources were invested so that everyone could get real-time feedback from live screens. This time they got a slight improvement in performance, though they couldn't tell if this was from the screens or other factors. However there was no improvement in retention, an area still costing them dearly.

The following year, someone in management felt they could pinpoint the problem better by surveying their staff. An extensive cultural audit showed that people didn't feel appreciated by their managers or by the organization. So the investment that year was in a reward and recognition program. Anna pointed out a wall twelve feet high and twenty feet long, filled with various monthly awards. Again management found no impact on performance, and no impact on retention.

I asked Anna what she was thinking of doing next. "Our people say they don't know what's expected of them, and they don't feel appreciated. Yet we've addressed these things already," she exclaimed. "What else can we possibly do?"

Looking around their offices, I saw several managers leaning over people's shoulders giving rapid instructions. In the distance I saw training under way in a glass-walled room, most of the participants nodding off. "Have you thought about changing the way your leaders and managers speak to their people?" I asked. "How can we change the way leaders lead, when we can't change anyone else's behavior?" she replied. "Well," I said, "it sounds like you might need to take a whole new approach."

This book outlines that new approach to leadership. It's for busy leaders, executives, and managers who want to improve their employees' performance, and are ready to try something new. It's for the CEO who wants to be more effective at inspiring high-quality thinking in his or her leadership team, but has just a few minutes each week to speak to them. It's for the executive who'd like to get a manager to plan more effectively, but can't seem to work out how. It's for the manager who wants to inspire their sales team, but isn't sure

how to do it. And it's for the human resources professional who is ready to take on changing the culture of a whole organization.

The new approach is what I call "Quiet Leadership." Quiet Leaders are masters at bringing out the best performance in others. They improve their employees' thinking—literally improving the way their brains process information—without telling anyone what to do. Given how many people in today's companies are being paid to think, improving thinking is one of the fastest ways to improve performance.

Quiet Leadership is not an academic theory; instead, it's a practical, six-step guide to a new way of having conversations, based on recent discoveries about how the brain works. The central part of this book, the Six Steps to Transforming Performance, points to a new way of thinking, a new way of listening, a new way of speaking, a new approach to every conversation a leader has with their people.

The Six Steps to Transforming Performance were developed over ten years, through designing and delivering workshops to more than five thousand professionals across the United States, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia, and New Zealand. At first, these workshops were about how to be a more effective performance coach. In time I saw that coaching was such a central foundation of leadership. From that point on, my focus became developing great leaders by improving their ability to bring out the best performance in others.

My approach has always been scientific and process-focused: I wanted to deconstruct the "code" behind those high-impact conversations that transformed people's performance. Over years of thinking about this issue, identifying patterns, testing out models, and then refining everything further, I developed a set of ideas that was transforming people's ability to impact others. The Six Steps represent the most important ideas that came out of this decade-long process. Some people say I have done for performance coaching what Six Sigma did for the concept of quality: process-mapping best practice, thereby making it more of a science.

A few years ago I started to see strong links between what I had

developed and what was now coming out of neuroscience. I found I could describe what I had created based on new findings about the brain, and I began the journey of integrating an understanding of the brain into my approach. This made the ideas even more effective, and opened the door to working at higher levels in organizations, teaching these models to dozens of large corporations, including four Fortune 100 clients. Then in 2004, after working with more than one thousand leaders inside large organizations, I felt ready to put everything into a book.

I have found that the Six Steps are useful at every organizational level: from enabling CEOs to better develop their successors, to helping senior executives become more effective leaders of their general managers, down to line managers becoming better leaders of frontline staff. The Six Steps have helped leaders from many industry sectors, including financial services, information technology, manufacturing, airlines, health care, and government. While I wrote this book primarily for leaders and managers, the ideas here are relevant to teaching, training, coaching, mentoring, counseling, even parenting: any situation where an individual wants to improve another person's performance or facilitate any kind of change.

The book is broken down into three parts. Part one gives you some context for the book and the background theory behind the Six Steps. We start with an introductory chapter, "Why Should Leaders Care About Improving Thinking?" Here we identify the key workplace trends that provide the setting for this book. Next we dive into the workings of the brain in "Recent Discoveries About the Brain that Change Everything," exploring the discoveries that shine a light on this new approach to leadership. This chapter provides a broad theoretical base for why and how the ideas in this book work, and explains why much of our current approach usually doesn't.

Part two is all about the Six Steps. The first of the Six Steps is to learn to "Think About Thinking." This is followed by a new way to listen, "Listen for Potential." Step Three is about a new way of approaching every conversation, "Speak with Intent." I have included some insights here on how to improve the way we communicate by

email, an area of significant pain for most employees today. In Step Four we “Dance Toward Insight”: we explore the first layer of the conversational process map, the mechanics of how we help other people develop insights. We also learn to recognize what’s going on in people’s brains by reading their facial expressions, in a model called “The Four Faces of Insight.” In Step Five we learn to “Create New Thinking,” with the second layer of the process map, called the CREATE model. The CREATE model describes the phases that people go through when real breakthroughs in thinking occur. The last step is called “Follow Up,” which is about ensuring that any change we facilitate has the best chance of becoming a long-term habit. Here we use the FEELING model to follow up on the actions people have set for themselves.

Each of the Six Steps contains exercises to help you build new mental muscles. If that’s your goal, I recommend reading one chapter a week and doing the exercises as you go. Developing new habits is like eating: You can’t eat a week’s worth of food in one day and expect to take it all in. I’m not saying you won’t get benefits out of reading the book in one sitting; however, working through it slowly will be even more beneficial.

Part three of the book, Putting the Six Steps to Use, is where we see how the Six Steps can be applied to the most common leader-employee interactions. We explore how to help others make better decisions or solve problems. We identify a new model for giving feedback when people have done well, and when they haven’t. There’s a chapter on using the steps with teams and an additional chapter on how you might use them with children. Finally, I share my thoughts on integrating the Six Steps into an organization’s culture at a system-wide level, to bring about that new approach so needed in many workplaces today.

I have tried to make the book as readable as possible, simplifying complex ideas by using metaphor and analogy, and creating illustrations where I can. There are also some extra online resources at www.quietleadership.com, including additional readings and links, as well as online questionnaires I have created to gather data for research

purposes. I have intentionally left out the detailed science in the body of the text, giving you references if you want to go deeper. If the book gets to be heavy going at any point, try jumping to part three to see the models being used in context. At the back of the book is a glossary of scientific terms and the models I introduce—you may find this a handy reference.

When I first introduce these ideas to leaders, one of their common concerns is that they don't want to waste time having "unnecessary conversations" with their teams. However, it's been my experience that applying the Six Steps to Transforming Performance will, in most instances, result in leaders having *fewer* conversations over time, not more. And not only that, but their conversations will be shorter, more energizing, and significantly more productive. Many people once introduced to this work realize they waste significant energy when they *don't* apply the Six Steps. One of the biggest inefficiencies in organizations is the conversation that doesn't achieve its intent. Using the Six Steps can make a big difference.

In the last fifty years, our ability to process information via computers has jumped from a mere fourteen bits of information per second, to processing billions of bits per second. Perhaps it's time, as Theodore Zeldin said in my opening quote, for our ability to relate to each other to catch up with our developments in technology. My hope is that this book will go a small way toward helping us all move in this direction.

WHY SHOULD LEADERS CARE ABOUT IMPROVING THINKING?

People don't need to be managed, they need to be unleashed.

RICHARD FLORIDA (2002)

Our leadership practices are not keeping up with the realities of organizational life. The result is an increasing gap between the way employees are being managed at work, and the way they *want* to be managed. Countless surveys have been done in this area, ending in headlines like “Six out of 10 workers are miserable”¹ and “74 percent of staff not engaged at work.”² Dig into these surveys and you’ll see the quality of leadership on top of the list of complaints.

The poor state of leadership and management skills in organizations is being driven by a broad range of factors, including the changing nature of work, the increasing education of employees, the needs of later generations, and the pace of change. Let’s explore these concerns.

PAID TO THINK

One hundred years ago most people were paid for their physical labor. The dominant management model was the master-apprentice,

and the role of the manager was to improve how people carried out observable physical activities such as hammering and plowing.

By the mid-twentieth century we'd had a big shift in what people were doing for a living, driven by the advent of electricity and mechanization. Much of our work now involved executing codified processes that required less physical exertion. Workers were paid to undertake repetitive tasks: entering data, filing paper, running machinery. The dominant leadership paradigm became the management of processes: scientifically analyzing linear systems to find ever greater efficiencies. The people driving the processes didn't need to be superintelligent, just smart enough to follow plans laid out by management.

In the last few decades, any kind of process work—anything that could be codified or systemized—has been either computerized or outsourced to the lowest-cost country. The number of processes having the people taken out of them is continuing apace, at times with some disturbing consequences. A colleague in recruiting wanted to see how *Fortune* magazine's "100 Best Companies to Work For" treated candidates in their automated recruitment process. He applied online to each company with a made-up CV, perfect in every sense—except the person applying for the job was Goldilocks. Goldilocks received job interest from a frightening number of companies that rely on "intelligent" software to do their initial screening.

By 2005, as a result of all this computerizing, outsourcing, and other process improvements, 40 percent of employees were considered to be knowledge workers.³ For mid-level management and above, that number is close to 100 percent. So a lot of people in companies are now being paid to think. Yet the management models we're applying to our workforces are still those of the process era. We have not yet taught our leaders and managers how to improve *thinking*. Imagine a factory where artists painted pictures, and the people managing them had not studied how to improve the quality of painting itself, only how to build better canvases and frames.

MANAGING BRILLIANT MINDS

Employees today are better educated than any previous generation. The MBA is now less a mark of distinction and more a requirement for entry. Thirty years ago there were a handful of universities delivering MBAs; now there are thousands. So not only do leaders now need to improve thinking, they need to do so with extremely knowledgeable individuals.

As well as being more educated, employees across the western world have more independence, and on the whole, more wealth. Millions of executives worldwide now enjoy the kind of wealth that only a fraction of the population had fifty years ago. You can't just walk up to a wealthy executive in charge of a \$100 million revenue stream and start telling them what to do, just because you are "the boss."

The increasing education and independence of employees is an important issue. Yet we have not significantly reinvented our management models since the times Henry Ford hired a pair of hands and wished they'd left their brains behind.

The Needs of Generations X and Y

The new generations coming into management positions have different needs from their predecessors. These people expect more from an organization. They want to develop personally; they value freedom and independence. They enjoy diversity and change. These people need a different type of leader than our command-and-control cultures have been churning out. They need leaders who help them shine, who help them fulfill their potential at work. Leaders who improve their thinking.

THE PACE OF CHANGE

When today's management models were developed, we lived in a time where product life cycles were ten years. Now life cycles can be ten months, or even ten days, a pace of change that would terrify a

1970s' executive. When a big change initiative comes along, the first job of the leader is to change people's thinking. Again, most leaders have been trained to change processes, not people.

PERFORMANCE IS JUST THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG

There is a metaphor called the Iceberg model used by cognitive behavioral therapy and various behavioral sciences.⁴ The Iceberg model describes how our performance at anything is driven by our sets of behaviors, our habits. These are driven by our feelings, which in turn are driven by our thoughts.

In the Iceberg model, our performance and some of our behaviors are visible, while other behaviors, feelings, and thoughts are below the water. There's a lot more driving our performance than just the few habits we see on the surface. And at the base of all this is the way we think.

In other words, what we achieve at work is driven by how we think. Yet when a leader wants to improve someone's performance,

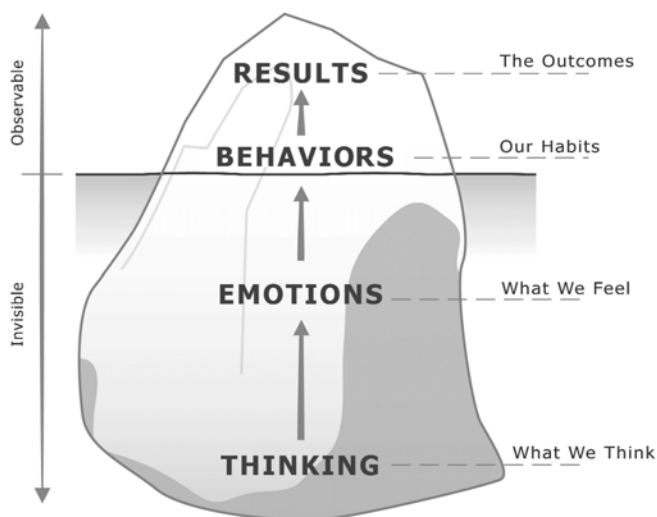


Figure 1, The Iceberg Model

they tend to stay at the surface and focus on the performance itself. They rarely discuss which habits might be driving the employee's performance, or discuss their feelings, and even less often have a conversation about the person's thinking. Yet if you want to improve performance, the most effective way to do this is to start at the bottom—to improve thinking. This might sound complex, yet my experience is that if you focus on just *improving* thinking, rather than trying to understand or unravel it, the conversations are surprisingly quick and simple.

ANSWERING THE LEADERSHIP CRISIS

There is a leadership crisis in many organizations, a lack of the right talent to fill key positions at mid to senior levels. This partly explains executive salaries and the amounts paid to search firms.

The concept of a leadership pipeline, developed by Ram Charan, Stephen Drotter, and James Noel,⁵ describes the critical passages that leaders go through, such as moving from managing oneself to managing others. As leaders go through each phase, they also need to change the way they think, yet organizations have scant internal resources allocated to helping people go through this change.

To me, organizations have developed solid pipelines to carry leaders up the mountain, in the form of well-defined sets of competencies and leadership frameworks. They have the contents of the pipes, lower-level leaders. What they are missing is the pumps to drive their leaders to higher levels of effectiveness. They need to instill in their leaders and managers the ability to transform performance by improving thinking.

In summary, it's time leaders learned how to improve people's thinking. Thinking is what many employees are being paid to do, after all. Many employees are highly capable individuals who will thrive on this approach. They want to work smarter, they want to *be* smarter, and they are crying out for help.

Part One

Recent Discoveries About the Brain That Change Everything

*Today's revolutionary advances in neuroscience
will rival the discoveries of Copernicus,
Galileo and Darwin.*

PAUL CHURCHLAND (1996)

Ten years ago I became fascinated by the sealed magic box that is the seat of our thinking, our choices, and our selves. I've now devoured dozens of books and hundreds of articles about how the brain works, from fields including evolutionary psychology, systems theory, genetics, linguistics, and neurophysiology. In 2003 I began to introduce a few concepts about brain functioning into my coaching programs and started to notice strong links between what scientists were finding out about the brain, and how I had been training leaders to be better coaches. I began to see that central to leadership was the ability to improve people's thinking. Therefore leaders might benefit from knowing more about the thing that does the thinking.

Over several years of including a study of the brain in my various classes, a set of core discoveries about the brain emerged. I began to see the central ideas that anyone wanting to understand how to change human behavior should know. These insights trace their origins to brain research by a wide range of neuroscientists including Gerald Edelman, John Ratey, Jeffrey Schwartz, Joseph LeDoux, Michael Merzenich, Edward Taub, Jeff Hawkins, Thomas B. Czerner, and many others. These insights, when fully appreciated, have the power to fundamentally rewrite the rules for nearly every human endeavor involving thinking and learning, including how we educate our children, how we hire and manage staff, how we train people in the workplace, and how we develop leaders.

To me, these insights help explain why therapy often doesn't deliver real change, why trying to give advice is usually futile, why managers are not meeting the needs of workers today, and much, much more. But enough of what *my* brains thinks about all this—let's get into it.



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