

Changing in the Moment

Too often we try to make change happen by planning for it and writing up action lists to change mindsets and behaviour. However the only thing you can change is the present moment, and, if you can change that, then the future will change. The question is, can leaders step into the flow of what they see happening in the present moment and intervene in a way that feels different to people around them, because if they can do that, then the change becomes real. This is what we call leaders being able to work with ‘Transforming Space’.

This was illustrated graphically to me recently at a big leadership conference. We had been working with the CEO and his leadership team running up to the event, helping them to learn about transformational leadership. By and large, they were a leadership team who liked to lead change through processes and analyses, rather than spotting the behaviour patterns happening around them and bringing people’s attention to that. The reason they found that difficult to do is that they were uncomfortable making interventions that had unpredictable outcomes! Writing up charts of how behaviours needed to change felt more secure than drawing people’s attention to unhelpful behaviours that were ‘in the room’.

However, with some coaching from us they entered this leadership conference of 90 people determined to make it an event that ‘felt different’, and lived the new behaviours required to transform their business. During the course of the event, I noticed that the Leadership Team themselves were getting defensive over their proposals (despite professing the need for greater ‘empowerment’ of the group), and that the group of 90 as a whole seemed to get stuck in endless debates and action lists (despite professing the need for ‘accountability and decisive action’).

When this was highlighted to the client, the CEO stood up in the moment, took the microphone, and courageously spoke to the behaviours he was seeing in the room. You could have cut the air with a knife. There was silence. He said that, if they could not learn to change their own behaviours now, how were they, as a leadership group, going to change the behaviours of the whole culture? He said, “let’s try and start now, let’s not put up more action lists, let’s solve the outstanding issues with the new organisational model right here right now. We will not leave the room unless we as a group can decide together, today”.

From that moment on the whole atmosphere shifted. The debate had more clarity and less posturing. People in the room accountable for the various issues knew they had to take the microphone and decide there and then. The rest of the group knew they had to trust in their decision and leave the room supporting it. No stone was left unturned. Where there was discomfort it was brought out and named. The group had become leaders.

While people felt uncomfortable with the accountability and decisiveness displayed, the CEO insightfully helped them see that this is what they were going to have to get used to – and that the discomfort was a sign that the real change was now happening. In debriefing the event, participants spoke to the CEO’s ‘in the moment’ behaviour, and how that had memorably shifted the culture in the room. And the Leadership Team were likewise powerfully moved by this shift in behaviour. They had now ‘got’ what changing in the moment really meant.