Leading from Within, And From Without

“The value of another’s experience is to give us hope, not to tell us how or whether to proceed.”

Peter Block

What I intend to cover in this talk
- Define what this is
- Share a few critical things
- How this started for me
- Specifics of leading from without
- Specifics of leading from within
- Some Practical ideas I have tried
- Some Gotchas
- One last big idea

Where we are at in this talk:
- Define what this is
Leading comes in many flavors

For my purpose in this talk:
A leader is a person who has no direct power but takes action to attempt to have influence and hopefully cause improvements in a group, an organization, or across an industry or community.

Loosely based on Peter Block's definition of a consultant

What I mean by “from within” and “from without”

Leading from within:
I am working in a company, as an employee, contractor, or consultant.

I want to make improvements within the organization, and to do this I need to find ways to influence my coworkers, and the organization.
Leading from without:
I am interacting with the community at large, not within an organization
I want to find opportunities to be invited to work within an organization.

Leading from without:
Later it grew to include this:
I want to encourage, support, and make improvements across the community or industry.

Where we are at in this talk:
• Define what this is
• Share a few critical things

I must keep an open mind.
Plant little seeds everywhere...
eventually, you'll find an environment
where the seeds can flourish!
- Colleen Kirtland

"Many More Much Smaller Steps"
- Gee Paw Hill

"I want to be a little less wrong today than
I was yesterday."
- Alfredo Rivas

The object isn’t to make art,
it’s to be in that wonderful state which
makes art inevitable
- Robert Henri
Where we are at in this talk:
- Define what this is
- Share a few critical things
- **How this started for me**

**My motivation**

**A Tale of Two Workplaces.**

1999

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times
My first two full-time jobs in Software Development

Small place vs Big place

The small place

Direct communication with Customer
Rapid work/delivery cycle
Rapid feedback from actual use
Collaboration within the team
No politics
No bureaucracy
Safety and open communication
Mutual commitment
Sense of unity
Sense of joint progress
Mutual trust
Holistic focus

The Big Place

Stress, pressure, fear
No Collaboration within the team
No communication with Customer
Lengthy (years long) work/delivery cycle
Stress, pressure, fear
No feedback from actual use
Lots of politics, territorialism, parochialism, empire building
Endless bureaucracy
No Safety, no open communication
No Mutual commitment
No Sense of unity
No Sense of joint progress (no progress)
No trust
No focus

Was the first job really wonderful?

That is irrelevant
I want my work to be more like the first place than the second.

Small = Good

Big = Bad

Small = Good?

Big = Bad?

I want every new job to be more like the first place than the second.
A place that would be uplifting. Where everyone could work effectively and with joy.

This was my beginning of attempting to “lead from within”

That didn’t go so well.

What got in the way? Selfishness, closed-mindedness, negativity, politics, personality issues, etc.
That is
MY Selfishness,
MY closed-mindedness,
MY negativity,
MY politics,
MY personality issues,
MY etc.
was getting in the way.

My ability to make things better was pretty lame.

I needed to improve my chance at finding better places

Where we are at in this talk:

• Define what this is
• Share a few critical things
• How this started for me

• Specifics of leading from without
I was seeking opportunities to be invited within.

I was reading a lot of job listings

What if instead they would seek me out?

This is known as Positioning.

Positioning: The Battle For Your Mind by Al Ries and Jack Trout
Create a lasting positive impression in the minds of consumers

Maybe I could own the top spot!

My plan:

I would provide presentations at Developer Meet-ups and other venues
I didn’t know how to do that.

I couldn’t even talk in front of 5 people.

Mary Poppendieck

Kent Beck
This paid off almost immediately.

Me as an instructor at a university

And “small” companies!
There were other things going on, but this was serving my purpose:

Getting me inside places that wanted to do things better.

Where we are at in this talk:
- Define what this is
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- Specifics of leading from without

- Specifics of leading from within

Leading from within:

I am working in a company, as an employee, contractor, or consultant.

For my purposes in this talk:

A leader
Has NO direct power
But takes action
To attempt to have influence
And hopefully cause improvements
Where we are at in this talk:
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- Some Practical ideas I have tried

Warning
These are the things I tried and found helpful. They might not work for you. Some are safe to try, others might be risky. You must determine for yourself what to try. Please don’t risk your job.

Tread lightly, and take baby steps.
Find a way to be patient

These things take time:
- Building Relationships
- Building credibility
- Building influence

Start with the end in mind.
But at a VERY HIGH LEVEL.

It’s in the Doing of the Work that we Discover the Work That We Must Do.
Doing Exposes Reality.
We don’t even know what the end looks like until we get there!

And then it is no longer the end.
Dang.

Pot of gold?

It’s all about steering.
"Many More Much Smaller Steps”  
- Gee Paw Hill

Gain
clarity in
what we
believe

This whole thing is more about being open-minded than almost anything else.

“Beware of the obvious; it is the antidote to curiosity - without which there is no creativity.”

Russell Ackoff
“The first principle is that you must not fool yourself – and you are the easiest person to fool.”

Richard Feynman
(Confirmation bias)

Kahneman

Success = talent + luck

Kahneman

Great Success = a little more talent + a lot of luck
“There are
1000 right
ways to do
anything..."

... so we must
never think
ours is the
one right
way.”
~Dad

Dr. William Hare, one of the pioneers of research into open-mindedness, puts it this way:

Open-Mindedness means:

- Being critically receptive to alternative possibilities
- Being willing to think again despite having formed an opinion
- Sincerely trying to avoid or offset the conditions and factors which constrain and distort our reflections.

(That is: Watch out for Confirmation bias)
Study
Study
Study

Collaborate

No work is done alone.

We collaborate in some way in everything we do.
We need to find the most effective and meaningful ways to collaborate

Make it as simple as possible

**Separation**: steer to avoid crowding local boids and objects

**Alignment**: steer towards the average heading of local boids

**Cohesion**: steer to move toward the average position (center of mass) of local boids
We Collaborate with our team, but we must expand what we mean by “our team”

Little Ben
“The good we may do separately is small compared with what we may do collectively”
Benjamin Franklin

Build relationships

Find the people who want the same things we want
At first, make this as easy as possible

Seek out and connect with those already onboard, or almost ready

Build Credibility

The quality of being trusted and believed in.
The quality of being convincing or believable.

Establish Credibility

Borrow Credibility
Fred Brooks

Build influence

What is influence?
The ability to impact the decisions people make

Why Influence?
To encourage the decision makers
To make the decisions
That can move us forward
Take Action
Do the thing
Model the Behavior
Step up
Take responsibility
Be the person that is needed

Little Ben
“Well done is better than well said”
~ Benjamin Franklin

Sometimes we need to be very quiet about it

Flying under the radar.
Often, rules are a contrivance. Someone protecting a territory.

Model the behaviors

A most helpful idea
Slowly introduce and build familiarity with the kind of ideas we are going to be exploring

Create opportunities for discovery
Find what others want and help them get it.

Provide options and let it be their decision

Give it away

Stack the deck in your favor, whenever possible.
Stack the deck in my favor, whenever possible.

Wiio’s Law
What if Wiio’s Law is True?

What is Wiio’s Law?

The Fundamental Wiio’s Law
Communication usually fails, except by accident.
We behave as if we have understood what has been communicated to us and vice versa.

Don’t Communicate, Collaborate

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Some Gotchas
Are you willing to lose your job over this?

Gains can be lost instantly
Example: A manager who is supporting the improvements leaves the company

Gains can lead to failures
Example: A big win leads to an “everyone must work this way” mandate

Gains can slow or stop
Examples: Familiarity lessens the impact.
Principal-Agent Problem
The conflict in interests when one person takes actions on behalf of another person

My most powerful observation

Watch for Failing efforts. These are HUGE opportunities
Leading from Within, And From Without

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