

Coaching for touchpoint leadership

It's interesting to see that the 2013 Ridler Report has highlighted a growing interest in team coaching, and that it is suggesting that team coaching will be seen increasingly as part of a wider organisational development intervention aiming at "shifting the organisational culture towards being more collaborative and empowering". When I first proposed we should write Touchpoint Leadership, at the end of 2010, one of my own drivers was to evidence how we could integrate our leadership and organisational development experience to create a coaching intervention that would go much deeper into enabling a broad spectrum of change and engender a collaborative energy across organisations. It seems that we tapped into an emerging need as clients seek to maximise their investment in external coaches by putting their focus increasingly on what it takes to create joined-up organisations.

Of course that wasn't the only reason for our writing together. We also wanted to share our individual passions and insights – I from a perspective that leadership is itself relational and Hilary from a belief that we should aim at leveraging difference rather than aiming to homogenise it. Add to that our separate grounding in dialogue and inquiry, and in gestalt and emotional intelligence, and we stood a good chance of emerging all the differences we could into our joint and separate coaching practices.

More importantly though we had a shared endeavour: we wanted to share our 'touchpoint' proposition. Having collected our case-work from over forty years of consulting and coaching (collective not separate!) we had come to the conclusion that enterprises will be much more successful, and the people more fulfilled, if leadership could be re-framed as an outcome of the connection between people, and if those tasked with co-creating leadership were to understand how to unlock energy, creativity and learning every day through attending to the quality of these relational 'touchpoints'.

As we began to write it became clear to us that there were at least three levels of 'touchpoint leadership' we should and could attend to. We refer to these as:


- Priming the touchpoint: developing a relational perspective
- Igniting connective energy at the touchpoint: paying attention to the quality and impact of the touchpoint itself
- Building the collaborative enterprise: noticing the wider dynamics that impact on every touchpoint connection across the business

It was also significant to us that we too were different and that we used that difference to both inform our inquiry and thinking, and test the proposition we were developing. This encouraged us to experiment with how we brought our differences to the writing – how we held our difference, left space for each other and explored what emerged without losing the richness of both our contributions. This in itself became rich data for our writing, and has proved invaluable in designing subsequent client work.

We talked long and hard about the pros and cons of including cross-references, and just how we should do that. We walked a tight rope between evidencing our academic robustness and ensuring that we didn't turn off a large proportion of readers by creating a

text that would appear esoteric. It was important though that we could show how we'd brought together theoretical underpinnings from personal, interpersonal and organisational change to support our practice and findings and so we focused on bringing this all together in chapter 1. This opens the book from the perspective of our theoretical grounding. We then decided to offer an antidote to this chapter, shaping the final chapter as a practical methodology in the form of a set of developmental questions to help leaders, and their coaches, to explore new areas of development. We hope you'll find them useful – and that you'll add more of your own.

That leaves the chapters in between, each of them tracking a different aspect of our client work as we have both developed and applied the principles of 'touchpoint leadership'. The examples are drawn from across sectors, illustrating both 1:1 and team work and in several cases drawing on our understanding of the systemic development of organisations as we have worked within the broader framework of cultural and strategic change. In all the cases we have sought, and received, the express permission of our clients to incorporate their experiences into the book. This is the best testament we can offer to the validity of the accounts.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stephen L. Charles". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent flourish at the end.