

Elements U is for Understanding

March 2013

Welcome to new and old readers!

This edition of Elements is dedicated to "U" for Understanding. During the few months it takes to birth each issue of this newsletter, the spotlighted letter surfaces as the current most important aspect of great leadership to examine. It all began with "A" for Awareness, and now "U" is no exception. I am convinced that the secret to being or becoming a great leader is the ability to understand situations, oneself, and others.

What do you think?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours in understanding,
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Leaders, Understanding, and Stories



Great leaders understand. They understand the needs and wants and hopes of others. They understand themselves, their goals, and visions. They understand how to concisely and simply state the reality and complexity of a situation. They understand how to say it so that the other person feels understood. They understand how and when to take action. They understand how to create that perfect balance of self, others, and action by dancing in the moment.

When a person feels understood by a leader, so much is possible. That person can become more open to listening, being influenced, taking action and being a more engaged follower of the leader. Being able to genuinely communicate understanding is key to being a leader. The clues that understanding is a key leadership attribute are threaded through some of our most time-tested and beloved stories. Frankenstein would have been a very different story if the monster had been truly "seen" and understood by his creator, Victor. Other misunderstood literary fictional characters are Professor Snape – from the Harry Potter series, Quasimodo from The Hunchback of Notre Dame, and Kate from The Taming of the Shrew. Being misunderstood causes conflicts and great stories. The fictional story Wicked takes the point of view of the witches in Oz, who were wildly misunderstood because popular culture maintains Dorothy's side of the story. A great leader would have been able to understand and communicate both Dorothy's and the witches' beliefs, and could have averted the fantastical catastrophes of the story.

In a crowd of almost 10,000 people in South Africa, Nelson Mandela changed one person's life because that person felt understood. Dr. Annie McKee, tells the story of a man whose life had been defined by

violence. His wife had been senselessly murdered because she was out after curfew. After that he and his family's life were filled with hatred and violence. When he reluctantly attended a talk by Mandela, he said it was as if Mandela was speaking directly to him and understood him. That day, because he felt understood, he changed his and his family's lives to one of non-violence and acceptance. This link is an hour long talk similar to what I heard at a conference in which Dr. McKee tells the story. <http://www.sweetspeeches.com/s/19583---leading-google-annie-mckee>

Workplace Misunderstanding Story



Misunderstanding is rampant in our workplaces. It can create a lack of buy-in, wasted energy, and poor performance. People fill in the gaps and create their own beliefs when there is a lack of information or understanding.

Here's a typical example. A person was convinced that her manager didn't like or support her. This unhappy employee was actively interviewing to leave the company. Her beliefs about this situation caused the person to not be engaged and to not perform well. When I challenged her about the belief, she was adamant that it was true. She told me lots of stories to prove her truth. They all sounded legitimate and shocking. She finally agreed to give her manager another chance because she said she had nothing to lose at that point. It took a lot of courage to do what she did next – she presented the "facts" to her manager. Ironically the reality was the exact opposite of her belief about the situation. Her manager saw her as a rising star, and did pick on her more than anyone else. The manager was attempting to mentor her by giving her constructive feedback to improve. Her manager didn't understand the impact of that feedback. This misperception was based on a false interpretation of the situation. Luckily this misunderstanding was caught in time before a talented employee left.

Beliefs and Conflict



Beliefs are strong and they are backed up with a person's personal "truth." If beliefs are not discovered and understood by a leader, they can cause poor performance in the workplace. The dynamic tension arising from misunderstood beliefs are also the basis for some of the world's greatest stories!

As an individual, it's important to challenge and validate your beliefs, assumptions, and generalizations. As a leader, it's important to understand what people believe and why. Only when a leader understands is it possible to begin the real work.

This classic picture above illustrates how a lack of understanding creates conflict. The first time someone looks at this image they may only see either a young or an old woman. They can argue for their perception because the picture seems to "prove" it. However, there are at least two ways the image can be perceived – as either an old woman or a young one. When you as a leader can understand a situation in multiple ways, change can really start to happen. Conflict starts when two people look at the same thing and have a different belief or opinion about it, and are unwilling to UNDERSTAND what the other sees. Conflict starts when understanding stops.

Great leaders connect and motivate and influence because they understand.

Quotes on Understanding

Any fool can criticize, condemn, and complain but it takes character and

self control to be understanding and forgiving. ~ Dale Carnegie

(What's so funny 'bout) Peace, love, and understanding ~ Elvis Costello

All truths are easy to understand once they are discovered; the point is to discover them. ~ Galileo Galilei

You don't need strength to let go of something. What you really need is understanding. ~ Guy Finley

"They [Leaders] are very clear about what is important to them. And they understand themselves well enough to talk, walk, and live what is important to them." ~ Dr. Annie McKee

To understand the heart and mind of a person, look not at what he has already achieved, but at what he aspires to. ~ Khalil Gibran

Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood. ~ Marie Curie

Everyone hears only what he understands. ~ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Events: Conference, Webinar, Training

Conference: April 26, 27 Mass Bay Professional Day in Lowell Mass
Speaking on Friday on Coaching and Project Management
To register: <http://www.pmimassbay.org/prof-dev-program/professional-dev-day>

Webinar: May 15, 11:00 – 12:00 EDT
Corporate Coaching for Sustainable Success and Tangible ROI
To register: <http://www.corpedgroup.com/resources/webinars.asp>

In Person Training in MA, to register: www.corpedgroup.com
MDP454 Leadership and Communication Skills
April 16 (Framingham)
September 30 (Waltham)

MDP455 Facilitation Skills for Project Managers
May 16 (Framingham)
October 22 (Waltham)

MDP456 Working in a Matrix Organization
May 10 (Boston)
November 18 (Waltham)

MDP457 Coaching Skills for Project Managers
December 5 (Waltham)

MDP645 Leading and Developing High Performing Teams
July 31 – Aug 1 (Waltham)
November 13–14 (Boston)

MDP647 Effective Communication and Influencing Skills
May 6–7 (Waltham)
August 14–15 (Boston)
November 4–5 (Chelmsford)

About Us

Star Leadership is a seasoned management consulting firm that offers coaching, training and consulting services for business. What makes Star Leadership LLC unique is the focus and delivery of measurable goals and proven results in the areas of communication, leadership and teams. Our approach is direct, results-oriented and geared to the bottom line. We are able to quickly map, translate and align your broader vision to the concrete details of skills and behaviors. We have an impact on the results you want in an open, informal, non-judgmental and supportive way. We take pride in providing a wide array of experienced associates, resources, and expertise to be brought into play as needed to help clients. Star Dargin is the founder and has been creating vision and direction for the company since 1996.

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