

Energize Your Life and Leadership

Expand Your World View

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Love it or hate it, 2009 will be a year that changed how we look at the world. Some saw crisis, some opportunity. Most of us endured the economic equivalent of mood swings of a tempestuous two-year-old. It was a dramatic reminder that the world is a complex, interconnected and constantly evolving organism.

So chances are you are craving the wellspring of new possibilities that a new year brings. You may be seeking peace, perspective and a new definition for prosperity. Perhaps you are eyeing a special gift to soothe your weary soul.

As you ponder the mind-set you wish to wear into 2010, consider a different investment of your precious resources that may be surprisingly bountiful: Expand your world view.

What is world view?

Our “world view” is the lens that we use to interpret and experience the world around us. It is a composite of our personality, genetic and intellectual wiring, memory, experiences, assumptions, beliefs and values.

Our world view is the fusion of our internal and external realities. It is our understanding, our perspective, our philosophy – and it gives meaning to our life. Each of us filters the information we receive about the world through our world view to determine what we consider “truth.”

Our personal world view will change and become more complex as we mature. It is informed by our experience that will either validate or dispel what we know. Our expanding worldview is critical to our learning and development, in determining outcomes in our lives, and our impact as leaders.



Our collective world view plays a major role in determining outcomes in our organizations and institutions. This is often described as the “See-Do-Get” cycle. How we *see* the world determines what we *do* and what we do determines what we *get* as an outcome. In other words our attitudes and behaviors lead to our results.

Human beings are creatures of habit, and may over-rely on a loop of past attitudes, behaviors and results. This may be a useful strategy to develop repeatable processes and results in constant environments, but it creates barriers to envisioning new ideas, opportunities and outcomes. We may limit our ability to adapt to changing conditions, or appreciate and include the perspectives of others.

“Often we enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought.”

John F. Kennedy

As Albert Einstein said, “ We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking that created them.” In these circumstances it is important to expand our “observer” by expanding our world view – to see things in a new light and to explore new possibilities.

Diversity in world view can fuel learning, creativity, innovation, and growth.

misunderstanding of another’s world view has also led to some of the most devastating conflicts of humankind. Great leaders leverage different world views while at the same time aligning the world views of others.

In a divided America, Barack Obama brought the collective will of Americans together to win the vote for the US presidency through his call to action for change. “Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.” While history will tell if Obama’s vision is realized, he continues to engage America and the world in a different conversation of collective versus individual interests.

A world view story

During the 2003 Leadership Calgary program, my class spent a day at the Calgary Drop-In Centre. Our goal was to learn as much as we could about homelessness in our city. Upon arrival we were noticeably uncomfortable and didn’t know what to do. I was somewhat anxious and fearful and found myself jumping to negative assumptions about the people at the Centre. Many thoughts jumped to mind - like mentally unstable, drug-addicted, uneducated, irresponsible, and untrustworthy.



I stood in line for a bowl of soup and sat down at a table with three men. We introduced ourselves and I explained why I was there. I sensed an opening and started to ask questions. The stories I heard changed my perspective forever. One of the men had two university degrees, a young family and had been a manager for an insurance company in Ontario.



After a destructive divorce, he lost his job and headed west to find work. It never worked out and soon he had exhausted his financial resources and was living on the street. An aboriginal man spoke eloquently with wisdom and compassion of his devastating childhood and the aftermath that had become his life. He cared deeply about helping young people stay off the street.

Sitting in that cavernous room among hundreds, I had an insight. Life is fragile, and there is a fine line between these fellow humans and myself. The experience taught me to suspend judgment of others and not jump to conclusions too quickly. I felt ashamed that I had been so arrogant.

This pivotal lesson enabled me to

connect and build more meaningful relationships with many different people. This has translated into greater well-being and success in my personal and professional life.

Why expand your world view?

Leadership in the 21st century demands a new way of seeing and being. In our increasingly complex business landscape, leaders and their people need to listen, learn, and work together. Organizations need conditions for flexibility and adaptive thinking and behavior, so individuals and organizations can evolve and grow.

To work in this way is possible when we expand, integrate and direct our individual and collective world view. This provides a greater range of knowledge and experience from which to make strategic decisions and take purposeful action.

Here are some key leadership benefits to expanding world view of yourself and others:

1. Leading Authentically

- Inspire and enable others by acting in alignment with your values, passions and strengths. Be the best version of yourself.
- Build trust and connection in your relationships by being yourself and sharing your knowledge. Get to know people, and value their contributions.
- Increase individual and organizational contribution and achievement by cultivating an environment that values diversity of background, thinking styles, perspectives and ideas.



2. Leading Strategically

- Develop organizational resilience by providing the big picture context to help people make sense of, accept and adapt to change.
- Improve strategic thinking and decision making by fostering broader knowledge of the bigger system and its interdependencies - global, cross-sector, industry-wide, cross functional, business processes, human systems ,etc.
- Increase engagement and performance by creating a sense of meaning and purpose by aligning people's world view on strategic priorities and values.

3. Leading Creatively

- Generate new ideas and solutions by creating the encouraging space for people to speak their mind, challenge each other, test new ideas, and make mistakes.
- Generate energy and excitement by creating a culture that is open, fun, challenging and serious about great performance, that everyone can be part of.
- Increase competitive capability by creating organizational learning capacity to identify issues and opportunities, assess, and respond quickly to changing conditions. Develop leaders at all levels of the organization who can drive and influence positive change.

How to expand world view?

We are all unique individuals with different values, styles and preferences. Expanding your world view is essentially about learning. How do you learn best? Learning for adults is hard. Most often we try to avoid making mistakes and the risk of looking incompetent. The majority of us dislike being outside our comfort zones despite the fact that our greatest learning takes place on the “edge of our competence”.

Here are some suggestions to get started. Part of expanding your world view might be to ask yourself and others what they do to expand their perspective:

1. Be CURIOUS

- Think like a reporter – take interest in people's opinions and what's really going on. Learn to ask good questions, inquire and get the facts.
- Be present and listen deeply. Practice focusing on others, observe body language, and hear below the surface.

“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”

John F. Kennedy



- Be teacher and student, keep learning, especially from those who might think differently than you do. Read something the opposite of what you normally would. Make a new unlikely friend. Ask a new grad or your teenager for advice.
- Travel to new places near or far.
- Create capacity in your life to do nothing. Enjoy the excitement of the unexpected, the mystery of the unknown, and unplanned moments of magic.

“You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers. You can tell whether a man is wise by his questions.”
Naguib Mahfouz

2. Be COURAGEOUS

- Step out of your comfort zone and try something new that energizes you – food, music, sports, languages, destinations, friends, fitness, career, hobby, business.
- Challenge assumptions – your own and others. Are you thinking, feeling or behaving based on old patterns that are no longer relevant and may be holding you back. Show up, speak up, step up.
- Practice listening to your heart and intuition. Take breaks from the pressures of life to rejuvenate and reconnect with yourself.
- Take calculated risk, be bold and creative, consider new ideas and old ideas, engage your imagination, have fun. Dare yourself to take a big leap.

“One small step up the mountain often widens your perspective in all directions.”

E.H. Griggs

“Once in a while it really hits people that they don't have to experience the world in the way they've been told to.”

Alan Keightley

3. Be CARING and connect with people

- Show genuine interest in people's stories – everyone has one. Profile and elevate people. Shine a light on their best. Share their wisdom.
- Seek ways to align the values, needs and interests of individuals, teams and the organization. Increase the pool of common purpose and resources.
- Demonstrate the ability to walk in others' shoes, and be empathetic and caring. Emotional intelligence is critical to connecting and resonating with others.
- Tell stories that engage and inspire others, not from the best-seller list, but your own bank of experience.
- Be a role model. Keep learning. Leadership is a journey, not a destination.

“Leaders create worlds in which others want to belong and contribute.”

Richard LeKander



When's the last time you did something for the first time?

I've noticed that my 12-year-old daughter and her friends have a different way of looking at the world than when I was their age. They come from single parent families, adoptive families, multi-generation families, with different backgrounds and customs. They have access to expansive information, knowledge and experiences. Despite their young age they seem to understand that a loving family, respect for each other, working towards their best, and having fun - is what matters most. They are naturally curious, courageous, creative and caring. They try new stuff every day, and they laugh a lot. I believe there is much we can learn from the children around us.

As we say goodbye to a year of remarkable change - making the time to expand your world view may be the greatest gift you can give yourself and others. In our busy lives, it will likely take discipline and conscious action to stop and choose a different path.

Expanding your world view is not about finding the right answers. It is about asking the right questions. What do you really care about? What old habits are holding you or your organization back? Who are you becoming? What do you need to learn next? And, while you sit back over the holidays with a warm drink in hand, perhaps you'll ask yourself – "What new stories do I want to hear, live and tell - in 2010?"



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