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FEATURE

Leading today looks very different than it did ten, five, or even two years ago.

Transformational Leadership

By Jardena London, CEO, Rosetta Agile, and Consultant, Author, and Speaker

Transformational leadership has become a popular term recently, and a popular job title. Before we look at what a transformational leader is, first we'll have to define "transformation."

What is transformation?

The definition of *transformation* is "change in form." It is a buzzword right now because it has become apparent that the way companies operate fundamentally needs to change for them to survive. Transformation is not about implementing a new process; this is about foundational change.

Implicit in organizational transformation is the idea of a *paradigm shift*, a change in approach or underlying assumptions. We're not just changing form, we're changing assumptions.

What is transformational leadership?

Now that we have established what a transformation is, what is transformational leadership? I'm using "leader" in this context to refer to

anyone who takes responsibility for changing their world. Transformational leadership is more of a calling than a choice.

A transformational leader is part spiritual leader, part work manager, part inspirer, and part community builder. Transformational leaders breathe life into organizations.

Many of the same skills that worked for leaders in the past, in mechanistic organizations, stifle living, adaptive organizations. The things we rewarded leaders for in the past will no longer serve us in the future. Management activities like directing work, driving deadlines, and evaluating people have now been replaced by creating conditions, identity, and clarity.

The three lenses of transformational leadership

Transformational leaders operate through three lenses:

The "me": The process of mastering ourselves and all the things we do that get in the way of being an effective leader.

The "we": The "we" is about how we interact with others and enable people to interact with each other.

The "system": The overall organizational system; find where it's hampering the organization's success.

Connecting the soulful and the practical

Transformational leaders help connect the soulful and practical. When I see a group have a pizza party and then say, "the fun is over, get back to work," I know that this company isn't connecting the soulful and practical. The connection means that all our work feels good and feeling good helps the work. Note: The term "soulful" acknowledges that



life is not always happy or easy. Soulful means that we can experience difficulty openly and in a non-toxic way.

Transformational leaders are connecting the soulful and practical, as they move through all three lenses: the “me,” the “we,” and the “system.”

WHERE TO GET STARTED

The ME

Self-awareness is key for all leaders. If you are unaware how you affect the people around you, you will keep getting in your own way. There are a lot of self-development tools that can help you know yourself inside, but you also need to know how you show up on the outside. Ask the people around you for feedback on how you show up.

Have you ever had the experience where someone walks into a room and the energy shift is palpable, even if they didn't say a word? Your energy has an impact. It has been said that “we create our world.” Everything we do and say – our whole vibe – attracts or repels, encourages or inhibits other people's actions. It's a soulful matter to “know thyself” but it's a practical matter to show up on the outside the way you intend to. Self-awareness is the process of getting congruent on the inside and out.

Try this: The Johari window is a free tool that gives insight into the qualities that others see that you don't see yourself. Find it here: <https://kevan.org/johari>

The WE

First, heal the pain. No transformation can happen when there is pain in the organization. Piling new processes and techniques on top of a

festering wound just makes the wound worse. The pain might be acute, or it might be pain from the past that has never been reckoned with. What I know for sure is that ignoring the pain never works.

Second, expand participation. Molly Breazeale¹ says, “people support what they help create.” I find that some leaders are afraid to include people because they don't want too many different opinions and objections. Participation means a voice, not a vote. It's perfectly acceptable to say that you want to hear what people think, but you will make the final decision. There are wonderful facilitation techniques to gather and cull ideas from large groups and easily make room for “too many opinions.” Try Liberating Structures.²

Both healing the pain and expanding participation are soulful in that they create ease and inclusion. The practical side is that both also yield better results. Participation upfront ensures adoption and eases the need for heavy change management later on.

Try this: Identify the biggest source of unattended pain in your organization. What is one thing you can do to attend to that pain today?

The SYSTEM

Transformational leaders focus on creating thriving, living systems and less on directing work. A healthy system is the best predictor of business success, whereas individual performance is not predictive. Focus less on managing an individual's tasks and more on cultivating the system.

Planting: Build structures, connections, and competencies for your system to flourish. What's missing that you need to get to that future state? Sometimes it is as simple as two teams needing a communication channel, which could be

addressed simply by including each other in a monthly meeting. It might be a competency that's lacking, that could be gained through hiring or training. What seeds can you start planting?

Pulling weeds! Look for places where the system (internal or external) is inhibiting value from getting to the customer. Listen to the people doing the work. How are corporate processes slowing them down? Are there contradictory goals in place? Contradictions that look small from the top, can be magnified on the ground. Remove these obstacles so people can work with ease.

Try this: Create an “obstacle backlog” of items you hear about. Work through removing them and reporting back to the people on the ground.

You're ready to begin!

Transformational leadership calls for attention through all three lenses, the “ME,” the “WE,” and the “SYSTEM.” As you look through the lenses, also think about where you need to make connections between the soulful and the practical. ○

Jardena London is a consultant (the good kind), author, speaker, and CEO of Rosetta Agile. She has spent the last 30 years finding ways to transform organizations so that our souls can flourish, while our financials thrive. Her book “Cultivating Transformations: A Leader's Guide to Connecting the Soulful and Practical,” supports this mission by drawing a straight line between the processes we use, the way we feel, and the results we get that nourish our souls while producing thriving financial outcomes. Her new community and movement on leadership can be found at www.cultivatingtransformations.com.



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