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Paradoxes

From the Editor

“Do you have any bandwidth?”

“Bandwidth?”

“Yeah. Like I’m really pushed and this deadline is pushing me into virtual meltdown.”

“Bandwidth?”

“Time!”

“Bandwidth means time?”

“Sure. Where ya been?”

I had thought that bandwidth was the volume of information per unit time that a transmission medium could handle but just in a seeming nano-second the word transformed itself to mean time. And I suppose just as quickly it could mean something else in the virtual-speak world of the Internet.

Come to think of it, the language of management is no less transient. Terms and terminology come and go with the speed of summer lightening.

At LIVE Consultants we help organizations differentiate the fads from the fundamentals, the temporary from the tried ‘n true.

Marilyn Baetz, editor

About the Author and the Article

A paradox is a kind of riddle that invites you to hold two seemingly contradictory ideas in your mind at the same time. On the surface, it can seem absurd, even foolish.

But within a paradox there are often profound insights that are worth listening to.

In this article, Stephen shares with us 10 paradoxes, riddles, inversions, and apparent absurdities that he hopes will help challenge some of our thinking and paradigms about relationships and work.

Stephen is a principal partner of LIVE Consultants, the organization sponsoring this publication.



Stephen Baetz

Let Me Play The Fool

Shakespeare had the fool; the king's court had a jester; native mythology has a raven. These tricksters beguile traditions, they challenge untested truth, they tease pretentious acumen. They do this with paradoxes, riddles, inversions, and absurdities. When they do their best work, they invite us to question what we know.

Allow me to follow in this admirable tradition with, what I hope is, some wise foolishness.

The more you give, the more you have.

Giving power to others is not like giving away candy whereby you lose what you have given. It is, however, like what happens when you provide information to someone else. Although that person may know more, you don't know any less.

The more you let others know they have power, the more power you have.

The soft stuff is the hard stuff.

The most difficult challenges individuals and teams face is learning the soft skills of listening, collaboration, negotiation, coaching, resolving conflict, supporting, and facilitating. By far, the easier skills to learn are the hard skills related to our vocational expertise.

The strongest ask for help.

Life is a life of limits. Individuals can know some things very well but there are times when those individuals reach the limits of their knowledge, the limits of their expertise. And that's the time that they ask for help. They don't fake it; they don't bluff it. They simply ask others to help.

Keep your eyes on the invisible.

Sure enough, what we see and measure, we manage. However, what can't be seen is often more important than what can be seen. Truth, trust, commitment, respect, integrity, consideration, dedication, inspiration, insight,

learning, decency, kindness, and sharing are more important than any of the numbers on a profit and loss statement or any output from a Pareto analysis.

The best answers are questions.

In working with managers and organizational leaders, I have come to understand that finding a good question is infinitely more helpful than finding an answer. Questions hook you into thinking ... they break new ground ... they push limits. In a funny, quirky sort of way, questions are both durable and capable of making change. By contrast, answers are as temporary as today's problems.

Imagine what you would start thinking about if you were to ask questions like, "What kind of problems would I like to have in the future?", "If I knew the answer to that, what would I know?", "Why?", "How will I know when I'm done?", "Who owns the problem?", "What differences make a difference?" or "What do others know that I don't know?"

Mentors know the wisdom of answering questions with questions; researchers invest the bulk of their time finding the right questions to ask before they invest an ounce of energy in gathering data to test a hypothesis; carpenters question their own judgement and measure twice before cutting once; planners question the assumptions they make; judges question truth; managers question what they know and even what they don't.

The obvious isn't.

There is little in life that is as plain and obvious as the nose on your face. The obvious plays a cunning game of hide 'n seek. It hides behind partial information, prejudice, untested paradigms, yesterday's answers, and even smugness. Yes, smugness. If I think I know it all, I'm not open to learning something new or even seeing the obvious.

I think there is another reason we can't see the obvious: we've become convinced that everything has to be complex. There is no

doubt that our world has remarkable complexity — we face many complex social, economic, familial, political, environmental, and marketplace problems. But reason would tell us that not every problem is complex. Yet somehow or other we end up adding layers of nuance and ambiguity that weren't there before we started and, as a result, the obvious is hidden.

Improvement brings dissatisfaction.

It would seem that improvements should bring about a sense of satisfaction. They do but only for a short time. And then people see the shortfalls of the new and improved process or system and they want to change it again ... and again ... and again.

In that context, dissatisfaction isn't a bad thing; anything else but.

The way I see it, the mother of invention is necessity ... but the mother of improvement is dissatisfaction.

That being the case, one of the new responsibilities of a leader is to capitalize on any dissatisfaction that is evident or even to create some dissatisfaction *with current processes or systems*. That may sound odd if you've thought of your role as keeping the calm or creating contentment but where there is not ferment, there is no improvement.

Our fascination with our strengths may blind us.

The popular wisdom is that good organizations fail because of some unattended-to weakness. However, that's often not the case. Many good organizations fail because of an over-fascination with their strengths. They insist on building strategy from strength rather than responding to the needs and requirements of the marketplace; they tell themselves stories that justify carrying on a product well past its peak; they want more of what they already have. As a result, they assume the future will be a mirror of the past, they minimize the impact of competitors' innovations, and they stick with what they have.

The more I know, the less I know I know.

The School of Hard Knocks and Life U both have the same core learning objective at the heart of their curriculum: to ensure that every person realizes how much they don't know. And they're being pretty successful in meeting that objective. Daily I'm confronted with how much I don't know ... even in those areas where I have some vocational expertise. The trick is not to be intimidated by that realization and do yourself in with a chorus of I-should-know-that's.

There are few people who are more dangerous than those who don't know what they don't know. Real strength comes from knowing your limits and realizing why it is important to collaborate with others who know what you don't.

What is not said speaks more loudly than what is said.

There are numerous techniques and interpersonal tactics that can be used to hear what is said; paraphrasing, confirming, mirroring to name a few. But those techniques, as useful as they are, can only help you hear what is said.

Far more understanding is gained in listening for what is not said. That's right, what is not said. The message is in the white space between the lines. For it is there that fears hide, apprehensions take shelter, needs seek refuge, and insights wait to be found.

Marriage counsellors, consultants, leaders, parents, and partners know that little time should be spent on issues that people can already talk about. To be effective, we must hear what people can't talk about or, more typically, won't talk about. We must hear the buried life. If given voice, the unspoken issues and unspoken needs have the ability to move a relationship to new ground.

"There is no difference between a wise person and a fool," one wag observed. "Both stand on the same ground and see to the heart."

A Final Check

When developing an education plan, think about the following questions. The more “yes” options you can check, the greater the chance that your plan will meet the needs of your internal business partners.

Does my education plan ...	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
1. consider the current and emerging goals, values, and strategies of the organization?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. mesh with the attitudes, skills, and knowledge the organization wants to develop?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. identify all the populations that can benefit from development opportunities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. meet the needs of the target groups as they have been assessed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. include a variety of learning strategies?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. have a set of standards for all the growth and development opportunities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. have a practical focus to decrease the gap between information and application?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. have an overall theme that will link the ideas and build continuity?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. contain content and delivery techniques geared to the level of each target group?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. have a built-in evaluation process?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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