

The Transformational Change Simulation and Leadership Workshop
“Different by Design”

Chapter Four Behaving “*Out-of-the-Box*”

Robin was the HR Director at Flow Systems Solutions. She was here with her boss – Aaron and Aaron’s boss Curt.

She said, “I’m so sorry about how Curt continued to interrupt Debbie --- he is very frustrated with the lack of continuity in our company.”

I asked, “Lack of continuity? What does that mean?”

“He’s the CFO -- and like Patrick described -- has to submit financial forecasts to the Board every quarter. I’m not privy to those numbers – but he’s always mad about the performance of our sales organization – he just tells everyone we need to “take it to the next” level by thinking outside the box.”

She quietly continued, “Before my boss comes back – he reports to Curt – he repeats what Curt says -- we need to think outside the box and no one knows what he means. He was the material handler yesterday and when his job evaporated, he said he felt “*out-of-the-box*” and totally confused as to how to “think.”

“At dinner last night he didn’t want to come back this morning. He and Curt got into a big argument about the feasibility of embracing Phase Three – you heard how Curt confronted Debbie -- can we talk about taking it to the next level by thinking *out-of-the-box*?”

She quickly noticed that Aaron had returned to the room and was on his way toward us. It was too late for her to leave and as he arrived, he volunteered, “I’m very confused as to what actually happened yesterday”-and pointing toward the Phase Three wall said- “but it is obvious that somehow we got “*out-of-the-box*” and achieved – what Curt calls the “*next level*.”

I asked, “Curt is your boss and he talks about thinking “*out-of-the-box*” to achieve the “next level” --is that right?”

“Every day at every managers meeting.”

“You saw him interrupt Debbie – he is not a good listener – he laughed and said, – “Just a Teller.”

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“Has he ever defined what the “next level” looks like so everyone can be clear about the behavior – not the thinking that is needed to achieve it?”

“Are you kidding? – It’s like me telling Robin here--to think outside the box. It is that mysterious financial numbers realm that he uses to justify blaming everyone else for what’s not working.”

I thought to myself, *Wow! What an admission about toxic soil!*

His cynical orientation continued, “You will likely recall that I was one of the “tapers” who did the taping of the big Flier.”



“You held the tape and were adamant that we do it correct.”

“At dinner last night I told Curt that the taping experience was an example of *“out-of-the-box”* thinking for me. You didn’t force us to “think” that way -- to just “do it” – even though I was a little ticked off by how you “told me what to do.”

“Curt said that taping is not the *“out-of-the-box”* thinking he is talking about – for him it was all about the revenue that the big Flier represented -- and when we were making it, he was mad because no one knew the price.”

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“I told him that when we made the second half we knew “why” we were to “tape it” that way – and he still didn’t care.”

“His “next level” is all about the money.”

He paused, “His attitude actually ruined my dinner as he would not listen to what I actually learned from that taping experience.”

I asked, “What was the significance of the taping experience for you?”

He paused and in a rather rhetorical manner said, “That we need to “do it” in order to know “why?” -- so I should tell my people to “just do it” -- then explain “why?”

He continued, “Or --maybe we never explain “why” -- or --- our “why” is wrong?”

“Aaron, I appreciate how it is very difficult to extract meaning from an experience when the focus is on the money – but --- the taping experience is just a process step and Curt is not concerned with process efficiency – he’s a bottom line guy.”

“Remember yesterday -- we said it was about *“taking action without knowing how?”* It did not say to *“take action without knowing why.”* The “why” was the 100%-100%-100% and serve all four customers ----- and it was carefully explained in advance.

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He just looked at me – still in his confused state. I said, “The “why” of any initiative must always precede the “what” – even though the people do not know “how.”

“We have to simulate it—*just behave out of the box -- just “try it”* – is a better way to say it --- then learn from the experience of that behavior – and --if it works -- then consider new ways to “think” about “how.”

He still seemed to be having difficulty processing the sequence, so I added, “The astronauts “behaved” the first rocket launch with John Glenn – he survived -- they “learned” from that experience – then developed the “how” to take it to the “next level” – but the “why” was always a constant – to land a man on the moon and bring him back alive -- does that help?”

He said, “That’s a great example – I’ll use that with Curt – that we need to “behave” different – in order to “think” different -- in order to develop the “how” – he just has it backwards – and he’s always asking “how” with the wrong “why.”

I paused and said, “Just be clear with Curt that you were not building that Flier for inventory or to “defeat” a competitor – a legitimate customer asked for a prototype – and the potential for future “profits” is enormous – only -- if it is taped correctly.”

“If he asks about the profit potential – show him this picture of Lauren with the money.”



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Curt had returned with Debbie and both were headed in our direction. During the Simulation, Curt had been very vocal as an assembler – tried several times to take over the Plant Manager’s job as the Phase One and Two sessions tested his patience for “solving problems.”

He shook my hand and said, “Thank you for allowing Debbie to tell her story. --- I see how it applies in banking --- but I’m not sure how it applies in our business -- we have sales and manufacturing plants in global locations and many employees do not speak English.”

I said, “That is very common for many of our clients – why does that matter?”

In a rather impatient manner he asked, “Have you ever done this for an international group where the money issues are very complex?”

“Yes – we’ve had participants from over forty international destinations attend our workshops – they were mostly managers -- and they all admitted that the key is to -- first create the fertile soil that will release the potential of their people – then focus on the money.”

His analytical mind was processing what I had just said, so I added, “From a purely financial aspect – the money is a “consequence” --- not the antecedent for designing any business.”

I could see that he was processing everything I said in a “problem solving” structure --- so I added, “But the first step -- before we do the Simulation for a specific company – anywhere -- is to make sure the corporate leaders are on board with seeing their people as people – that might be the reason you are here --- and understand that the “ingredients” of the fertile soil are very unique in different countries.”

He looked at me and asked, “Then -- are you saying that it has been done?”

“Yes, -- the creating technology has been successfully applied around the world for many years. The alignment aspects of the

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Simulations take on many very different dynamics on the global scene.”

“Global” and “local” are the very definition of mass customization. It would be impossible to explain it right now – but what did you extract from Debbie’s presentation --- what would you consider “out-of-the-box” thinking and “next level?”

He looked at Aaron and Robin and said in a humorous way, “You guys have been talking about my “conflict manipulation disease” – Debbie told me that telling people to think “out-of-the-box” is often a very deeply imbedded “problem solving” command – that people who have it thrive on “conflict” and do not have the patience to listen past what she called the “problem box” -- and that you will tell us what that means later today or tomorrow.”

I looked at Debbie and said, “Debbie is a great coach – glad she introduced you to the problem solving strategy of “conflict manipulation.”

I said, “The conflict manipulation strategy may be very strong for you --- based strictly on the fact that your company may have been designed to solve problems --- the name contains the word Solutions --- so we will need to be very careful how we address that issue – I don’t want you to use “conflict” to create toxic soil all over the world.”

That comment was a form of “conflict manipulation” --- I watched how he digested it --- he thought about retaliation – then laughed -- asked to talk to Robin and they both walked away.

Aaron said, “He’s a tough sell – it will not be easy for him to admit in public that he actually learned something from his own behavior this week – or from a training seminar -- he told everyone he was going on vacation for three days.”

I said, “That’s okay --- Debbie had a very difficult time until that lucky learning experience – maybe our time together can orchestrate one for Curt.”

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I looked at Aaron and said, “For right now -- let’s stay focused on your awareness -- would you do everyone a favor – when we are back -- simply tell everyone of your experience and ask me the question about “behaving” out of the box in order to develop the “thinking” to support that behavior?”

He wasn’t sure he was willing to admit his past transgressions, but with that request he said, “Sure.” and walked away.

Debbie laughed about how she had introduced the “conflict manipulation” strategy to Curt, but more importantly wanted to tell me about the one corporate lender who was still seeing the Simulation as “arts-and-crafts.”

I said, “We’ll only go as fast as the slowest.”

She laughed and said, “We’ll be here a long time.”