



DOES THIS “SHIFT” ACTUALLY WORK?

When we quit thinking primarily about ourselves
and our own self-preservation, we undergo a truly
heroic transformation of consciousness.

—Joseph Campbell

Our history as human beings is littered with things about which we have been wrong. Epically wrong in many cases. Yes, I know there are still some “flat-Earth truthers” out there (a famous NBA player among them), but our historical viewpoint about the Earth’s role in the larger universe has only been “right” for the briefest period of our existence. If you think of “conscious-humanness” as existing for maybe a hundred thousand years, we’ve known the Earth goes around the sun (not the reverse, or other nonsense about the structure of the universe) for about one half of one percent (0.5 percent) of our history. For the rest of the time, we had a number of theories that science ultimately disproved (the firmament holding back the “waters” of the universe is one of my favorites). In the following passage, Nancy Ellen Abrams, in her ambitious 2015 book titled *A God That Could Be Real*, discusses the past five hundred years or so as we learned the Earth isn’t flat:

Europeans living through this epic shift found it wrenching, almost impossible to

take in. The notion that the whole earth was moving simply defied common sense. The sixteenth-century philosopher Jean Bodin wrote, “No one in his senses, or imbued with the slightest knowledge of physics, will ever think that the earth, heavy and unwieldy from its own weight and mass, staggers up and down around its own center and that of the sun; for at the slightest jar of the earth, we would see cities and fortresses, towns and mountains thrown down.” Martin Luther wrote: “People gave ear to an upstart astrologer who strove to show that the earth revolves, not the heavens or the firmament, the sun and the moon. . . . This fool wishes to reverse the entire science of astronomy, but sacred Scripture tells us that Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, and not the earth.” The new scientific picture of the solar system flouted both common sense and religious authority. But it won out because it worked: its predictions were in perfect agreement with observations of tides,

eclipses, and the motions of comets, asteroids, the planets, and their moons. The new physics was so empowering that enthusiastic adopters extrapolated its applicability to the entire universe.

Far from the example of literally shifting one's world view to the planet being round and revolving around the sun as the sun moved in the galaxy—as cited in the quote above—here's an example from modern-day life that illustrates the power of changing attitudes from “who's right” to “what's right.”

This is a true story about one of my clients.

The nearly one hundred attendees had arranged themselves in “pods” separated by the color and logo on their shirts. It reminded me of a middle school dance—except these were adults, coworkers. The large meeting room was eerily quiet as the workers flipped through the information packet given to them as they came in the room. Aside from the occasional muted snicker and some scattered coughs and sneezes, no conversation was taking place. The air conditioning system was abnormally

amplified in the absence of human-based sound.

The tension was palpable. So was the mistrust, the fear, the skepticism, and the anger. Few people in the room demonstrated any positive emotion. They clearly didn't want to be there, and they couldn't wait to be away from "the others" in the room.

And then I stood up to address the group.

I was prepared. I'd done my homework. I knew the dynamics in the room. A report from the finance department—based upon superficial and, in some cases, flawed research—indicated the group could save \$1 million a year for five years. All that was needed was the termination of eighteen staff members and a massive, bureaucratic, "jam-it-down-their-throats" approach to making organizational changes. Flawed or not, the report had gotten the attention of senior executives, and the expectations to save money—or else—were very clear.

However, the two senior leaders representing the group assembled before me were aware of the "Design the Future Process" my team and I had developed over the years. They knew the power of creating change *through* people, rather than doing

change *to* people, because I'd helped them before. They had asked the senior executives to give them a chance to do something different, and they were given six months—or else. At that point, they asked me to get involved and see whether the group would be open to a new approach to choosing and implementing a new future. I agreed.

That day was the first meeting of the entire group.

I cleared my throat, looked around the room, and began: “Thank you for coming. I have an invitation for you—one that I’ll challenge you to accept, but one that I won’t force on you. I’m aware of the finance department report, and I know how you feel about it.”

I waited. I felt the anger and skepticism in the room.

I continued, “Are you open to being proactive, to being accountable, to examining a new future, to taking a stance about what will work best for you? Are you up for doing something completely different—where *you* will be creating the recommendations, not the finance department?”

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Silence. Crossed arms. Heads cocked. Bored faces, rolling eyes, sneers.

I went on, “Like I said, it’s an invitation. Your executives are giving you the chance to do the right thing—to focus on ‘what’s right for your organization’ and not on ‘who’s right in the head office.’ Are you up for that?”

No breakthrough happened during the first meeting, but I didn’t expect one to. However, the energy shifted from “who cares” to “maybe there’s something here.” A crack was all I wanted.

Now, suffice it to say, through a facilitated process over the next several weeks and months, this group made great choices. Its members eventually recommended changes, based upon “what’s right, not who’s right,” that resulted in not just saving \$5 million over five years but more than *three times* that amount. *And* all eighteen people got to keep their jobs.

I still remember the final celebration with them. It looked and felt 100 percent different from their first meeting. There was no division based upon “logos and colors”; everyone sat with everyone. There

was laughing, teasing, clapping, cheering, pats on the back, hugs, and even some tears. It was joyous, boisterous, exciting, and wonderful. They celebrated their success—together.

What did they do differently in the process they used? They came together, they built trust, they shared their great ideas, and they listened—all based upon doing what's right. Oh—I haven't yet mentioned this—what was the group? They were the public works, police, and fire fleets in the city and county of Denver, and the project was called the Fleet Analysis and Optimization Project. (See the case study here: www.teamtipton.com/portfolio_page/city-and-county-of-denver-fleet-optimization.)

The results they created don't sound much like government, do they? If a governmental organization can do this, so can *any* other organization in *any* other industry. So can yours.

Questions, Insights, Implications

1. Have you found yourself in a truly toxic, dysfunctional situation (at home or at work)?
What was your response?

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2. How do you feel about the notion that shifting worldviews starts with us, individually? Are you the type who says, “As soon as you’re done changing, everything will be fine”?
3. How open are you to the possibility that truly remarkable outcomes are possible even in the face of “evidence” that tells you it’s impossible?

Again, reflect on these questions, and allow yourself to be wrong and to be open to new perspectives. By doing so, you’ll likely find new insights in the most unexpected places.