

ADVICE FOR LEADERS (OF ASSEMBLIES AND MORE)

BY DAVE ARCH



As a leadership coach, an author, and a magician, Dave Arch is likely in a unique position to provide advice to anyone who heads up an SAM Assembly, a magic convention, or any other organization. The following articles have been adapted from his book, Transforming Leaders. Here, Dave provides insights that can be useful to those who work with staff, associates, volunteers, on-stage and off-stage assistants, or even come in contact with clients while running a solo magic business.

Personalities

At some point early in our lives we each went over to a window and looked at the world — realizing that the world is a place where one could get seriously hurt not just physically but emotionally as well.

Each of us selected a way to protect ourselves from getting hurt, and those compose the four basic personality types. We use the letters **DISC** to help us remember all four.

Director personality types decided that the people who get hurt are the people who allow others to make decisions for them. Therefore, Directors decided that they would always seek to remain in control — making their own decisions for themselves and for others where required. You will see from Figure 1 that they are in the upper left hand quadrant of the axis — comfortable with directness but not comfortable with an openness about their family or personal matters.

Interactor personalities went to the same window but came to a different conclusion. They saw people getting hurt when other people didn't like them. At that moment, they decided that they

would keep people liking them to avoid being hurt. You'll see them in the upper right hand quadrant in the diagram, both comfortable being direct in their communications and open in their sharing of information about themselves. Compared to the Director personalities, who are primarily "task persons," Interactors are "people persons."

Stabilizers left that window saying to themselves, *Slow and steady wins the race. The people who get hurt are the*

their personal life, too. You'll see them in the lower right hand quadrant of our diagram.

Calculators left the window saying, "The devil is in the details." They notice that people most often get into trouble when they don't pay attention to details — crossing their Ts and dotting their Is. At that moment they decided that they would always check the fine print before proceeding. They live in the details.

Fortunately, although most of us are primarily of one personality type, no one is *only* one. However, when someone is under stress, they tend to move to a different personality type during that period of time.

If you've ever sat across from someone who talked *louder* or *softer* or *faster* or *slower* than that with which you were comfortable, you know that you were just happy when the interchange was over. In the same manner, with these personality types engaging them in the style most comfortable for them is essential for building maximum bonding and rapport.

It's not unlike an adaptation of "The Golden Rule." Instead of "Do unto others



people who pull the trigger on a decision without thoroughly processing the ramifications. They prefer to talk about the weather first prior to getting into the meat of the discussion (indirect). However, they are open to visit about

as you would have them do unto you,” it’s “Do unto others as they would have you do unto them.”

Tip: Fortunately, there is a short cut. If you match the other person’s volume and rate of speech, you will connect to their style more often than not.

The Trust Equation

A leader cannot be a leader without the trust of their followers. “The Trust Equation” helps make trust — a rather abstract concept — very concrete by comparing it to a mathematical equation.

Before I can trust anyone, I must believe that the person is *competent* in their area of expertise. Next, they have to be competent *consistently*. Then they have to be able to show me who they are through their *intimacy* skills. I have to be able to get to know them. I can’t trust an unknown quantity.

All of those together are multiplied by *selflessness*. They’re not doing it for themselves; they put others’ best interests ahead of their own. Theirs is not a self-seeking motivation. If you look at Figure 2 and you consider any one of those missing, you can see the fracture that happens to trust. Trust gets diluted.

Now, will I ever trust someone without all of those aspects? I suppose a very competent surgeon, for instance, I would trust them with my surgery even though they might not be particularly good in their bedside manner. But that’s very rare.

Trust, for most leaders, requires that their followers have a conviction about their competency, their consistency, and has been able to establish a relationship with them. All of that gets multiplied by their selflessness. They put others’ best interests ahead of their own.

The intimacy component is the one that has been most challenging to define by those who I coach. Brene Brown to date has done the best job of breaking that down to its sub-points when she speaks about the intimacy component using the word **BRAVING** as an acrostic.

Boundaries — the ability to have and maintain personal boundaries and respect mine.

Reliability — carrying us back

to the word consistency in the main equation.

Accountability — able to accept personal responsibility and hold me responsible too.

Vault — maintain personal confidences.

Integrity — does what’s right instead of what’s expedient.

Non-Judgment — hears me without passing judgment on what I’m saying.

Generosity — gives me and others the benefit of the doubt when considering motives.

So, when you wonder why you don’t trust someone, you can come back to this equation.

When you wonder, as a leader, why others aren’t following you or giving you their trust, look no further than this equation. Something in the equation is missing or weak. In the final analysis,



trust is nothing you can take from them. Your followers must give it to you as they discover you are trustworthy. The elements of “trustworthiness” are what this equation makes clear.

When they give you their trust or they don’t give you their trust, you can look at this formula and you can see where you’re weak and where you’re strong. That might be a great place to start right now. Where, in this formula, do you find yourself weak? Where do you find yourself strong?

And it’s not just in who you are, but it’s how you project to yourself. It’s how others perceive you. Is the intent equaling the effect of what you want to have happened? The “Trust Equation” is a foundation for a leader.

The Trusted Advisor by David Maister is an excellent source of more information on this foundational subject.

Confident Humility

I believe some leaders suffer from

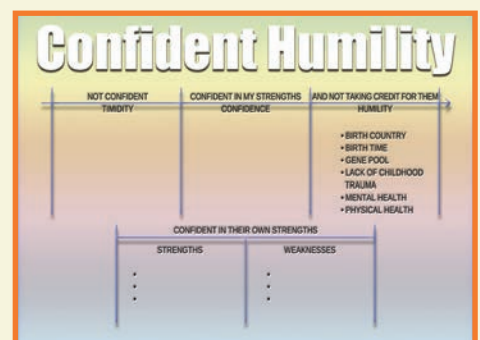
timidity due to a false definition of *humility*. Maybe in their childhood, they were told, “Don’t toot your own horn.” “Don’t get too big for your britches.” “Don’t get a big head.”

They began to think that humility meant being timid. Hence, the title of Figure 3, *Confident Humility*. If you follow along from left to right, you’ll see at the far left end of this continuum, people who are not confident (i.e. people who are timid). Then, you’ll see as you move along the line, you find people confident in their strengths.

However, sometimes those people are unattractive people. They tend to strut, which doesn’t wear well on anyone. So, follow the line along. It moves from not confident and timid to confident in their strength and abilities — and not taking credit for them.

Humility — I know my strengths, I know my weaknesses, but I don’t take credit for those strengths and weaknesses because there are many factors that have affected my strengths and weaknesses — factors over which I had no control or decision. Examples might be the birth country. I could have been born in Somalia, and I wasn’t; the time of my birth — I could have been born when people were dying of the bubonic plague; the gene pool into which I was born; the lack of childhood trauma. All of those were essentially out of my control.

This acknowledgement of things that are beyond the humble leader’s control extends to the present and



future, too. If that acknowledgement is not a part of the leader’s character, then the leader typically resorts to bravado, hubris, denial, and blaming in order to compensate for not bowing to the reality of the situation (i.e. they do not control the outcome of all

things). I have observed that followers tend to be more secure with leaders who realize the limitations of their control as opposed to the leader who tries to compensate for not recognizing that fact. Most followers accept such limitations of their leaders and wish for their leaders to do the same.

So, do I have strengths? Do I have weaknesses? Yes. Can I, as a leader, express those with confidence? Yes, but it's when I start taking credit for them or not openly recognize the limitations of those, that my leadership influence erodes. I look prideful, I look egotistical, simply because I started taking credit for those things over which I had no control.

My hope is, as a leader, you can find that confident humility and balance yourself.

Unsolicited Advice

In seeking to build and maintain connections with your followers, it's important to remember that unsolicited advice can often be viewed as criticism. That particular insight causes a leader to stop, think, and process before offering advice for which there has been no request.

Those of you who are reading this and have adult children, you know the process. You don't venture out with advice for which there has been no request. And sometimes, you have to allow those followers to go out a little bit further down the road before they even know they need the advice you're about to give.

In the levels of competence surrounding any skill, a level exists called "Unconscious Incompetence," at which level someone just plain doesn't know what they don't know. And it may be, as a wise leader, you'll need to put them in positions that help them discover what they don't know so that when the advice comes, it's welcomed. It's needed. They're prepared for it.

Unsolicited advice, in spite of the best intentions, can oftentimes be viewed as criticism.

Bonus: As one adult speaking to another, asking them if they want your feedback would seem to be a reasonable courtesy. Then asking them whether or not they want to hear it at this time might be a thoughtful follow-up question.

Eliminate and Concentrate

Great leaders are not "responsibility hoarders." They seldom take on a new responsibility without eliminating a responsibility they currently have. They are as good at ending things as they are at starting things.

My wife sagely said to me "When you don't say 'no' to someone, you are saying 'no' to someone." She of course meant that when I didn't say "no" to someone who was asking me for a time commitment, I was saying "no" to her. She has



greatly helped me put this into perspective.

There was a time when I could have taken you to my office where you would have seen a four-drawer file cabinet much like the one in Figure 4. Three of the drawers were filled with ideas and projects that didn't work out. One drawer was filled with the ideas from which I was making my living at the time.

Mentally, that's still how it works. What might you need to eliminate today so you can get on with the truly important?

When Nice Isn't Nice

I believe that "nice" people believe that they are taking the moral high road. "Be nice, and then people will like you," they might say.

However, I have found that being "nice" more often than not is gutless, manipulative, and a passive-aggressive power play.

It's gutless because quite often a "nice" person doesn't stand up straight and speak the truth, taking responsibility for their opinion.

It's manipulative because how are you going to be mean (or even honest) to a "nice" person? Their previous "niceness" just bought and paid for what they're now asking you to do.

It's a power play of an amazing proportion. When truth and "nice" collide within a "nice" person, "nice" always wins, to the sacrificing of truth.

Leaders understand that when truthfulness and nice collide, being called "nice" instead of truthful is never a compliment.

Maintaining Happiness

This equation gets to the point: Our *happiness* equals *reality* over our *expectations*. When our *reality* equals or exceeds our *expectations*, we find ourselves filled with *happiness*.

When that is not the case, we can:

1. Change our *reality* by stop playing the victim; or
2. Adjust our *expectations*, often-times by stopping the insidious practice of comparing our plight (of which we know too well) to the plight of others (of which we have more limited knowledge).

Wise leaders seek to maintain the balance in this equation and teach their followers through their own example to do the same.

Defuse A Bomb

Wise advice by David Sandler is to "Defuse a bomb before it blows." The strong leader doesn't wait for an issue to be raised by one of their followers. If the leader knows there's an issue, they bring up the topic before their follower.

The less mature leader hesitates to bring up the topic — hoping the issue might just go away without having to be addressed. The mature leader knows better. The book entitled *Difficult Conversations* by Douglas Stone has proven itself to be an effective model for that conversation.

Effective Goal Setting

You'll see my quote there on Figure 5: "The goals I set for myself had better be goals over which I have control. Any other goals are only wishful thinking."

I like a fellow who said to me, "What kind of goals are you going to set for yourself when you go fishing?"

You need goals that are measurable. You need goals that have a definite time period for completion. What are you going to say? "By the time I come home tonight, I will have caught five fish?"

That's wishful thinking. You don't have any control over whether you're going to catch five fish or not. I want to encourage you to start thinking about your goals as being those things over which you have control.

So, instead of saying, "I'm going to catch five fish," have your goals be your behaviors. "I'm going to get up so that I can be at the lake at such and such a time." "I'm going to have these baits that I'm going to try." "I'm first going to try these baits, then I'm going to try these baits."

What are the behaviors that will give you the best chance to get your wishful thinking goal done? Your goals are actually your behaviors. To set goals on things over which you don't have control is only like making wishes.



So you say, "But then I might meet all my goals?" What's wrong with that? If your goals are your behaviors, my hope is you will meet all your goals, because they are the components you have control over.

I think, sometimes, goal setting gets a silly rap, and it's viewed as less than positive by many people because it is viewed as only an exercise in wishful thinking. It can be so much more.

Vision Creation

Certainly, one role of a leader is to cast a vision for where an organization can be. So that as people follow, they follow the leader to their vision of what could be. As you look at Figure 6, you'll see several moving parts. What? How? Why?

It's important to understand *what* we're going to do, it's important to understand *how* we're going to do it, but it's more important to understand *why* we're going to do it. That "why" becomes

a driving force that many companies don't have.

Many organizations have lost the "why." They know what they do. They know how they do it. But the "why" they do it has become separated from the "what" and the "how." In that moment of separation, there's a loss of motivation.

Early on in an organization's development, it's typically a very mission-driven organization. It's all about the mission. They're changing the landscape of whatever industry they happen to be in.

But as the organization grows and becomes a thing, the mission orientation can get lost, and the motivation can get lost at the same time. Maintaining that mission feel throughout the history of an organization is an ongoing but necessary challenge.

One of the best examples in today's world is Apple. What does Apple do? Apple sells computers. Ah, but there are a lot of places that sell computers.

What does Apple do? How does Apple do it? The distinction is *why* Apple does it. From its beginnings, it was clearly anti-establishment.

If you walk into an Apple store and you look around at those who are the "Apple disciples," you will see a group of people committed to the mission as they shine their MacBooks and polish the screens of their retina display.

They know why Apple exists. Apple exists to continue to challenge the status quo, pushing it to greater and greater heights. It's on a mission.

"What could be" is the essence of a vision. However, before a leader paints a picture of "what could be," a leader has to help the followers experience the fact that where they presently are is an intolerable situation. Pain motivates.

So, before casting a vision of where you want to go, make sure you've helped your followers understand why staying where you are is not an option. The two questions at the bottom — Why must we do it? And must we do it now? — have to be clearly answered in your mind, and then communicated to the followers that are going to be going with you on this trip.

Why is this an intolerable situation? You may need to wait because it may only be intolerable for you; it may not



be intolerable for them. You may have to wait for it to get to be intolerable for them.

That means you're going to quit supporting initiatives that are only a bandage — helping them stay where they are. They're propelled by having it become an intolerable situation for them. Then, they'll be ready to follow your leadership to what could be.

Vision creation is an indispensable skill of a leader.

A Velvet-Covered Brick

My hope is that you're enjoying these topics. However, more than enjoying them, my hope is that you're being reminded of key concepts essential to effective leadership. I think of a great leader as a velvet-covered brick — i.e. easy to approach, soft to the touch, and nurturing in their leadership style.

Nevertheless, when pushed against, one can immediately feel substance in the leader. My executive coaching is oftentimes spent fine-tuning the velvet-covered brick in each of those I coach. Some are too "velvety" and need more brick. Some are too "bricky" and need more velvet.

When that balance is struck between velvet and brick, I find I have my strongest leaders. My hope is that these articles help you achieve more of a balance in becoming truly a velvet-covered brick to those who follow you. 🧱

With his 25-year career as a leadership coach winding down, and his book Transforming Leaders published (<https://amzn.to/415GvKE>), Dave Arch assumed the role of executive director of SAM Assembly #7 (<https://theomahamagicalssociety.org>) and Administrator of the Magic Club Leaders Facebook Group (<https://bit.ly/3NA6XGT>). He can be reached at samassembly7@gmail.com.