

LeadershipFAQs

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Creating Space between Short-Term Scrutiny and Long-Term Expectations

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A Conversation with an Athletic Director

I have always been fascinated with vocations. Perhaps it started with the infamous career day in grade school. Each time a parent would come to our class to talk about their job, I would get excited about a new calling. In addition to wanting to be a professional baseball player, I considered spending my off-seasons as a brain surgeon, attorney, fishing guide, travel agent, airline pilot, or Governor of New Mexico. I must admit, deep down inside I still pine to be Governor. As for my baseball career ... I fell short of the 'big's', way short.

Recently I had the privilege of having lunch with Bill Shumard, California State University Long Beach's Athletic Director. When I get with someone like Bill, I again become that grade school kid full of questions. He was gracious to entertain my inquiries and true to my childhood experience, I gleaned a lot. Although he minimizes his talents and strengths, he has an incredibly complex job and he makes it look easy.

In addition to the responsibility of graduating athletes, recruiting coaches, raising funds, following rules, honoring academia, and the myriad of other demands, Athletic Directors have to win—now! Unlike most of us, their wins and losses are immediately quantifiable. Such pressure leaves little space in the distinction between short-term and long-term planning. A brief survey of leadership research suggests that a short-term focus warrants a transactional leadership style while a long-term focus requires a transformational leadership style.

Transactional leadership focuses on performance outcomes; it is about the real results that are produced to achieve business objectives. To that extent,

transactional leaders guide or motivate individual contributors in the direction of established goals by clarifying role and task requirements. In the transaction, your people give you labor, and in exchange you give them rewards.¹ Transactional leaders are primarily dependent on compliant followers and influence through positional power.

Conversely, due to major shifts in all aspects of organizational life, a new kind of leadership is emerging. It is the kind of leadership that enables the exploration of new and innovative ways to drive value and deliver real results in an ever-changing business environment. This type of leadership allows individuals and organizations to thrive at the edge of chaos, inspiring the innovation and creativity needed to develop new products and technologies, even new business models that can lead to sustainable competitive advantage in the new economy. This new form of leading is called "transformational leadership." The context for transformational leadership includes a kind of visionary acumen that can articulate winning and success in a way that captures the imagination of others. In doing so, like-minded contributors can be invited to add their views to amplify the meaning and purpose of the company such that everyone is inspired to do their best work and serve the greater needs of the enterprise and its customers. Transformational leaders are primarily dependent on committed followers and influence through relational power.

Before you try to determine which kind of leader you are—you are probably both. Most of us have to navigate between the two worlds of short-term and long-term expectations. I do know a few leaders who are strictly transactional but the de-

mands of a knowledge-based economy are making them fewer and farther between.

The real challenge of leadership is allowing the time for your organization and people to be transformed. Leaders tend to be lightning rods for both negative and positive energy. Consequently, disapproval and criticism can easily turn the transformational leader into a transactional leader.

Back to Bill

I have observed that the great leaders are able to endure the short-term criticism to nurture long-term possibilities. One way is by using their credibility to sponsor others. I discovered that much of Bill Shumard's job is sponsoring others, from his players to his coaches to his president. He perhaps more than anybody else knows his livelihood is dependent on the performance of others and yet he will use his credibility to create space between short-term scrutiny and long-term expectations—the space that people grow in, the space that is necessary for transformation. In most cases, be it a new hire or a change initiative, things get worse before they get better. It takes a special leader to allow their credibility to be questioned until their ideas or new hires have their own credibility. Go Bill and go Beach!

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¹ Kinicki, Angelo, and Brian Williams. *Management: A Practical Introduction*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003