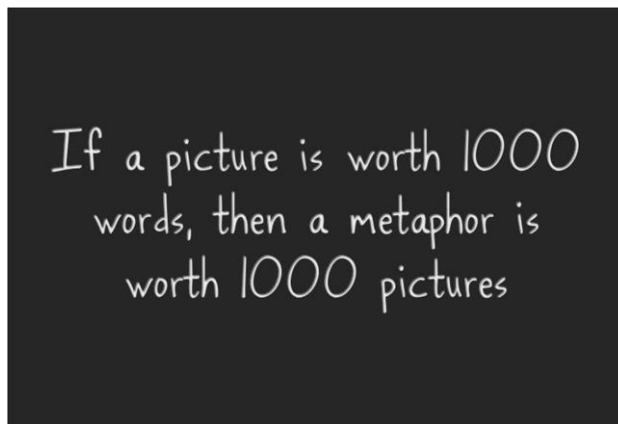


3 Reasons Why Metaphors are Powerful

Dr. Peter Fuda

In my previous blog post, I introduced 7 Metaphors for Leadership Transformation [See below], which were derived from doctoral research findings on Leadership Transformation. These include Fire (motivation), Snowball (accountability and momentum), Master Chef (frameworks, tools and strategies), Coach (coaching), Mask (authenticity), Movie (self-reflection) and Russian Dolls (journey).

The metaphors were forged in the brutally honest reflections of a select group of successful leaders, and since then, my colleagues and I have used them to explain, inspire, and accelerate leadership transformation in leaders at all levels, in all types of organizations, all around the world.



I have already gotten a sense for the potential of these seven metaphors from my many speaking engagements and interactions with leaders and change agents over the past 12 months. To my great enjoyment, the question and answer periods

would often entail audience members taking one of the metaphors in a direction that I had not conceived of at all.

There are three key reasons why I believe metaphors are powerful catalysts for transformation:

1. They open not close thinking. The seven metaphors listed above are designed to be generative in nature. Unlike lists, steps and formulas, which typically are rigid and don't allow interpretation and personalization, the nature of metaphors is that they can be unfolded. They allow us to open not close thinking, to inspire not restrict creativity, and to invite the reader to discover complementary and related meanings and applications.

2. They make complex stuff simple. We use a saying in my organization, given to me by a great mentor; "if a picture is worth a thousand words, then a metaphor is worth a thousand pictures." So for example, if I was to try and engage leaders in the theoretical basis for my approach to leadership transformation, I would be met with yawns – or worse. On the other hand, I have to be careful not to oversimplify what can be deep and multifaceted learnings. These are both challenges leaders face every day. Metaphors fill the space in between these extremes – they invite people into the idea, like a door into a big house. It's much easier to

explore the idea once you're inside it (yes, I just used a metaphor to explain the power of metaphor).

3. They are familiar. I imagine if I'd come up with a seven step model for leadership transformation, people would find it hard to recount each step – even on a good day. And yet it seems very easy for leaders to remember and access these seven metaphors in their everyday work. Their familiarity means leaders can recall them easily, which is helpful when trying to change entrenched behavior – even when you're having a bad day. Their familiarity also allows leaders to talk about them effectively with a group. As the organizational theorist Karl Weick once wrote, "People see more things than they can describe in words."

BRINGING METAPHORS TO LIFE THROUGH STORY

A final thought on the power of metaphor. For me, a metaphor on its own is still not as impactful as a metaphor within a story. On their own they are interesting and eye opening, with the stories they are insightful and thought provoking.



Dr. Peter Fuda is an international authority on business and leadership transformation. As a researcher, consultant, business leader, speaker and published author in Harvard Business Review, Peter's approaches to transformation have impacted across the globe.

Source: <http://www.peterfuda.com/2012/11/01/7-metaphors-for-leadership-transformation/>

FUDA'S SEVEN METAPHORS FOR LEADERSHIP TRANSFORMATION



1. FIRE: The motivational forces that initiate and sustain transformation efforts; including a burning platform and burning ambition, as well as personal and organizational reasons for change.

The Fire, or the big why is actually a crucial part of how leaders transform. As Nietzsche said, "he who has a why to live can bear almost any how". Fire is central to the other six metaphors, because if the fire goes out, all other factors are redundant.

2. SNOWBALL: A virtuous snowball of accountability that propels the change effort forward; starting with the leader, and building momentum as others are 'swept up' in the journey.

Momentum is contingent upon getting a critical mass of leaders on the journey, exiting those who are not committed, and embedding constructive leadership in the organisation's systems and structures. At this point, the snowball is almost impossible to stop.

3. MASTER CHEF: Artful application of the 'leadership science' (frameworks, tools and strategies), which enable a leader to advance from amateur cook to 'master' chef.

Pioneering French chef Marcel Boulestin once said "cooking is not chemistry, it's an art. It requires instinct and taste rather than exact measurements". Similarly, transformation is accelerated when leaders work fluidly within a recipe (change frameworks), and artfully deploy their utensils (tools) and cooking methods (strategies).

4. COACH: A team of consultant(s), colleagues and supporters that collectively coach a leader toward their aspirations.

The leader is likened to captain of a sporting team who receives coaching from a variety of sources, both on-field and off-field. Coaching is most powerful when all groups identify mutually beneficial outcomes from the leader's transformation, and create a trusting environment for that coaching to take place.

5. MASK: Concealment of imperfections, or adopting a persona, which is misaligned with a leader's authentic self, values or aspirations.

The mask is a heavy burden to uphold; it creates inner conflict with a leader's deeply held values and aspirations, and can negatively impact on important relationships. When leaders drop their mask in favor of being their 'authentic self', the power this unleashes is atomic in scale; they get more done, build more trust, have far more enriching interactions and feel more fulfilled.

6. MOVIE: Processes of self-awareness and reflection, which allow a leader 'edit' their performance, and direct a 'movie' in line with their leadership vision.

Often, leaders find themselves in their own version of Groundhog Day, living the same reality day after day with the same result. After many visits to the editing suite, leaders can hone

their reflective capacity, and eventually, learn how to slow down their movie. From this place of stillness, leaders can draw upon past learnings, and their ever expanding repertoire of tools and strategies, and choose a better response – in real time.

7. RUSSIAN DOLLS: A complimentary set of journeys that interact with a leader's personal journey of transformation.

A leader's journey personal journey never exists in isolation; there is most often a team journey, an organizational journey, and a journey of the up-line environment such as the corporate parent. And there can be even more journeys, or 'dolls' in the set. When all of the dolls fit neatly within one another, they have the potential to travel well together. Conversely, whenever one doll tries to pull in a different direction, its proximity to the other dolls ensures that it doesn't get very far.

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Our original research centered around seven leaders of CEO status from my management consulting practice. Their success in transforming themselves, their leadership teams, and their organizations had been well documented. They had seen radical improvement in 360-degree feedback on their personal effectiveness and the effectiveness of their team, along with significant gains for their organizations in measures like financial performance, customer approval, and employee engagement.

Based on my level of intimacy and trust with each of these seven leaders, we sought to develop a rich and contextual understanding of leadership transformation through their eyes. Their humility and preparedness to be vulnerable was paramount to the findings, with each leader giving me license to tell the 'warts and all' version of their stories.

We captured these stories through a series of lengthy interviews, conducted a rigorous linguistic analysis, and discovered several themes common to all seven in the challenges they had faced and the strategies they had used to meet those challenges. In subsequent conversations, we found that the best way to elicit a deep and broad discussion of those key themes and to describe the leaders' mastery of what they had learned was through the use of metaphor.

Over the last two years, I have tested and applied these metaphors in consulting, speaking and teaching engagements to more than 10,000 leaders on four continents. They have proven to be a reliable catalyst for purposeful reflection and meaningful action.

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