



## The power of paradigms

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There is a quote that has been inspiring me for over 15 years that I'd like to share with you. It's an Albert Einstein quote that I came across while studying Dr. Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People:

"The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level  
of thinking we were at when we created them." *Albert Einstein*

For me, this quote is all about paradigms. Paradigms are the way we see the world, how we think about our job, our teams and ourselves. This is one of the most powerful concepts I've come across. You can deliberately identify your paradigms and change them to your benefit.

Here's some examples of how I've endeavored to leverage paradigms in my leadership over the years.

1. Create a shared vision (paradigm) for your team. What kind of team do you want to be? What does success look like for your team? What do you want the team to be known for? You can lead your team through questions like this and incorporate various techniques to create a mission statement for the team. Once the entire team has a shared paradigm for the team, it will pave the way to collectively get there. It can also be used as a litmus test to ensure decisions are aligned to your shared vision.
2. Determine the current state of your team. In one of my roles we went through a process as a team to understand our current state from the perspective of our customers. First, we made a list of all of our customers. This list included advertising, buyers, vendors, stores, operations etc. Next we anonymously ranked how we thought these groups would rate our team on a scale of 1-10. We tallied the results and we were averaging around 6 out of 10. Hardly a score that we could be proud of. We discussed the results and how this made us feel. Did we want to be known as a 6/10 team? Hell no. Immediately we recognized that we needed to do better as a team and overnight things improved. We created a new paradigm of wanting to improve and we did.
3. You don't need to reinvent wheel. Leadership literature is packed with models that you can adopt and implement within your teams. By using models you create paradigms in the team with common language that the team can all relate to. The model I've most often implemented with my teams in the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. Most leadership models I've been exposed to cover similar concepts, just packaged differently. It doesn't necessarily matter which one you use. The important part is to choose a model that resonates with you, your team and your business. Then adopt the model with your team and implement the models paradigms into how you work.

The next time you find yourself with a "significant problem", think about Albert Einstein's words. Evaluate your current paradigms and tap into your imagination to bring your team to a new "level of thinking". You might just find the solution you've been looking for.



## The paradigm of potential

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“People become great if you treat them in terms of their potential.”

Dr. Stephen Covey

When I first came across this quote, I was immediately influenced by it. It occurred to me that adopting the paradigm of potential would lead to exciting new opportunities. If we want to grow and prosper, we must look to the future, use our imaginations, and tap into our potential.

Here are some ways I've attempted to tap into the paradigm of potential:

- Create a paradigm of “potential” within your team. When I first came across this concept, I started asking the following question in my staff's performance reviews: “How would you rate your performance versus your potential?” It is a very powerful question. It requires people to think deeply about what they may be capable of and contrast that against their current performance. My experience is that people (including myself) are generally operating well below their potential. They are caught up in their daily tasks, hitting deadlines and just making it through the days and weeks. When they start to explore the concept of their potential, it is like turning on a switch. They become aware that they have more capabilities to tap into and start to recognize some of the obstacles that are in their way.
- Remove obstacles for your staff. Your role as their leader is to help get obstacles out of the way and facilitate unleashing their potential. As people start exercising their potential, you'll find that there's new ground being broken, ideas that challenge existing norms and sacred cows. These are challenging areas to get into. The easy way out is to tamp this down and stick with the status quo. Don't allow yourself to fall for this temptation. Push through, get past the resistance. The destination will be worth the effort.
- Celebrate the journey. A presupposition of NLP (Neuro-linguistic Programming) is: “There is no failure, only feedback.” Celebrate victories and defeats equally. When something doesn't work, take the opportunity to learn from it. What didn't work? Why didn't it work? What could be done differently? Tapping into potential requires taking risks and being open to the feedback you get when you try new things.
- Create opportunities to reset. When you start something new, you have momentum and excitement. As time passes, the shiny new object will lose its luster and we can find ourselves settling back into the hustle and bustle of our daily tasks. It's key to have an opportunity to stop and reset. Schedule a regular session to step out of the daily grind, and review where you and your team are at. Treat it like a retrospective. Look back and get a sense for how far you've come. Internalize your achievements and get charged up for the future. Think of it like a pit stop in a race. Refuel, change your tires, and get ready for the next phase of the race.

There are few things more exciting as a leader than being able to help people tap into their potential. I'll end where I started, with this great quote:

“People become great if you treat them in terms of their potential.”

Dr. Stephen Covey