



## Creating Alignment in Your Leadership

By Bryan Shelton

Consider the following question: *Is what you say and do to motivate others aligned with the type of leader you want to be?* Typically there are two reactions to this question; the immediate reaction is something like, “Of course it is...” followed by the more accurate answer of, “Well, not all the time. I wish I did some things differently.” Creating alignment in leadership behaviors can often be a difficult task without deliberate focus and practice. This is because leadership behaviors are influenced by the same principles that influence all other behavior; specifically they are influenced by consequences. Because

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**– Bryan Shelton**

of this, our own leadership behaviors (desired or undesired), are strengthened or weakened over time by our environment. If we want our behavior to change, we have to change our environment or our relationship with the consequences we experience.

## HOW WE INFLUENCE OTHERS

Before we get into managing our own behavior, it is important to quickly address how we influence other people's behavior. We influence others by what we say and what we do.

**Leaders don't get to deliberately pick and choose when they influence others and when they don't—quite simply, the way in which a leader behaves motivates others to do something.**

What we talk about, the questions we ask, how we talk about things and the emphasis or emotion we put on topics all influence other people's behavior. Our verbal behavior can be a consequence itself (e.g., asking, "Why would you do that?!"). Or, it can alter the reinforcing or punishing value of other consequences people experience. For example, when companies talk about production as if it's the only measure important to daily operations, it will likely increase the reinforcing value of saving time and therefore make behaviors that save time, whether desirable or undesirable, more likely. When leaders talk, they are influencing behavior. What we do also plays a role in motivating others. What people see us doing,

decisions and policies we enact or ignore, what we approach and what we avoid, all have influence. Leaders don't get to deliberately pick and choose when they influence others and when they don't—quite simply, the way in which a leader behaves motivates others to do something. It just may be behaviors that are not desired by you or the organization.

## HOW WE INFLUENCE OUR OWN BEHAVIOR

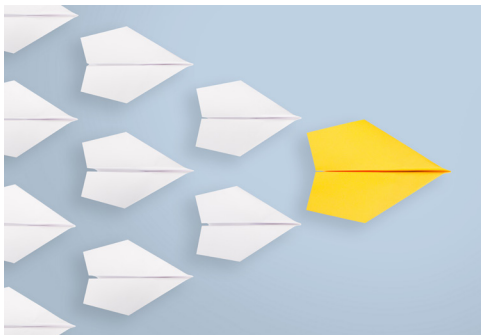
As mentioned, our leadership behaviors are strengthened or weakened by the consequences we experience. Many sources of consequences are external such as senior leadership, peers and direct reports, organizational design, and natural or work process consequences. However, there is one source of consequences that is internal—our internal verbal behaviors. It should come as no surprise that we self-talk, and deliver consequences to ourselves all the time. Our internal behavior influences our external behavior. This is important for leaders to understand because in many instances people develop, and then internally wrestle with, rules that are either ineffective, such as, "I should not have to give



feedback as high performance is an expectation here” or they create avoidance behavior such as, “If I give that person constructive feedback, he/she will not like me.” This type of internal behavior can weaken good leadership behaviors and strengthen undesirable leadership behaviors. Combine this with the external consequences experienced and leader behavior on a daily basis could be completely misaligned with the type of leader someone wants to be. For example, saying, “Our employees are our best asset” while at the same time underpaying, understaffing, and avoiding uncomfortable conversations or providing feedback only when something is wrong, could be examples of behaviors misaligned with values.

### WHAT CAN WE DO TO HAVE BETTER INFLUENCE OVER OUR OWN BEHAVIOR

A leader’s goal should be to create alignment between what they say and do with who they want to be—to move past short-term reinforcers or punishers experienced daily and instead to access more meaningful, long-term reinforcers. To help us make this shift in our behavior we can use behavioral science to take notice of and redirect, or develop new,



internal behaviors that will allow us access to those long-term reinforcers. The process outlined below is by no means the complete story to help leaders through this process, but it will get you started moving in the right direction.

The process begins with clearly defining your long-term reinforcers, or motivators, for the type of leader you want to be. By doing this you will discover your values or who you want to be as a leader. Consider and answer the following questions:

- What things do you want to be known for?
- What do you want people to say about you when you’re not around?
- What do you want to achieve in your career or life?
- What do you want to be able to accomplish when you retire?

Identifying your values will help align day-to-day behaviors with the long-term reinforcers. Be as clear as possible here. Maybe you want to be known as someone who made life better for the people around them or you want to ride off on your motorcycle the day you retire and never look back. Whatever your values statements are, clarifying them will help determine what long-term reinforcers are meaningful to you. Once you have clarified your values,

identify key behaviors that will move you towards obtaining or living those values. These are the behaviors you will say or do on a daily or weekly basis to help ensure there is alignment with your intentions and the impact you have on others. Define these key behaviors as clearly as possible to make them actionable and observable. For example, behaviors might sound to you something like “Provide pinpointed feedback to help someone develop in their career” or “Always make decisions that place employee safety over the bottom line.” Clarifying these behaviors help us to develop better “rules” and counteract some of the ineffective rules we have created for our own behavior.

Finally, consider how you will align or create short-term reinforcers with the behaviors you identified. These reinforcers can come from your internal behavior or external sources. What do you do or tell yourself when

you engage in the desired behavior? How will you include others (peers, senior leaders, team members) in providing you with feedback and positive reinforcement? How will you align incentives or other sources of consequences? Aligning or creating short-term reinforcers will help strengthen the desired leadership behaviors you identified which will help move you towards your values and long-term reinforcers.

Misaligned leadership can wreak havoc within organizations, creating a workplace that actively disengages team members and puts the long-term success at risk for short-term gains. Creating alignment between day-to-day behaviors and long-term reinforcers makes it more likely that the impact you have on others will be moving in a desired direction and will help to create an environment that supports becoming the leader you want to be.



## [About the Author]

BRYAN SHELTON.



Bryan applies his knowledge and expertise in strategic planning to help organizations align employee performance with company goals. He helps clients create

improvement across a variety of business metrics including company growth, profitability, customer service, vision alignment, leadership development, and culture change. He also helps clients implement process improvement initiatives, improve sales results and using performance-pay systems to help drive company results. In his spare time, Bryan enjoys fly fishing and rock climbing.

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