Musings: How will Who Lead Whom to do What, When, Where and Why?

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By Mike Jay

In this Muse, Mike uses the meme schema and the OPPOR + Unity acronym framework to identify the critical vectors in sorting out how to have powerful conversations or interactions with leaders about what’s important. The deeper conversation will have to wait until Mike’s next muse.

It’s been a while since I worked out my “Muse” muscles, so I may be a little rusty. I certainly intend to misbehave so let’s give it a go with coaching and communications.

When John first asked me to contribute a muse for this issue, I wondered about how to keep you interested, as well as give you a TPOV (teachable point of view) to play with afterwards. I often wonder if I’m even qualified to talk about communication. I know many people that know me who would say I’m the last person who would be writing on something like communication!

Over a 21 year coaching career, even someone like me can learn something valuable about communication. What I’m about to say, I’ve never formalized in this way before, so I acknowledge that this is raw. Nevertheless, I think it will give you some advantages as a coach, or a person being coached, or someone trying to figure out how to talk about coaching and leadership in an organization.

Certainly, somewhere in all these years of writing muses, I’ve mentioned memes, but in case I didn’t, I’ll refer you to literature produced by Google for a quick primer. Wikipedia comes up first and that will suffice for a starting point. E.O. Wilson, writing in Consilience in 1999, called a gene a “biological schema” and a meme a “cultural schema.” He noted the gene as primary schema and the meme as secondary schema—I have no reason in my experience to doubt him—which places the meme in pretty heady territory.

Now why is memetics important in communication?

Clearly, I’m now going to give you a ride down the “rabbit hole.” Over time, in fooling with memetics, I could never find anyone who had created taxonomy of a meme, so I did; it can be found at http://www.emergenics.com/meme. I concluded that in order to understand communication and how it worked in the bowels of misunderstanding, especially for coaching, one had to understand what they were dealing with in order to communicate with greater precision.
To communicate well with clients so they could assimilate what I was saying, I had to understand what to communicate. In other words, I needed to solve or answer the question that leaders have to ask themselves continually: How will who lead whom to do what, when, where, and why?

Without dragging this on much farther, here’s what I came up with and why I did. I identified six layers of communication vectors, and all of them offer opportunity. With this, I formed an acronym-style framework, so it becomes the teachable point of view I promised – OPPOR + unity, where the following is important to remember for coaches:

- **Openings**
- **Possibilities**
- **Plans**
- **Outcomes**
- **RightAction**
- + (for the ‘t’)

**Unity**

This also is part of another TPOV (a lagniappe for you) called OPTIMULL and you can read more about it at [www.optimull.com](http://www.optimull.com). That aside, you can see how a communication model can be constructed quickly to answer the question I posed above—a quick guideline for communication—with a set of memes that can be used to structure the coaching conversation, or as I like to refer to it, an *interaction*. David Whyte called a conversation something between two people where you don’t know where you are going to end up. I used the idea that an interaction is a defined path that two people can travel together and the definite ending or destination is an agreement.

So while people in organizations have conversations, coaches better have interactions in mind. Come back next issue and I’ll dig dimensionally deeper into this whole memetic thing. I’ll show you how I resolved where to insert my own communication that allows the client to assimilate and grow more quickly aware of how to answer the essential question.
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