

What do you do in your work with CEOs?

I serve as a knowledgeable guide that helps CEOs and other leaders access more of their capability and use their genuine skills and abilities more effectively as a result of greater self-knowledge.

How does your work help business?

Scientific studies on the neuroscience of leadership have indicated that most people bring only 10 to 30 % of their available energy to work. This includes leaders as well. The problem is that even though they could contribute a great deal more their mental models of themselves make it difficult if not impossible to see this. Even though great ideas are generated within these limitations, execution is limited by the mental models of the leadership and the workforce. The point of greatest leverage for improving performance is expanding mental models that the leadership's hold of themselves. When leaders increase their awareness of how their own mind works they become engaged in the early stages of profound learning which I would define as changing their mental models. Once change occurs at this level the brain has an opportunity to engage the frontal lobes which can enhance creativity and stimulate innovation. The result is a broadened view of self and one's relationship to work all of which influence culture and can be validated using business metrics. In essence, they are now in a better position to both create and implement the competitive advantages enjoyed by their organization.

Why is leadership psychology (e.g., mental models) so important in creating a vibrant and innovative organizational culture?

The leader sets the upper limit on what is attainable in an organization. Because the leader is in the position of greatest leverage, he or she has the greatest influence on the organizational culture.

Many leaders act as if their view of the world—especially the business world—is synonymous with reality. But ambitions themselves are created by many psychological factors. Like all of us, the leaders view the world through psychological lenses—mental models—developed early in life, before the frontal lobes are fully developed. Because of this, their conscious motives—excellence, profits, even contributions to the world—may be less important than what energizes their drive. In other words, they may think they are pursuing objective goals but their real underlying goals can be quite different.

Sustainable success coupled with satisfaction and fulfillment, are possible in direct proportion to a person's level of self-knowledge. If that person happens to be a business leader the effects of this are magnified. In other words, leaders who are curious about how their own mind works are in the best position to encourage and sustain a committed and motivated workforce who is free to make mistakes in the service of creativity and innovation.

[What do you think keeps business leaders from implementing clearly advantageous changes that can be demonstrated to contribute to business success?](#)

The short answer is relative success! In other words, they are experiencing success in accordance with their conscious ambitions and use business metrics to validate that they are succeeding. For example, if their ambition is propelled by the deep physical shame that they are not enough, will never be enough, and can never measure up, then they may experience external success but fall short of their leadership potential. Like early stage undetected blood pressure or blood sugar elevations their symptoms are not evident in the short run. Leaders and followers behave as if the long run will simply be an extension of the short run. But, cause and effect are not always closely related in time and space. At some point followers will be faced with at least two choices: to demand only enough of themselves to

comply with leadership demands, or leave the organization for one they can commit themselves to fully.

In many respects the motives underlying the leader's ambition influence the workforce more than the ostensible motives that leader presents to themselves and others. In other words it all depends on what propels the leader's aspirations. Below the surface of our professional life are mental models based on unresolved parent-child relationships, unrealistic emotional demands of fellow workers, refusal to come to terms with a traumatic childhood, longing for self protection, and immunity from the consequences of one's actions at any cost.

In essence, our mental models provide a relatively restrictive perspective of reality. Like "psychological lenses," they not only determine what we see but also suggest potential responses available to us based on what we see. We do not interpret the world we see; instead, we see the world we can interpret. This alone perpetuates the psychological inertia that keeps us on the same path in our negotiated interchange with the world. An organization's capacity to develop a culture based on creativity and innovation (critical in a knowledge based economy) is a direct function of top leadership's commitment to self-knowledge based on personal growth and change

[What are mental models? Why are they important?](#)

Mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations or images that influence how we interpret the world and how we take action. They influence how we see, what we see, how we interpret what we see, and how we respond to what we see. They are often tacit and operate like invisible lenses through which we experience ourselves and the world outside of us.

A technological comparison might help to clarify the concept. We enter this world with a new operating system with an intact source code. As we grow and develop we must learn to regulate our lives to conform to the demands

of social living. In addition, we will encounter trauma in various forms and the hurts and rubs associated with living. In order to make sense out of our world, we create mental models that help us to negotiate the situations in which we find ourselves. To return to our metaphor, our source code becomes contaminated and is not able to process software in accordance with the original hardware design. Mental models can be thought of as a software patch which allows us to make use of connectivity but at a higher cost than the original design would allow. Objective self-knowledge is like anti-virus software that cleans the source code and greatly improves the effectiveness of software utilization.

What is self-knowledge?

Self-knowledge is basically making tacit mental models conscious and applying that knowledge to understanding how one's own mind works. For example, if an executive has a deeply embedded insecurity based on early loss (e.g. traumatic death of a parent at an early age, alcoholic parent, etc.) they might tacitly and unintentionally create instability in their organization to account for unsafe feelings they are unwilling to face in themselves. In this case they might even hire a consultant and structure their assignment to further disrupt the organization in accordance with the leader's desire not to become aware of their own internal pain. This is an important reason why the leaders themselves must be willing to start objectifying their own mental models. Learning is continually evolving your mental models is the service of reality and greater clarity.

Why do you think that a leader's level of self-knowledge is critical to formulating an effective business strategy?

A leader should be a calming influence on an organization. That doesn't mean lack of energy or drive but not contributing to unnecessary suffering in the organization. The leader who knows themselves (i.e. how their mind works) is more likely to have a realistic picture of their organization and

their direct reports. When the person at the top knows themselves as they truly are (e.g. definition of humility) then they have greater access to their own abilities and can see more clearly what needs to be done and how best to accomplish it. Humility, genuine passion and interpersonal effectiveness are closely linked.

What is the relationship between self-knowledge, motivation and performance?

Self-knowledge is generally associated with optimal levels of motivation. Although the effects of self-knowledge can differ depending on what a person is dealing with, it is unlikely that genuine self-knowledge would negatively affect performance. To understand is to forgive. Genuine self-knowledge is associated with serenely bearing the pain of being displeasing to ourselves. That is the essence of self-forgiveness and is the basis for personal growth, including empathy for others. Once that is in place the stage is set for people to be at their best: Creative tension, increased energy and innovation are born in environments headed by these types of leaders.

What is the best way to improve performance?

Well, we can start by saying that the carrot and the stick only works in very restricted circumstances. Pink contends that the practice of using financial incentives to increase the productivity of workers engaged in tasks requiring problem solving, inventiveness, and conceptual understanding can actually have just the opposite effect. Numerous studies cited by Pink, conducted over several decades, have shown that financial incentives and other carrot/stick approaches to motivation actually reduce productivity, creativity and innovation. The best way to improve performance is for the organization to encourage voluntary commitment based on identification with the goals

and aspirations of the organization and belief in the leadership's commitment to the personal growth of all members, including themselves.

Why is commitment more important in the 21st century knowledge-based business world?

Increasingly, knowledge is the product of the information age. While many industrial age products could be produced at acceptable levels based on compliance, corporations of the future will increasingly rely on innovation to create competitive advantages in their markets. Genuine innovation is the product of inductive thinking that cannot be demanded or coerced. The very process of creative thinking requires emotional buy-in. To offer their best, knowledge workers must be committed to the vision and mission of the company based on identification between their company's growth and their own. Commitment is a function of opportunities for personal growth.

What are some things leaders can do to begin increasing their self-knowledge?

Do the harder thing. This can often lead to a disconfirming experience and develops the frontal lobes.

Gather information from others—dialogue. List the things you find intolerable in others and ask trusted persons if they can see any of those attributes in you.

Remind yourself that ambiguity is not equivalent to danger. Learn to tolerate anxiety without taking action to reduce your discomfort.

Be skeptical of your assumptions. Ask others what they think.

Engage in self-talk that disconfirm your assumptions

Change habitual ways of dealing with high levels of stress by overriding hard-wired brain tendencies. Talking things out with trusted others can be very helpful.

Take a long-term perspective (long-term self interest creates better results than short-term self interest)

Think about the perspective of your direct reports. Work at putting yourself in other's shoes. It can reveal your tacit mental models.

Listen to Leadership and Self-Deception (published by the Arbinger Institute) **in audio form.**