



Advanced Leadership Strategies

Deep Dive Session



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Who are we and what business do we have talking about leadership strategies?



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Signature Science, LLC

- Managed projects for 30+ years
- Managed staff for 30+ years
- Director, SigSci Forensics



Kris Cano

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- 30 years in Forensic Science
- Forensic Services Director at City of Scottsdale
- Serves on numerous boards



Acknowledgements

- **Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge**
 - Written by Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus
- **7 Habits of Highly Successful People**
 - Written by Stephen Covey



Agenda

- **First Segment: VUCA Leadership Framework**
 - Alignment in a crime laboratory setting
 - What VUCA is and why it works
 - Tabletop exercise of VUCA in action
- **Second Segment: Leadership Effects on Teams**
 - Where you are now and where you want to be
 - Leaning into your and your team's superpowers
 - Activities to practice your leadership pillars



VUCA

Volatility

Uncertainty

Complexity

Ambiguity



VUCA History

- Concept first introduced in 1985 via the book *Leaders. The Strategies for Taking Charge* by Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus
- Term VUCA used by the U.S. Army War College in 1987 to describe the complex world that resulted from the end of the cold war



VUCA – War College Acronym

- **Volatility:** Rapid and unpredictable nature of change
 - Requires adaptability and agility, leaders must embrace volatility and be open to new ideas and approaches
 - Leaders should foster a culture of learning and innovation to navigate volatile situations
- **Uncertainty:** Unpredictability of events and issues
 - Leaders must be able to handle ambiguity and make informed decisions even with incomplete or contradictory information
 - Requires leaders to develop good judgment and intuition to effectively address uncertainty



VUCA – War College Acronym

- **Complexity:** Intertwined forces and issues that muddy cause-and-effect relationships
 - Need to navigate complex situations and understand the interdependencies
 - Leaders should think holistically and develop a systems perspective to manage complexity effectively
- **Ambiguity:** Unclear realities and potential misunderstandings due to mixed messages
 - Leaders need a level of tolerance for ambiguity and embrace it as an opportunity for growth and creativity



VUCA in Today's Forensic Laboratory

- **Volatility:** Rapid and unpredictable nature of change

EXAMPLES?

- Availability of grant funds
- Staff attrition or unexpected leave of key team member
- Sudden case surges (major crimes, mass incidents)
- Legislative changes (e.g., House Bill 1422 in Texas)

Other examples in your world?



Response to Volatility

- **Mindset:** As leaders, we absorb volatility, so analysts don't absorb risks
- **Focus:** Stabilize the system – Prevent whiplash without slowing justice

Does your team stay true to your vision in volatile times?



VUCA in Today's Forensic Laboratory

- **Uncertainty:** Unpredictability of events and issues

EXAMPLES?

- Government administration changes (federal and state)
- Emerging technologies with unclear validation paths
- Legal interpretations shifting over time
- Pandemic anyone?

What else?



Response to Uncertainty

- **Mindset:** We actually don't need certainty – we need defensible reasoning
- **Focus:** Create decision confidence and help staff act professionally without perfect clarity

Can you model “I don't know yet” with credibility?



VUCA in Today's Forensic Laboratory

- **Complexity:** Intertwined forces and issues that muddy cause-and-effect relationships
 - Generational biases and staff interactions
 - Interdependence between evidence intake, analysis, reporting, and testimony coupled with technology, policy and human factors colliding

Other examples?



Response to Complexity

- **Mindset:** Complex systems fail – our job is to reinforce them
- **Focus:** Simplify without dumbing down, and reduce friction while preserving rigor

Are you taking the time to build relationships outside the crime lab walls *before* a complex issue arises??



VUCA in Today's Forensic Laboratory

- **Ambiguity:** Unclear realities and potential misunderstandings due to mixed messages
 - Interpretation thresholds and gray areas associated with analyst judgment
 - Emerging methods without long legal history
 - Ethical dilemmas under pressure to “help the case”

Other thoughts?



Response to Ambiguity

- **Mindset:** When rules are unclear, values become the standard
- **Focus:** Anchoring to principles helps prevent ethical drift under pressure

Are you creating a brave space to have these conversations and are you acknowledging the existence of ambiguity?



VUCA Leadership Framework

- In a crime lab, mistakes have legal consequences, uncertainty is constant, and trust is everything
- VUCA leadership isn't about moving fast at all costs – its about moving deliberately while absorbing chaos



Integrating VUCA

- Trust and psychological safety are force multipliers in VUCA environments
- High trust = early warnings = fewer catastrophic failures
- Why it matters in crime labs:
 - Analysts must speak up about errors
 - Leaders need bad news early
- Leadership in Practice
 - Reward transparency over speed
 - Respond to errors with learning, not blame
 - Publicly support staff when decisions were defensible
 - Admit leadership mistakes openly



Effects of Good Leadership

- Analysts feel protected when they raise concerns
- Court testimony reflects clarity, not overconfidence
- Backlogs are managed transparently, not hidden
- External pressure never changes scientific conclusions
- Staff trust leadership to do the *right* thing, not the easy thing



Break Time!

Exercise Time!

- Your crime laboratory serves a mid-size jurisdiction and is ANAB-accredited
- You have a DNA backlog, limited staff, and are preparing for a high-profile homicide trial involving political attention and intense media coverage
- A new analyst completed analysis on touch DNA recovered from a weapon. The profile is low-level, complex, and partially interpretable
- Decide as a leadership team what they will do, say, and document



Here comes *Volatility*

The prosecutor calls: trial date moved up **30 days**

- Media requests confirmation that DNA “matches the suspect”
- Two analysts are out unexpectedly

- What decisions must be made *today*?
- What standards are absolutely non-negotiable?
- Who communicates externally—and how much?



How about some *Uncertainty* in the mix?

- Analyst reports mixture interpretation is borderline
 - A peer reviewer disagrees on statistical significance
 - Case notes document assumptions clearly—but results are not definitive
-
- Do you proceed, pause, or escalate?
 - How do you document defensibility?
 - What support does the analyst need right now?



Let's throw in *Complexity* just for fun

- Prosecutor wants a meeting with lab leadership *without* the analyst present
- Defense has filed a discovery motion on lab backlog practices
- QA flags that similar cases are handled inconsistently across sections

- Who attends which meetings?
- How do you maintain role clarity?
- What system-level issues are now visible?



Ahhh some *Ambiguity* ...

- There is no explicit SOP guidance on this interpretation threshold
- Prosecutor suggests “clearer wording” would help the jury
- Analyst expresses discomfort with how conclusions may be perceived

- What principles guide your decision now?
- How do you support ethical neutrality?
- What language *will not* be used in reports or testimony?



Key Take Aways

- **Volatility** – Stability comes from standards not speed
- **Uncertainty** – Document reasoning, not just conclusions
- **Complexity** – Protect seams between roles and systems
- **Ambiguity** – Principles must outrank pressure

- Reflection Questions:
 - What leadership behavior today most protected scientific integrity?
 - What changed when leadership stopped being about *doing*?



Leadership

“Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.”

– Warren Bennis



Definition Check

- Management: “To bring about, to accomplish, to have charge of or responsibility for, to conduct”
- Leadership: “Influencing or guiding in direction, course, action, opinion

**Managers are people who do things right and
leaders are people who do the right things.**



How Does a Person Become a Leader?

- Long ago leadership skills were considered something you were born into (e.g., via inheritance such as a line of royalty)
 - Means you could not learn to lead or strive to become a leader
- Replaced by idea that great events made leaders
 - Means that you were in the right place under the right circumstances
- Now we know that leadership can be a learned skillset
 - Leaders can and do emerge and reveal themselves by their actions

But How?



Four Critical Pillars of Leadership

- Emotional Intelligence
- Strategic Positioning
- Purpose-Driven Vision
- Intentional Communication



Pillar 1: Emotional Intelligence



- The capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically:
 - *“Emotional intelligence is the key to both personal and professional success”*
 - Emotional intelligence is a leadership skill, not a personality trait – and it is a choice we continually make
 - Leaders set the emotional temperature of the team
 - Psychological safety precedes performance



Emotional Intelligence (cont'd)



- In *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People*, Stephen Covey made some interesting points about emotional intelligence
 - Focus is on self awareness, intentionally choosing to behave positively and proactively, and basing your center on values or principles
 - The key to the ability to deal with change is a changeless sense of who you are, what you are about, and what you value
 - Consider your *emotional bank account* (i.e., the amount of trust that has built up in a relationship) with others and whether you are running a surplus or deficit
 - Deposits are made through courtesy, honesty, keeping your commitments
 - Withdrawals are made by being arbitrary, over-reacting, betraying trust
 - Deposits and withdrawals can be small kindnesses or little cuts, they still can have a profound effect



Emotional Intelligence (cont'd)



- Know your triggers
 - What causes you stress?
 - What are your typical reactions?
 - What is the impact on others?
 - Who pays the price when you are unable to regulate yourself?
 - Role Play
 - Empathy without rescuing
 - Accountability without blame





Practice

Your team missed the grant deadline and will lose funding used to pay the salary of a team member. This grant is your ultimate responsibility; however, you delegated it to a senior member of your team for growth.

How would you conduct the conversation with your employee and with your boss?

Main goals are to:
1. Have empathy without rescuing
2. Take accountability without blame



Pillar 2: Strategic Positioning

- This is where your leadership matters most!
- Leadership is about leverage, not effort
- Not every problem belongs to you
- Saying yes strategically requires saying no intentionally



Establishing Leverage



- Leadership isn't about telling people what to do, it's about finding a way to inspire them so they want to follow your vision
 - Fed through creating a culture of respect, caring and trust
- Attributes needed to inspire:
 - Character: Be trustworthy (e.g., follow through with what you say), be respectful and honest (to be respected and to have people be honest with you), take responsibility
 - Optimism: True leaders have an uncanny way of enrolling people in their vision through their passion and optimism
 - Proactivity: Our behavior is a function of our decisions, not our conditions
 - Make a conscious choice not to respond negatively to external stimuli



Simon Senick, Golden Circle (the Power of 'Why')

- *Why* did the two of us get into leadership?
- *Why* did you get into leadership?
- *Why* did your staff get into their roles?



Effective Delegation

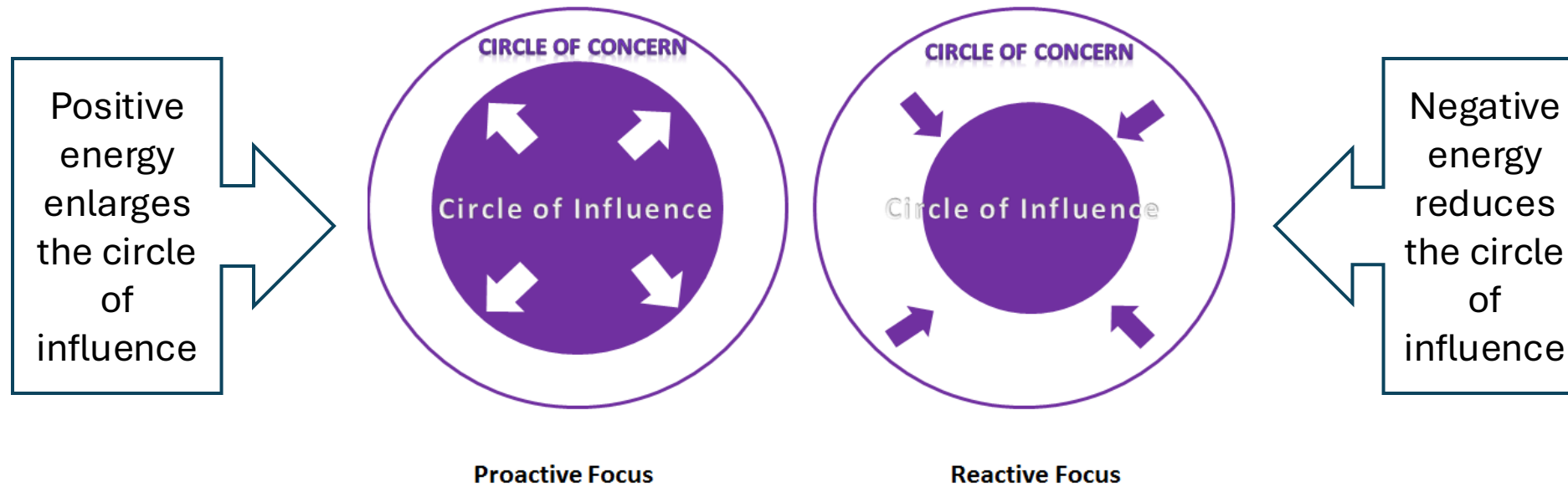


- Two types:
 - Gofer delegation - focused on methods and directs people to execute those methods, involved in every move they make
 - Stewardship delegation - focused on results, not methods; gives people a choice of method and makes them responsible for results
 - Involves clear, mutual understanding of *what* needs to be done instead of *how*
 - Identify resources they can use (human, financial, technical)
 - Provide operating parameters/restrictions and explain consequences (good/bad)
 - Fosters growth in critical thinking
- What is your superpower? What superpowers does your team have?
 - Focus on delegating to match their superpower when possible



Practice

- Influence mapping exercise (self reflection):
 - What decisions do you control?
 - What decisions do you influence?
 - What decisions do you need to let go?



Pillar 3: Purpose-Driven Vision



- Determination: Have purpose and direction and a strong desire to achieve the goals (aka conviction, passion)
 - But in order to create a sense of alignment behind a purpose, the purpose has to resonate with the people you lead
- Initiative: Recognizing our responsibility (response-ability) to make things happen
 - It does NOT mean being pushy or aggressive



Purpose-Driven Vision (cont'd)

- Finish this sentence: I lead to _____ so that _____
- Vision fails when you assume others just “get it”
- Are there abstract goals that you have for your laboratory?
 - Produce quality work in a timely manner
 - Provide public safety



Practice

- Let's practice translating these into:
 - Daily behaviors
 - Decision criteria
 - Team expectations



Pillar 4: Intentional Communication



- We are strengthening clarity, trust, and psychological safety through communication
- Silence is a form of communication
- Consistency builds credibility
- Leaders should narrate change not announce it

- Example language:
 - “What I know / What I don’t know / What we’re doing next”
 - “Here’s how we’ll decide, even if we don’t like the outcome”



Pillar 4 (cont'd)



- '7 Habits' key components on effective communication (the sequence of these three is significant)
 - Leverage your personal credibility to set the stage for the communication
 - Lean into your empathetic side where appropriate, it means you are in touch with the emotional state of your audience
 - Present the information you intended to convey



Practice



- Scenario: We have a case involving public safety as an unknown suspect is shooting people. There is no information on why and the news is reporting that it is a hate crime. You are the laboratory director and have been asked to process shell casings and a key piece of equipment just went down.
- Volunteers needed!
 - Practice delivering bad news to the laboratory
 - Practice providing uncertain information
 - Practice verbalizing values-based decisions



Bonus Material! Servant Leadership*

- Servant leadership is a philosophy and set of practices that enriches the lives of individuals, builds better organizations
 - Focuses on the growth and well-being of employees and other stakeholders
 - Emphasizes that the primary role of a leader is to serve others rather than command or control them
- It is active, not passive
 - Remove obstacles
 - Protect standards
 - Develop others intentionally by seeking to help them grow

* Model developed by Robert K. Greenleaf in the 1970s



Servant Leadership (cont'd)

- Stephen Covey's Habit #6, *Synergize*, speaks to this directly
 - Synergy catalyzes, unifies, and unleashes the greatest powers within people and organizations
 - Valuing the mental, emotional, and psychological differences between people is the essence of synergy
 - Takes humility to realize your own perceptual limitations and value that people interpret things differently
 - Seeing things differently doesn't mean one person is right and the other wrong, both can be 'right'
 - Embracing the creative process is key, but takes a high degree of internal security
 - Many of Covey's examples of synergistic groups begin with someone being open and vulnerable



Servant Leadership (cont'd)

- You can also value the differences within yourself to increase your internal synergy
 - Accessing the intuitive, creative, visual right brain AND the analytical, logical, verbal left brain makes the whole brain work better
 - Can help to catalyze personal creativity
- You can even be synergistic with yourself in the midst of an adversarial environment
 - Allows you not to take insults personally and to look for, and utilize, the good in others



Reflection Time

- What are you doing that helps people grow—and what are you doing that helps yourself feel important?”



“Leadership is a combination of strategy and character. If you must be without one, be without the strategy.”

– General Norman Schwarzkopf
(U.S. Army)

“Quality of character doesn’t make a leader, but the lack of it flaws the entire process.”

– Peter Drucker
(Pioneer in modern management theory)



“Go into any situation and make somebody better, don’t get so caught up in you that you don’t see the qualities in someone else.”

– Coach Mike Krzyzewski aka Coach K
(Duke)



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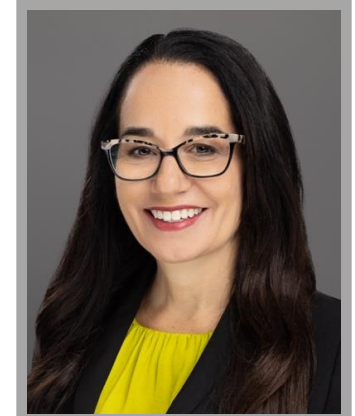
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