

## Pragmatic Psychology: Empowering Leaders of the Future

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### What future could we create if we were to empower?

Practitioners are often in their work with clients trained to look at what doesn't work – not at what does. The question is what this process creates for the clients. What could be possible if we were to embrace a pragmatic approach, encouraging the individual to see beyond their defining diagnosis or disability. Would we be able to inspire leadership?

In our modern society, we have been taught to value leadership in a number of ways: the title someone holds, the power they wield, the publicity they get, the money they make and/or the influence they have on our lives.

The trouble is that all of these factors are based on what an individual is doing. Faced with the expectations of a society that demands they do more – or do more appropriately – in order to deserve a title of 'leader', many individuals shrink from their own innate ability to lead.

One of the most valuable transformations we can facilitate, as practitioners, is to help our clients understand that there are many people of this world who are leaders – not because of what they are doing – but because of who they are being. Their work may never reach the headline news or go viral on social media. They may never have their name written into school text books or have buildings dedicated in their honor ... and yet these quiet leaders influence the people around them in positive, inspiring and valuable ways and lead their little corner of the world into the future.

Yoko Ono once said, "You change the world by being yourself". Using the ethos of pragmatic psychology, it is possible for us to affirm to our clients that a leader is simply someone who decides to follow their own path and invites and inspires others to follow. We have an opportunity to teach that true leadership has nothing to do with power or persuasion; that it arises within us when we choose to be authentic, unique and courageous enough to step away from the crowd.

### Leaders: those who dare to be different

It is my view that many potential (and potent) leaders of our world have been disempowered by a demand that they 'fit the mold'. Too often, individuals are coerced into adopting 'acceptable' – and often ambiguous – leadership behaviors, attributes and habits. People are directed as to who to become; they are told which traits they must embody and enhance to be considered a leader.

However, as history shows us, a leader is simply someone who is aware of what the future requires and is willing to do whatever is required now to create that future. A leader trusts their vision – what they know and what they see as possibility – and they place more priority on this inner GPS than on external validation. We usually look to others to determine what is possible, right, or wrong, but a leader is someone who is willing to (initially) stand apart from the crowd, and to resist conformity.

It is my experience that as long as we are asking individuals to conform, as a society, we are disempowering them from being able to lead. As soon as someone conforms, they are adhering to the paradigms that are pre-conceived for them. Therefore, the answer to leadership is to embrace and encourage difference.

In my view, as psychologists, we have an opportunity – and an obligation – to empower our clients to resist the urge to conform to the leadership blueprint, and to focus, instead, on one simple question: what skills do I naturally possess that make me a leader?

In pragmatic psychology, leadership is all about bringing it back to the 'self'. It's about placing priority on awareness (rather than external expectation). This makes it a uniquely powerful tool in enabling leaders of the future because it focuses on the individual and what they inherently know and are aware of.

Of course, when working with clients, we are often confronting each individual's strong desire to be accepted and belong. Too often, this need to be liked by others causes individuals to try

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to be like others. However, as Yoko Ono implied in her quote, leadership (and life) is not about being the same as everyone else. In fact, being a leader is about being you, precisely so that you can see possibilities that others cannot.

Therefore, I believe that we, as practitioners should enable the leaders of the future by encouraging our clients to be different; to have a different perspective and see things that are not easily apparent to others. To help them understand that, just because others don't see the same path or a possibility, it doesn't mean they're wrong. To encourage them to understand that resistance from others may simply be an indication that they, our clients, are aware of a future that doesn't yet exist.

### **Are labels helping or hindering leadership?**

Labeling has become standard practice in psychology, and sadly what used to be accepted as 'difference' is nowadays often perceived as wrongness – by the client, their families, and society.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention:

- “The percent of children 4 - 17 years of age ever diagnosed with ADHD has
- previously increased, from 7.8% in 2003 to 9.5% in 2007 and to 11.0% in 2011-12”
- “The number of young children (ages 2-5) who had ADHD at the time of the survey increased by more than 50% from the 2007 - 2008 survey to the 2001-12 survey “
- “In 2016, among U.S. Children ages 2 - 17 years: - Nearly 2 of 3 children with current ADHD had at least one other mental, emotional, or behavioral disorder”

I believe it may be time for us to reflect on the assignment of labels, and ask whether their ubiquitous use invites us, as society, to embrace diversity or whether they force an expectation of sameness. Vitaly, we have an opportunity, now, to decide how we can compel our clients to see the power in a label and not simply mitigate the discomfort of each diagnosis.

In order to empower the leaders of the future, it's imperative that we, as practitioners, understand that every perceived wrongness can be turned into a strongness, and understand that difference – including those differences that carry a label – can be a resource which, if harnessed, can be used to create a future that works for us all.

The principles of pragmatic psychology are simple: allow and enable every individual to find the answers within themselves, and help them understand that, in every moment, they have a choice. In this way, every problem becomes a possibility, every attribute becomes a leadership quality, and every difference becomes a resource that they can build upon for the future.

*Leaders of the future trust themselves.*

*Leaders of the future ask questions.*

*Leaders of the future use their past as a springboard, rather than a limitation.*

*Leaders of the future know that they know.*