

# Transformational Leadership for the New Golden Age

OM JAI JAI SAI MAA

## TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR THE NEW GOLDEN AGE

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To truly be **transformational leaders**, to lead our own transformation and that of the planet, we are to arrive at and live in new perspectives about ourselves and the world. We are to transform how we see ourselves and those around us, how situations occur to us in our life, so that we create freely and naturally as leaders individually and collectively. This powerful, dynamic creation arises when we are in a state of openness to all that is, in the realm of all possibilities always available in us to tap into and create from. How can we be this "blank canvas", "clearing", "gateway" for pure creation that transforms humanity and the planet? Let us explore together some possible answers to this question in defining the path of transformational leadership, a path that requires of us self-inquiry, authenticity, commitment and action.

In the path of transformational leadership, becoming and being a powerful leader, we must first distinguish within us what we are to transform that limits or constrains us in being leaders, including how we see ourselves as leaders and how we see the world and others in our life. To distinguish these constraints, we first face, accept and acknowledge them with compassion (love with understanding) for ourselves, without self-judgment that leads us to ignore or reject them. Once we distinguish what constrains us, we are clear, we can be decisive and active in transforming ourselves. H.H. Sai Maa expresses this self-inquiry and freeing ourselves from constraints to be true leaders in this way: *"On your 'personal side' live as a leader in conscious co-creation, explore who you are, allow yourself to love, to be loved, to be free of limitations, free of pain and suffering such as doubts or more."*<sup>1</sup>

This article will take us through exercises in distinguishing how we limit ourselves as leaders, taking steps to transform these constraints so we are free to be powerful leaders who can transform the planet in co-creation with others. In other words, to **distinguish — transform — be a transformational leader**.

### "It's All in the Mind!": The Frames of our Glasses

What are we to distinguish? We have certain fixed perspectives from the past that shape us in the present, like glasses that we look through to see our life and the world based upon our thoughts, beliefs and assumptions. As Zaffron and Logan put it, we have a "default future" that we live into, in other words, when we look into the future, we can almost predict what the future will look like based on the past. We might improve on the past, have more of what we want, or perhaps change the circumstances a bit, however we do not have much room for the future to be completely unexpected and transformed. Until we consciously look at ourselves and examine our fixed perspectives, our conclusions about life and associated perceptions, they will limit us and become the "almost certain future".<sup>4</sup> Although we have created these self-limiting perspectives, when we

become aware of them creation is possible. They are actually linguistic phenomena, including what we say to ourselves, what we may or may not say to others, what we are aware of, or what may lie below our level of awareness. They are thoughts and interpretations that can be distinguished once we become aware of them, when we articulate and see them as thoughts and interpretations. At that point, we can continually decide on our internal language, the words we use with others, giving us the greatest power for self-expression, the freedom to be and act as leaders.<sup>4</sup>

Almost twenty years ago, Peter Senge wrote about the learning organization and provided a model of the "ladder of inference" we can use to understand our frames of reference. Steps of this ladder exist within us that create a filter between "observable data and experiences" as a video camera may record them and the actions we actually take. These steps include: selecting data from observations, adding meanings (cultural and personal), making assumptions, drawing conclusions, adopting beliefs about the world, and then taking action based on these. A "reflexive loop" also exists through which our beliefs affect what data we select next time. Senge advises that, although we cannot live without adding meaning and drawing conclusions, we can improve our thinking and communications through reflection and becoming more aware, making our thinking and reasoning more visible to others, and inquiring into others' thinking and reasoning.<sup>3</sup>

Another viewpoint of these screens or filters, interceding shaping factors between "reality" and action, is presented by Erhard et al. who write about "perceptual constraints": **worldview** (model of reality) and **frames of reference** (mindsets). As an analogy, they present our worldview as an entire wall of bricks on which we sit to view and interact with life, ourselves and the world. Each brick in the wall is something we believe through conclusions, interpretations and decisions we have made about our life experiences. In the wall, any bricks that surround a given brick, or a group of bricks, are consistent with and often reinforce the brick(s) they surround. Our worldview is the entire wall, while our frame of reference relative to some "specific something" in our world is a group of bricks within the wall. We have a frame of reference about who we are for ourselves that shapes who we are as a person, and the same is true for who we are as a leader. These constraints (bricks) result in two kinds of limits: (1) some of the structure and/or operation of what is actually there in our life does not occur for us, or show up in our awareness (we are blind to it); (2) some of what is there occurs for us and is registered below our level of awareness.<sup>2</sup>

These perceptual constraints limit our freedom to be a leader and our perceptions, emotions, imagination, thinking, planning and acting in exercising leadership. The constraints affect our anatomy. Based on our perception, our brain generates patterns, predictions of the structure and operation of what we are dealing with (how it works and the way we will act in dealing with it). For example, in throwing a ball to someone who thinks they are not a good catcher, or are clumsy, the throwing of the ball is perceived by (occurs to) that person as difficult or scary or impossible to catch, and the person consequently drops the ball. The prediction in the brain based on the person's frame of reference constrains the pattern of action the person can take to one that is consistent with the prediction.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of our leadership, these factors and their impact on our brain alter (distort) who we are as leaders and how we exercise leadership in our lives. If we see ourselves in a certain way relative to being a leader, we constrain ourselves to certain patterns of being and acting that may not be

creative and powerful in how we lead. When we reflect, become clear about the constraints, distinguish them, we can relax them (take the significance out of them) and be present, we can deconstruct and reinvent them, transform them and increase the likelihood that we are creative and powerful in our leadership.

To summarize, we alter, distort, constrain the "reality" of who we are, and of others and the world around us, through the ladder of inference, the wall of bricks, the perceptual constraints we place on ourselves. As transformational leaders, we are to distinguish and transform these constraints to free us to be and act as the powerful leaders we always are underneath of these screens. As Erhard et al. express it, what we do not distinguish (what we are unaware of) "runs us"; we are to "master the fact that we are in a mess before we can master the mess." Their work and that of Zaffron and Logan is focused on the conversational domain, what we say to ourselves and to others, and whether these conversations empower us to be leaders and to exercise leadership as a natural expression.

### **Being Authentic with Ourselves: How We See Our Leadership**

In order for this personal transformation to take place, we are to be authentic with ourselves about who we are being, how we are acting, as leaders and in general in life. **Authenticity** is key to being a leader. We examine our thoughts, feelings and associated actions to see if they are self-limiting, creating suffering within us, constraining effective action as a leader, or if they are empowering us, creating breakthroughs for us to be powerful leaders. We are to be authentic about our inauthenticities. Aside from being authentic with ourselves, as we will see later, leaders are authentic in their communication and relationships with others. As Erhard et al. state:

*"Being an effective leader is a product of the freedom to be, that is, the freedom to be appropriate to what is called for to be effective in the situation. For a leader this is true authenticity. And, that requires an unconstrained freedom to be — an expanded, indeed unlimited 'opportunity set' of possible ways of being when being a leader."*

### **EXERCISE: PERCEPTUAL CONSTRAINTS ABOUT YOUR LEADERSHIP**

**Let us use this distinction of perceptual constraints to carry out an exercise in distinguishing and transforming our view of ourselves as a leader:**

**In looking within yourself authentically, distinguish the context in which you see yourself in terms of your leadership, your frame of reference about yourself as a leader. Take a few moments to reflect, asking yourself the following questions: In what areas of my life am I a leader or asked to be a leader? What criteria or measures do I use to assess my leadership, in other words, what is effective leadership for me? Now choose an important example of leadership in your life where you feel you are not effective. Ask yourself: How do I view my own leadership in this example? How do I think I am being and acting as a leader? How do I view the situation I am dealing with? How do I view the people I am interacting with? Does this context I have created for my leadership (or how I occur to myself as a leader, and how the situation and others occur to me) empower or limit me in being an effective leader?**

In writing, list key aspects of your context or frame of reference about your overall leadership. First, distinguish aspects that empower you in being and acting as a leader, and acknowledge and appreciate how you occur to yourself in these cases. Next, in distinguishing aspects that limit your leadership, determine whether any can be transformed by realizing they are no longer valid, they have been carried over by you from a past that has actually changed. In these cases, realize these changes and transform the constraints. Finally, see whether any other constraints on your leadership can be transformed by adopting a new perspective or context within yourself about your leadership, in other words, how you, the situation and others occur to you. List these, and we will refer back to them later when we address creating a new context for your leadership.

### **Being Authentic with Others: Listening and Expressing**

In addition to how we see ourselves, and the perceptual constraints that limit this view, how we see others affects our being and actions as a leader. We have frames of reference about others in our life, including those we lead and those who lead us. These viewpoints fill our heads with "noise", non-stop words representing judgments, assumptions, beliefs, that are automatic like a CD playing on repeat, and they impact our communication and relationships with anyone in our life. This **automatic listening** within ourselves takes place while we are communicating with these people, as well as when we are silently thinking about them. This continuous conversation also applies to when we are speaking to ourselves about ourselves (during or outside of conversations with others), and when we are dealing with situations in our life (for example, we play CDs about our family, organization, community, society). This automatic listening of our "monkey mind" gets in our way of effective leadership.

Some examples of this type of listening that operates and can be distinguished during our conversations are: "I already know this", "I'm right/you are wrong", "I agree/disagree", "This is true/false", "I like/dislike this", "What's in this for me?", "I'm busy, what's your point?" These examples reflect our frame of reference about the other person, ourselves, the situation, that we are listening to in our heads as conversations are going on and situations are being experienced.

The main point is to be aware of and to distinguish this listening so we are not "run by it", so we can witness when these thoughts, judgments, assessments are present and make a decision to let them be, turn down the volume, put them aside so they are not in the way. By doing this, we are open to the present moment in our communication and interactions, we live outside the automatic listening of the past and in the moment-to-moment listening of the present. This newfound freedom is transformation in itself: we are aware, distinguish and generate an opening for creation and action as leaders.<sup>2</sup>

### **EXERCISE: AUTOMATIC LISTENING**

Choose a person in your life associated with your being a leader: someone you lead, someone who leads you, an associate or colleague, a community member. Being completely authentic, identify the immediate thoughts that come to you about this person, the "CD that is on repeat". You may choose instead your organization, or community, or group within which you serve as a leader. Make a list of what the automatic voice is saying to you about this person, and

then reflect about how the items in the list affect your communication, relationships, power and effectiveness as a leader.

Senge's book on the learning organization provides another useful exercise ("The Left-Hand Column") for us to distinguish and transform constraints to improve our communication (Ross & Kleiner).

### EXERCISE: LEFT-HAND COLUMN

Take a few moments to choose a difficult interpersonal problem with someone you have been involved with recently related to your leadership. Note a few comments in writing describing the situation, the obstacles, what is not working. Recall what you feel was a frustrating conversation with this person. In writing or on the computer, create two columns with a line down the middle, with the right-hand column representing the actual dialogue that occurred. First, write this dialogue as you remember it in the right-hand column. When you have finished, write in the left-hand column what you were thinking and feeling but not saying during the conversation.

After you have completed the left-hand column, reflect using it as a resource, asking yourself these questions: What led me to think and feel this way? Did I achieve the results I intended? What comments did I make that might have contributed to the problem? Why didn't I say what was in the left-hand column? What assumptions or judgments was I making about the other person? What were the associated costs and payoffs of my operating this way? What prevented me from acting differently? How can I now use this column as a resource to improve my communication?<sup>3</sup>

By distinguishing what impact your thinking and feelings had on the conversation (how the situation occurred to you), you can decide to transform your context for the sake of the relationship and the intended results, thus re-creating as a transformational leader. Determine whether you will have another conversation with this person that is now informed by what you have distinguished through this exercise.

Let us return to a fundamental component of leadership, authenticity, and apply this to the above situation (or you can choose another situation so that you can transform how you see it in order to be and act as a leader). Our focus here is on practicing *authentic listening* as another way of distinguishing and transforming to be a leader.

Authentic (or generous) listening is when we are completely present with the speaker, allowing our thoughts, preconceptions, opinions, to be present without focusing there. We are focused on the speaker and, as Erhard et al. explain, we are being the exact duplication of what exists where the speaker is, "getting" everything that is being said as the speaker is experiencing it, without evaluation or judgment. We are where the speaker is with our eyes, attention and energy, and we are not adding anything to what is being said (we are not nodding our head, saying "yes", making comments); we are being still and present. This is a critical way of being as a leader as we create a space for the speaker to speak into, to feel completely listened to, and this practice leads to resolution, completion, creation when the listener is fully authentic and generous.

## EXERCISE: AUTHENTIC LISTENING

Choose a person with whom you can practice authentic listening, especially when there is something that the person wishes to share and resolve with you. During the interaction, be completely present with the speaker and practice what is explained above, distinguishing whether thoughts are sometimes "getting in the way" and then shifting and coming back to the speaker. This exercise will develop your ability to distinguish and transform yourself, as well as your communication and relationship. Of course, you are to practice authentic listening as often as possible as this is a key aspect of transformational leadership.

Now let us move to *authentic expression* with others. Transformational leaders are honest and genuine in expressing themselves, distinguish when they are being inauthentic, transform any inauthenticity by admitting it to the other person(s) and sharing the truth of what they think or feel. The decision to be authentic takes humility, seeing oneself as a learner who sometimes makes mistakes, being open and innocent without self-judgment and fear of criticism or rejection. Authentic expression comes from a place of acceptance, trusting oneself and others, knowing that one's expression will serve the relationship and the creation of what may not be evident or possible at the moment.

## EXERCISE: AUTHENTIC EXPRESSION

Choose an example where you are holding back from expressing yourself to someone due to how you may be seen, out of fear of not being liked or admired, out of wanting to be seen positively. Reflect about how not being authentic is limiting your being and actions as a leader, and the associated results that can be achieved or creation that can take place. Have a conversation with this person, beginning with expressing that you have not been authentic, and then stating your thinking, feelings, opinions while asking the other person to listen. Notice how you are feeling, what you are thinking during the conversation, and transform whatever is necessary within you to be as fully open and authentic as possible. See what the two of you can create together based on this renewal of authenticity in your relationship. If it is not possible for some reason to have a conversation, you can choose to write a letter to the person, being honest about your inauthenticity, mentioning that you are sharing for the sake of the relationship you wish to have with the person, or what you would like to create together, or whatever benefits you see. You may also write a letter to someone with whom you no longer have contact, in order to express yourself authentically for completion.

## Setting a New Context for Leadership

Transformational leaders distinguish, transform and create. We have covered above distinguishing constraints to your freedom to be and act as a leader, and transforming them by being aware of them, shifting your thinking, having new conversations, listening and expressing yourself authentically. All of this transformation shifts your context or perspective on yourself and the world, and leads to new opportunities for creating with others as a transformational leaders. Now let us look at how you can transform some constraints about how you see your own leadership that you identified earlier.

Aside from what you identified that you appreciate about your leadership, you uncovered ways you occur to yourself as a leader that you wish to transform by adopting a new perspective about your leadership. Before we address these constraints, let us review some options for defining transformational leadership, aspects you may like to consider in declaring a new context for your being and acting as a leader. As we look at transformational leadership, keep in mind that any aspects highlighted here are meant to serve in creating the most open, powerful framework around your leadership, one that inspires you to set a new context that transforms your constraints and generates unlimited possibilities and freedom for your being and acting as a leader.

One way of first approaching the definition of transformational leadership is that all possibilities are available to being and acting as leaders, that we have a "blank slate" or "blank board" in what we consider to be this kind of leadership. We then fill this in with aspects that we discover are the most powerful for us as we transform our constraints and serve actively as leaders (i.e., we put parameters around the new context we are creating that enables us to be and act the most powerfully as a leader).

Erhard et al. define leadership as a term in the following way: *"the realization of a future that wasn't going to happen, that fulfills (or contributes to fulfilling) the concerns of the relevant parties, including critically those who granted the leadership (those who lead you, and those you lead)."* This definition highlights key aspects of leadership: (1) "transformation" as something that would not have otherwise happened, or as "completing what was there and giving empty space to bring something forth not based on what was there" (contrasted with "change" as "what was there before persisting in a different form"); (2) the realization of what is important to those who have declared you as a leader. The authors also refer to leaders as: having an unlimited opportunity set of being and acting; being a space where everything shows up, where the world is happening, where those they are leading show up; being a place where the created future comes together and, when created, constituting himself/herself as that future.<sup>2</sup>

Let us consider more aspects of transformational leadership that relate to the mind and heart. Transformational leaders are fully open-minded, they live in the realm of all possibilities, activating and accessing all dimensions of themselves; they dwell in the questions, not living in dualities or absolutes or final answers. These leaders come from the heart, feeling what resonates as the truth for them, living and leading with love, being Divine Love in Action. Expression of this love is especially critical in these times when the vibration of the planet is transforming to the energy of the Divine Feminine which will serve and lead the evolution of the planet for many years to come.

Finally, aspects included in the acronym "LEAD" (**L**iving **E**mpowered **A**ctive **D**evoted) may serve in setting a new context for your leadership: Living — an ongoing state of being, a "living leadership" in every moment in daily life. Empowered — we empower ourselves through awareness of who we truly are, through our awareness of what serves and does not serve us, what is our highest, what is higher or lower vibration within us, what is in our heart; we align with and live this naturally in life. Active — as H.H. Sai Maa proposes, we are to take action with passion, make things happen, be a movement with Shakti (creative intelligent energy), not just creating positive thoughts but acting consciously to fuel the brain and the entire being, saying "yes" to life and creating. Devoted — we focus and commit to continually transforming through practice and

application in life, ourselves and the planet, to "reprogramming" ourselves out of pain and suffering so that we are aware of and can be our original perfection.

Erhard et al. propose "the context is decisive". Once we free ourselves from past constraints, we become an opening, a sacred space, in which we create ourselves anew as leaders: this is our new context for being leaders, humans living as spirit in physical form. In this state of freedom, we are fully present to what unfolds in our lives, we are spontaneous creators as we open to the abundance of the realm of all possibilities. We create new thoughts and associated feelings, words, actions as we innocently and authentically experience life from a pure, limitless context.

In this complete openness to all that is, through language, we can choose to place some parameters around our context as leaders. We have the opportunity in each moment to create a new context which represents a breakthrough in our being and acting as a leader, when we alter what we say to ourselves and express to others about ourselves as leaders. This action that we can take using future-based, generative language is called "declaration".<sup>24</sup> Through this linguistic expression or speech act, we create an invented future, what was not there before, a transformation, a shift in being, acting and creating. This statement brings into life a future that we can live into in the present, making the person who is declaring the author of his/her life (this can also be a group, organization, community, etc. making the declaration). The declaration alters how situations are perceived by (occur to) oneself and those impacted by the declaration, thereby altering conversations, relationships and actions taken together.

For ourselves as leaders, and those we are leading, these declarations generate a future that exists in the moment of the speaking, they inspire action and speak to everyone involved in the process. Rather than being shaped by the past (constraints), what shapes you is the future you have declared. The Declaration of Independence for the United States of America is a powerful example of a declaration that generated freedom. As you declare to yourself and others in life, the statement you create can begin with "I declare I ..." or "I am ...", "I commit to ...", "I (active verb) ...", and it generates who you are as a leader. Some examples include: "I am constant joy and gratitude with my colleagues at work", "I commit to speak my truth powerfully at all times and in all circumstances", "I seize all opportunities to be fully expressed and creative in my life", "I declare that I offer myself as a powerful teacher and mentor to my students". Well formed declarations use the present tense and the active voice.

### **EXERCISE: DECLARING A NEW CONTEXT**

**Considering what we have just covered about transformational leadership, determine what aspects truly inspire you, resonate with you in your heart about being a transformational leader. What aspects do you really wish to embody, to manifest and express in your life and the world? Now look at those aspects that you listed earlier about your current leadership that you wish to transform. Determine how you would have to occur to yourself, how the situation and others would have to occur to you, for you to have a *breakthrough* in your leadership. List the aspects of this "new occurring" for yourself as an effective leader.**

**Now choose one aspect of this breakthrough in leadership that you will transform by creating a new context for your being and acting as a leader. Visualize how you are being and acting as a**

**transformational leader in a given situation with others you are leading, and make a declaration that creates a breakthrough and new future for you as a leader. Repeat your declaration to yourself and aloud several times, making any adjustments necessary to ensure it comes from the heart, resonates with your truth, motivates you, addresses what you would like to transform in the aspect of your leadership, the situation and your interactions. Feel and picture what is created in the speaking of the declaration, and how you occur to yourself and to others in this new context.**

In declaring, we are creating a future into which we are now living, a context that is giving our being as a leader and our actions in the exercise of leadership as a natural expression. This context limits and shapes the conditions in which we are leaders; our emotions, thinking, planning, acting in exercising leadership; the outcomes that we see as possible and can therefore achieve.<sup>2</sup> The transformation of our constraints, the declaration of who we are in the present for the future, need not take years of analysis and processing. We determine the speed of our evolution by realizing our power to recreate: ourselves, our perspectives and context, our self-expression and communication, our relationships with ourselves and others. We are natural creators and leaders, so let us realize this and act passionately from this knowingness and inherent truth of our incarnation on this planet!

### **Expanding the Network of Transformational Leaders**

We serve others we lead by continually transforming ourselves to be powerful leaders and to exercise leadership as our natural expression. The more we "re-design" ourselves as free and limitless, the more we live as transformational leaders. Being this, we have conversations and create relationships that are inspiring, creative and conducive for those we are leading to transform themselves to be leaders. As Zaffron and Logan explain, leaders take responsibility and have a say and give others a say in how situations occur, they master the conversational environment, alter the network of conversations, create a compelling future and fulfill that future in the present.

Through our own empowerment, we empower others to generate unlimited possibilities for themselves as leaders and to rewrite their future. This transformation of others occurs naturally when we ourselves are being transformational leaders. It occurs when we educate and coach those we lead to become aware of any constraints they have to their own leadership, how to transform those constraints, and how to create a context for how they occur to themselves and others that leads them to be transformational leaders. "Distinguishing — Transforming — Creating" applies to those we lead as well as to ourselves; it applies to everyone for being a leader.

As we transform to be transformational leaders, as those we lead transform themselves, and so forth, the transformation continues through all of our relationships, communities, societies as a network of transformational leadership evolves, strengthens and expands around the world. These leaders naturally invent powerful new futures together which manifest what was not before possible. This represents a "New Age" of pure creation that transforms the planet, raises our own and the planet's vibration, aligns humanity with higher dimensions and limitless abundance and possibility. H.H. Sai Maa describes this collective wisdom and conscious co-creation:

*"Empower others always. As a leader, get together, create Oneness, assemble groups, satsangs, explain the coming shifts, how to facilitate your own transition with love, with forgiveness, with compassion, through this time of radical, profound change. This 'time' is a great, a golden opportunity to realize your own Natural Essence. Work, serve at a global scale to restore all that is possible. Establish new structures, new foundations to support the coming Golden Age. ... An important shift of consciousness is to occur. This transformation is to come from collective wisdom, and in that leadership is needed. It is absolutely critical to develop open-minded leadership, leadership that cultivates that collective intelligence, wisdom, a 'togetherness consciousness' which serves, meaning accepting to change the old system ... Make sure they [our children] know it is up to them to be an authentic leader for their world as a whole, thus creating new dimension leadership for a new consciousness. The leadership needed today is to understand the complexity of the world, developing the capacity for effectiveness which acknowledges the most fundamental reality, one of Unity Consciousness, evolving as a global awakened, enlightened race, a spiritual evolution which thus allows each to see Divinity in each other, meaning more loving, more respectful, more compassionate, and mostly service, serving each other."*

## **Bibliography**

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<sup>3</sup>Peter M. Senge, The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization. Currency, 1990.

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