

Who are you being as a Leader?

We are living in a dynamic time of tremendous change and challenge. You know the litany of the challenges: global financial restructuring, lending cut back substantially, the four generational workplace, rapid technology change, etc.

One of the ways Leaders can develop themselves is to pay attention to how they are being as well as what they are doing. In coaching, we notice the mindset that informs the actions leaders take and the questions they ask themselves and their teams. Who are you being while you are doing what you are doing? Are you coming from your dysfunction, head, heart, or spirit? By paying attention to your mindset, you can choose additional stances from which you can approach business challenges.

This article outlines four potential stances from which a leader may choose to respond. These can be thought of as places or stances from which the leader approaches whatever situation is in front of him.

The Victim. We've all been here at one time or another. This is the place of being at the effect of events. It is the level of ordinary psychosis. Anger, fear and blame rule the roost at this level. The questions asked here include: Why is this happening to me? Why can't I ever get a break? Who's at fault? etc. The leader at the Victim place sees events as happening to him, not because of him. He is the proverbial "Hem" in Spencer Johnson's **Who Moved my Cheese?** who wants to go back to the way it was before, to a time and place

where he was familiar, comfortable, and capable. Business shrinks, confidence plummets and the eroding effect of being a victim gives off an odor of desperation. The "Blame Game" gets played here. Who can I shift the blame onto so that I don't look bad, have to take responsibility or make difficult decisions and hard choices?

If this state of being was matter, this would be the place of ice. There is a hardness and little opportunity for movement. The Leader is disconnected from the best of himself and this disconnect continues in his relationship with others.

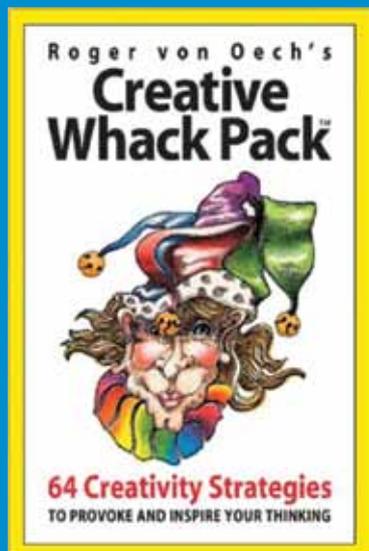
A case in point: Alex was furious at the banks, the government, and anyone else he could blame for his business falling off during the global financial disruption. He fired some staff, complained to his colleagues, barked at his employees and was felt sorry for himself. Needless to say, he suffered (and so did those around him!)



The Problem Solver. This stance suggests that there is a way out and we're awake and aware enough to do something about the situation we face. Questions here include: What can I do to fix this? Where can I look for more funding, customers, candidates? What products and services shall I emphasize now to my clients? We are getting over the effects of whatever has occurred on the outside. We realize that we must do something and that it will take time and effort to overcome the challenge and we strive to do something about it.

Alex decided to apply for a grant, rework his pricing, contact all his past clients, and bring on new products and services to broaden the depth of services he could bring to his clients.

At this level, things are more fluid. Compared to ice, this level would resemble water. There is more movement. Our analytical problem solving mind is engaged in doing what it loves to do: analyze situations and come up with "how to" solve problems. The challenge at this level is one of exhaustion. Eventually, our analytical mind becomes tired. This is certainly a more productive place than the Victim, yet it leaves some creativity on the table. If you're a hammer, everything looks like a nail. If you're a problem solver, everything looks like a problem to be solved and you attract problems to solve all day long. Eventually, you run out of energy or ideas.



The Creator. At this stage, more energy is available. Our leader operates on a new plane of existence – the creative plane. No longer competing for ever shrinking resources, he looks within and finds new ways, new approaches, new ideas to bring to market. He innovates. Most people think of innovation as the slick new product, like an iPod (which was launched during the recession of 2001.) Yet innovation can occur in systems, processes, ways of providing service, advertising, and in the invention of a new product or service. When we are innovating, we are not competing as much as creating something new that never existed before.

Questions that the leader asks at this level include: What would be the most creative idea we could bring to market now? What problem do my clients face that we can creatively solve in an elegant way? If this was a game, how would I approach it?

Playful action is a part of creativity. Children are some of the most creative and energetic beings on the planet. They follow their curiosity and engage in discovery every day. I love Roger Von Oech's work **Creative Whack Pack**® in book, card, and now iPhone app forms. Each day offers another creative way to look at your situation and find new connections and methods in which to engage in solutions.

Compared to ice and water, this is the level of steam. It's has more dimensions than water and can travel farther and faster and higher. This is the level that engages the heart and the intuitive mind. It generates energy and has more access to creativity. Solutions at this level have a greater elegance and simplicity to them.

Alex started asking new questions. What would be the most fun way we can generate new income? He engaged his team in a game where the company could create value for the company, the employees and their clients. He became energized by the questions he posed and created a new vision of his company.

Spirit. At the highest stage, we know that whatever situation has come to us has come for us. We approach it looking for the value and gift in the experience. We have a sense of reverence and awe for all that comes our way and see the inherent perfection in situations. Questions our Leader might ask include: What's perfect about this situation? What character asset do I need to develop in order to be totally at peace with what is happening right now? Can I love what is? Can I be so present to the situation and myself that the answers will come to me in the moment?

This is a level that most human beings approach only in glimpses. I'd love to report that I live here all the time. The truth is that this is somewhat unknowable. Scientists have discovered another level of matter beyond ice, water and steam. It's called "Plasma" and can be described as "excited gas." A plasma is a gas that has been energized. An example in industry is a plasma torch that can be used to cut metals. Likewise, the leader who comes from a place of reverence and awe towards the challenges they face can find a greater power to use in approaching the situation.

Alex became grateful for the financial challenges he faces as they cause him to grow and create a stronger business than he ever had before. He recognized that this disruption would call forth new qualities in himself and his team that had been on the back burner before.

Application. I'd love to report that this is a linear process and that once you've left Victim stage and moved through the stages, you never return there. In actuality, we are operating in all the stances regularly. You may be a Creator in your work but a Victim in your personal relationship. Or you can be a Problem Solver in your attachment to unhealthy food, but Creating your best sales year ever. Frequently, you'll be in all the stages at different times in the same day!

Here's who you can be to get started:

The next time you face a challenge, ask yourself:

- Am I willing to take responsibility for this situation or am I eager to blame?
- If I look at this situation rationally, what solutions emerge?
- If I approached this as a game, how might I win? What happens if I play with this situation?
- If I put my hand on my heart and experienced this situation from a soulful place, what do I see?

The value of understanding the stages is that you have new options to choose from. By being flexible in the stance you take, awareness expands and new possibilities unfold. You can move from the Battleground of Dysfunction and the box of the Mind to the playground of the Creator and the Spirit.

What resonated for you in this article? I'd love to hear from you. ■

About the Author

Siobhan Murphy is a Master Certified Coach, Visionary, Facilitator and Speaker. She loves to work with leaders and their teams to make the transition to a vibrant new kind of working world where business is dynamic and people are connected to each other and themselves in a deeper way, moving from battleground to creative play and engagement at work. She can be reached at www.thequestconnection.com/contact.lasso



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