

# The Leadership Vacuum:

How missing leadership drives dysfunction...  
and what OD can do about it

BAODN Best in the West  
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## Today's Focus

### About our clients

- What are the signs of a leadership vacuum?
- Why does it persist?
- How can we intervene to unseal the vacuum?

### About ourselves

- How do we get sucked into the vacuum?
- What does it take from us to skillfully break the seal?
- What does this mean for our identity as OD professionals?

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## Signs of a Leadership Vacuum

### Symptoms

- Confusion
- Competing agendas
- Silo thinking, poor coordination
- Overwhelm
- Poor execution
- Wishful thinking
- Persistent conflict
- Low trust
- Low morale

### What's Missing

- No guiding vision
- No strategic direction
- No engagement across functions
- No setting of priorities
- No accountability management
- No rigorous analysis
- No durable problem-solving
- No standards in force
- No energy

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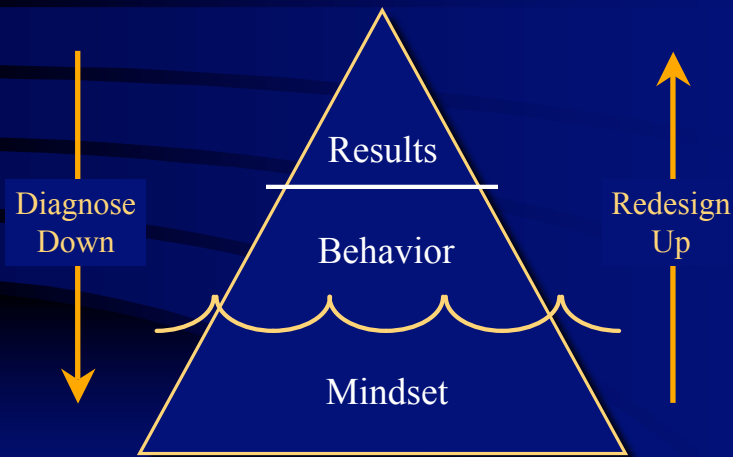
## Two Sides to Every Tough Problem

- Impersonal
  - Understand the game
  - Change the game
- Personal
  - Understand the mindset
  - Interrupt coherency of thinking (wake 'em up!)
  - Invent a new point of view
  - Move from intention to action

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## Powerful Conversations - 3 Levels



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## Case Study: “Me First”

- PCI - Preventative Care Institute is a University-wide effort for capital campaign.
- Departments are fiercely autonomous and self-sufficient.
- PCI requires joint investment of resources from autonomous departments.
- Director Mike has 100% responsibility, 0% authority.
  - When Mike relies on Department chairs, nothing happens.
  - When Mike takes charge to “get things going” he is accused of taking control.
- Everyone is frustrated, blames Mike for ineffective leadership...and no one else wants his job.

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## What Keeps the Leadership Out?

### Impersonal

- Stakeholders have competing interests
- Time horizons vary
- BATNA's are big
- Accountability mechanisms are missing
- Leader is not competent to get the job done

### Personal

- No one wants to look bad
- Stakeholders have competing identities
- People don't want to grant or assume authority
- We collude to avoid criticism
- We treat work as activities vs. commitments

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## What Keeps Your Vacuum Sealed?

- Pick a client situation where one or more of these conditions exists...and it defies easy resolution.
- In groups of 2-3, speculate: In your situation,
  - **Impersonal**: What about the external context keeps the vacuum sealed? (20%)
  - **Personal**: What about the leader's mindset keeps the vacuum sealed? (40%)
  - Which conversation is missing which (if supplied with courage and skill) could change everything for the better? (40%)
    - Name the core message in one sentence.

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## How to Bring Back Leadership

- Find the “missing conversation” which, if created with courage and skill, could change everything for the better.
- Use the conversation to interrupt coherency and generate something new.
  - Take a stand for a future that is different from today.
  - Demonstrate courage - put comfort at risk for the sake of a much bigger win.
  - Blend Challenge with Support.

## My Missing Conversation

- What new or different conversation do you want to have that will make a huge difference?
  - Impersonal: How will you change the game?
  - Personal: How will you interrupt their coherency to change their point of view about themselves, others, and the world around them?