



What is Heart?

We all use the common vernacular of having a “heart to heart conversation” or “the team with the most heart usually wins.” But what is heart?

Heart is the unseen essence within every one of us. Heart is the ability to care about others’ needs, concerns and aspirations as much as our own, often in spite of our differences. It is a point of view that identifies with the team first, as opposed to ourselves, and sees possibility as opposed to problems. It is the wisdom to know the high road in every situation and the courage to take it. Heart is our common denominator with all of life. It is what carries us through adversity whenever we come out better for it.

Unfortunately, we sometimes lose heart and allow adversity to define us. When something unwelcome occurs we feel disempowered or even betrayed by life. We explode in rage or shut ourselves down to avoid the painful experience.

You may have seen this simple formula for leadership: $E + R = O$. If you have heart you see it as **Event + Response = Outcome**. You know that we cannot control the events that occur but you notice your own internal signals of distress; and you stop long enough to respond from your values and highest intentions. You may also be wise enough to know that initially labeling any event as good or bad can make for an inaccurate prediction. Sometimes the things we want and pursue, actually do us harm in the long run; and we all know that a bad or unwelcome event can have a silver lining in it that teaches us an important lesson. Reflecting and responding with wisdom is the key to discovering the lessons that are always buried in our moments of hardship.

However, if you are not connected to your heart, or have not done the work to strengthen your inner resolve, you are likely vulnerable to a different experience of our formula: **Event + Reaction = Outcome**. Reactions come from a point of view that we are alone. Our consciousness focuses on comparing ourselves to others favorably or unfavorably and other wasteful thought patterns. We have forgotten our connection to our hearts, and believe we are unable to have our needs and concerns fulfilled. We become afraid of losing control and lash out in anger or freeze up in self-protection.

Leading from the heart instead of the self is a simple distinction to understand, but not always easy to live up to. However, our perspective is that our life’s work, first and foremost, is to gain mastery

over our egos and develop a conscious connection to our hearts. Only then can we become a real leader, operate as our Best Self, and find the joy and fulfillment that comes from pursuing our full potential.

In business it occurs like this:

A woman formally calls her boss out for a harassing management style after suffering a stress-induced heart attack...after her recovery she chooses to become part of the solution. She agrees to come back to work with her boss on the condition that they work together to heal the rifts among the entire team that are no longer tolerable. She is thrilled with her newfound confidence and lessons learned; and the team thrives going forward.

A suspicious scenario comes to light involving an executive and one of his attractive direct reports. The HR team faces the dilemma of knowing the scenario is devastating team morale and there's no definitive proof of any wrongdoing. They choose to take this difficult conversation head on without making any accusations. They respectfully inform him of what people are saying about him and challenge him to do whatever he deems necessary to repair his credibility. He and his direct report quickly resign. Eventually the IT department recovers the data in their computers that both mysteriously crashed on the last day of their employment. This courageous intervention allows the company to discover, and ultimately recover, hundreds of thousands of dollars in unnecessary travel expenses that occurred during this affair.

A professional gives a talk to 200 people at a conference where there are 6 speakers offering presentations on different topics simultaneously. Within the first 10 minutes over half of his audience departs for another topic leaving him embarrassed when his talk is completed. Fortunately or unfortunately, he is faced with being scheduled to begin the same talk with a new group in an hour. He wants to run away of course, but sits there in isolation to assess what didn't work and plan for corrections. During the second talk only a half dozen people leave for another topic. He receives compliments at the end of his revised presentation and walks away with his self-esteem intact.

The director of a contract manufacturing firm receives a call from his largest customer telling him they are seriously considering moving their substantial purchases to another supplier due to poor quality. After initial disbelief that his crew could have shipped bad material, the director is devastated. He considers firing everyone involved. Instead, he gathers 150 people together to explain what happened and request that they completely reinvent their quality processes. He tearfully breaks down in the middle of sharing the news. The team once again feels the importance of their values and reputation as a business community. They rally and redouble their attention to quality. The customer sees this commitment to immediate corrective action and decides to keep their business with them.

During a severe economic downturn that has the company on the brink of closing its doors, the owner of a tool company is approached by a large tobacco firm wanting to place a huge order for a marketing promotion targeting young people. He looks at the opportunity as a very tough decision – survival vs. values. After thoughtful reflection they turn down the offer. The company successfully recovers from the downturn without compromise, and ultimately becomes highly profitable and known for integrity.

Why does your business need heart? Productivity and engagement suffer when there are undiscussable topics, lingering upsets, or unresolved frustrations consuming people's energy. People need honest heartfelt conversations all of the time when it comes to working well together. When

your people's hearts are unified and full of possibility, they step into what's possible with enthusiasm and creative problem solving. This visceral experience of positivity in your organization does impact your overall performance and brand reputation.

So, how do you get people to bring more heart to work? There are innumerable ways to bring this about in your organization. Truthfully, it is imperative that the leaders make it a high priority. With this commitment in place you move forward in two primary directions. You begin building on what people are doing well. You identify ways to strengthen, learn from, and celebrate the "core goodness" at the heart of your organization. You unleash the natural creativity of your people. You ensure everyone is embracing the positive future that is trying to emerge from whatever condition you are currently in.

At the same time, you identify and directly address your organization's pain points. You acknowledge what's not working without blame. You challenge people to transform the organization's difficulties into new ways of doing things. You develop a stronger culture of accountability with purpose and shared values as the foundation. You create an environment where people are always learning and moving towards the mastery of what's meaningful.

Whether you are building upon what is working or addressing what is not working, your active ingredient is the same: positive energy. More specifically, your unique and personal version of positive energy is what enlivens your people's hearts. For some organizations this is a core competency. For others it is a vast yet underutilized resource.

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