



Leadership is the Conversation...Leading in a time of ambiguity

“Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what’s going to happen next. Delicious ambiguity.” - Gilda Radner

As I continue my leadership coaching for my clients, I am intrigued about how often so many of the challenges that leaders encounter stem from the inability for people to change. Either the challenge is one from within (we resist the change happening) or it is one outside (someone we lead is resisting the change). So much of this stems from our need to control our environment. We think that if we can keep change to a minimum, we will have more control. There is where the paradox takes its toll. The more we resist or struggle with the change, the more out of control we feel. The more we feel out of control, the more we try to keep things predictable and even keeled. Interesting, isn't it?

To get out of this loop, we need to embrace Gilda's philosophy in her quote – the essence of life is making the most of the moment and appreciating not knowing what will happen next. For some of us, that is very difficult because we live on structure and predictability. But who said this journey was going to be easy?

To consider developing your leadership skills regarding Dealing with Ambiguity, you need to look at those pieces of the definition that you struggle with the most. **Definition: Can effectively cope with change; can shift gears comfortably; can decide and act without having the total picture; can comfortably handle risk and uncertainty.** That doesn't sound like the comfort zone of someone who is a strong “J” on the MBTI, does it? So, I recommend breaking it down into “behavioral indicators” that you may be able to develop more effectively. Consider developing your ambiguity muscles through some of these behavioral areas:

- Embrace change – anticipate and prepare for change
- Develop new procedures in response to change
- Develop a new mindset or reaction to change
- Proactively adapt to new opportunities
- Consider risk as a method for improvement
- Flourish or get more comfortable in high-change environments

Depending upon your preference clarity for Dealing with Ambiguity, you may want to set some clear and achievable goals for improving this skill. For example, if you are very uncomfortable with ambiguous situations, don't try becoming the guru of ambiguity. You might also review the four stages of change – Denial, Resistance, Exploration, and Commitment to know where you are. It would be difficult to develop if you are stuck in Denial or Resistance

For further information and suggestions regarding developing your abilities to Deal with Ambiguity, consult **For Your Improvement by Lominger** (Korn-Ferry). This book is an excellent resource for ideas on stretching your abilities on a day-to-day basis. I would also recommend any resources authored by ***John Kotter***. Mr. Kotter is the foremost authority on organizational change and how to develop a contemporary business mind-set. I especially like his HBR article entitled **Choosing Strategies for Change**.