BIG PICTURE THINKING AS A LEADERSHIP TOOL

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COMPASSION is a powerful anchor for successful leadership. Compassion is simply caring in action. In the workplace context, compassion is the ability to perceive when you or your colleagues are going through challenges, and respond with an intent to make things better.

Receiving compassion is a basic human need. When you provide compassion to your colleagues, they feel secure, valued and connected. When this happens, people are inspired to show up as their best selves in the workplace. It is a win-win situation for people and their organisations – creating happier work cultures and better business outcomes.

CULTIVATING WORKPLACE COMPASSION

Big picture thinking is one of the nine pillars of workplace compassion. Given that leadership roles place enormous demands on time, attention and resources, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and fatigued. Big picture thinking is the ability to keep the bigger vision of successful leadership without getting caught up in negative dialogues and excuses that rise with challenges at work. It is the skill to see the forest for the trees and the ability to take the 10,000-feet view when challenges arise.

Big picture thinking allows leaders to act proactively rather than reactively. This helps avoid unnecessary conflict at work and creates emotional resilience. Cultivated as a habit, big picture thinking can help manage people and time with grace, and help turn challenges into opportunities. It has two essential facets. One is having a clearly defined strategy and the other is the ability to think in perspective. Let’s explore both.

1 Perspective thinking

This facet allows us to see challenges in context. To think in perspective is to be able to contrast and reframe your current challenge against a bigger universal reality. We value experiences by contrasting them to expectations created by our environment and past experiences. Perspective thinking may seem like a philosophical exercise at first, but the value of understanding the scale against which we ultimately measure our personal realities cannot be underestimated. We have a very finite presence in space and time. Yet, inside us, we are infinite nested layers of complexities.

Here’s how I work with perspective thinking. When I face challenging situations, I dig into my secret treasure box of questions. This box contains questions that help reset my perspectives and reframe my thinking. These questions include:

“What really are my actionable choices, and what is blocking me from making them?”

I find that taking time to reflect and compare my problems against my bigger vision of life and leadership helps me make meaningful choices. Perspective thinking not only can help reframe our personal challenges; it also helps reframe the challenges of those we lead. It helps provide latitude for the mistakes of others, extend understanding to those who are struggling and make meaningful decisions in dealing with them.

When our employees fail, for example, instead of reacting with disappointment or anger, what if we consciously step back to ask:

“What does this failure mean in the bigger picture of the organisation?”

“What does it mean in the context of this employee’s life cycle with the company?”

“What can I do that can enable this person’s growth, while still meeting work objectives?”

In the 10,000-feet view of things, how devastating is this mistake?”

I find my clients always come out of this line of perspective thinking with more compassion, grace and clarity.

FOR YOU TO DO

Here are two exercises you can do to help build the perspective thinking habit.

1. Create your personal ‘treasure-box’ of perspective questions. This is your personal collection of all the questions that can help you look at challenges you encounter in a different light.

2. Think of a challenge from your past that seemed insurmountable at that time, but which you have now overcome. Reflect on how the biggest challenges in your life have found closure with time. What does that mean for your current challenge?

To read the rest of the article, head over to bit.ly/2zQW3Zk.