HOW THE WAY WE TALK CAN CHANGE THE WAY WE WORK

ROBERT KEEGAN & LISA LASKOW LAHEY

Book Summary

Keegan and Lahey take their readers through a step by step approach to help individuals be responsible for the changes they make in their lives. They have delivered a book that empowers each person to prescribe their form of mental change that will ultimately increase their understanding of what it is they are most committed to in life. The goal of this book is not so much to tell you how to change rather it is designed to be used as an instrument of change that will help individuals set a path that will benefit them in their working environment. This book actively involves the reader with easy step by step tasks that makes it unique for every reader.

The first four chapters provide the reader with their own internal understanding of personal feelings, convictions, assumptions, complaints that are hindering a positive change experience. The latter chapters discuss the way we socialize with others and how our socialization, can in, effect, affect our ability to institute change. Keegan and Lahey present practical ideas and through the use of dialogue, and collaboration with the reader the book aids individuals to diagnose their own problems, allows them to understand their needs, and helps them develop sustainable change.
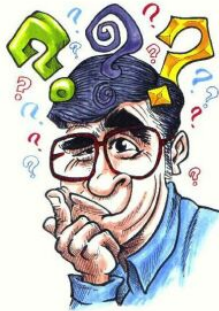
SEVEN LANGUAGES FOR TRANSFORMATION

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Putting Keegan and Lahey's Work into Practical Practice

Keegan and Lahey have formulated a very practical tool in which an individual could use to investigate various aspects of their working lives. They have devised a four column approach that breaks down and allows one to understand the root of their problems that need to be addressed and investigate reasons and assumptions that are preventing an individual from developing their own way of dealing with people. The book encourages people in groups or individually to think and actually write down issues they are having within their working lives. The book acts as a manual that is meant to help people within an organization identify their needs and how to meet them appropriately. By delving into the language of transformation an individual obtain an understanding of the various commitments, assumptions and problems they are experiencing. The following four column diagram is used to create a mental machine that enables one to view personal goals. The intention is to move through a variety of questions and develop an understanding of why you act and respond the way you do. The first 4 Chapters of the book discuss important aspects of your own "Mental Machine" and develop your internal language. The second part of the book is focused on the social languages that one uses when dealing with people on a day to day basis.

The 4 Column Approach to Transformative Language

Commitment	What I am Doing or Not Doing to Prevent my commitment from being fully realized.	Competing Commitment	Big Assumption
I am committed to the value or importance of...		I may also be committed to...	I assume that if … then...

The Internal Languages
Building The New Machine

1st Language: From The Language of Complaint to the language of Commitment-

The question posed to readers in this first Transformative Language is:

What sorts of things-if they were to happen more frequently in your work setting would you experience as being more supportive of your own ongoing development at work?

By opening oneself to this question an individual is able to grasp what commitments they genuinely hold and what commitments are not being met. By opening this type of question the language of complaint naturally appears. One should view these complaints not merely as a voice of whining but rather an opportunity to institute a transformation by harnessing the value behind the complaint. The leadership opportunity arises when a leader acknowledges that they have heard the complaint even though they may not agree with it. This acknowledgement turns the complaint into a commitment. By turning complaints into commitments people tend to, "Tell us what they stand for rather than what they can't stand."

> "We would not complain about anything if we didn't care about Something."

> "Beneath the surface torrent of our complaining lies a hidden river of our caring."

2nd Language From the Language of Blame to the Language of Responsibility

The question posed to the Reader in the second Transformative Language is:

What are you doing or not doing that is keeping your commitment from being more fully realized?

It is here where Keegan and Lahey make the reader respond by discussing the things each individual can control. The reader is moved from blaming others to personal responsibility. Using dialogue one starts to frame a mental picture of the complaints regarding others rather than developing personal responsibility for the situation. When you look back at your response in column 2 you will have noticed that you have indeed taken responsibility by acknowledging our own short comings. Moving beyond just fixing but an understanding of what you are in fact not doing.

> "If we regard all our problems as bugs in the system, the best we will ever do in removing them is preserve the system- and it may be responsible for producing the bugs in the first place."

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3rd Language From The Language of New Year's Resolution to the Language of Competing Commitments

Diagnosing the immunity to change is the idea that people have great intentions to fix problems needed to implement an effective change but competing commitments keep people from doing these things because they are afraid of what may happen.

The authors here ask the reader to:
Write down a possible commitment that prevents the thing from which you are afraid from happening. In essence the authors are asking you to name a particular form of self protection to which we are committed. While these competing commitments exist there will never be an effective change. Serving two commitments may actually have us working against ourselves. We have built our own immune system where, "...our own contradiction-laden system operates to ensure we will be able to do little to realize our own genuine commitments for personal or organizational change. "

4th Language From The Language of Big Assumptions that hold us to the Language of Assumptions we hold.

Each of the three previously discussed languages explain the dynamic in which people live.
The fourth Language introduces the term "Big Assumptions". Big assumptions are assumptions that are taken-as-truth. "They are not so much assumptions we have but assumptions that have us."

The Authors ask the readers to design their own "Big Assumption" by using the third language and develop their fourth language. Once a person becomes aware of their Big Assumption they have the opportunity to always look at rather than look through the big assumptions. Four steps to help one Look at rather than Look through their Big Assumption are:
Step 1– Observe Ourselves in Relation to the Big Assumption
Step 2– Actively Looking for experiences that cast doubt on our big assumption.
Step 3– Explore the History of our big assumption
Step 4– Design and run a safe modest test of the assumption

"The Problem is not that we are self protective, but that we are often unaware of being so."

"I have found the enemy and he is us."

"To bring about real change– we must disturb the balance not merely look at it."

"If we are certain we know how the world works—it creates a certainty-why would we even think to look for a different reality."

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An Example of the 4 Column Approach to Transformative Language

1 Commitment	2 What I am Doing or Not Doing to Prevent my commitment from being fully realized.	3 Competing Commitment	3 Big Assumption
I am committed to the value or importance of… *Securing sufficient resources and additional personnel support to thrive (rather than barely survive) in my job.*	*I can't or don't say NO!*	I may also be committed to… *Avoiding all conflict at all costs.*	I assume that if … then… *I assume that if I did not avoid conflict, then I will find myself becoming uncontrollably angry.*

What have the first 4 Languages Actually done for us??

"The conceptual map is certainly not a solution to the problem that is created in the first column, namely that we genuinely hold commitments we have not yet realized. Rather, the map (and the language forms to which it points us) creates a more complete, more satisfying space in which to consider and experience this problem. In a sense, far from having been solved, the problem has grown! We have widened it out, and explored its roots. Rather than focusing on the solution to a specific problem we have dug up ground all around the problem and made a big mess." (pg. 76) This inevitably needs to happen in order to implement a lasting change.

"The Leadership idea is that we are not able to effect any significant change until we recognize the dynamic immune system by which we continuously manufacture non-change."

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The Second Languages
Maintaining and Upgrading the Machine

5th Language The Language of Prizes and Praises to the Language of Ongoing Regard

Ongoing regard is appreciation and admiration. Keegan and Lahey have found three ways to institute the power of ongoing regard more powerfully.

-1– Be Direct– Deliver the appreciation and admiration directly to the person

-2– Be Specific– Often comments are very general. One should try to be more specific rather than making general statements.

-3– Being Non-attributive– Rather than relaying others attributes, the speaker should relay the speakers experience.

"Ongoing regard is not about praising, stroking, or positively defining a person rather it is about enhancing the quality of a precious kind of information. It is about informing the person about our experience with him or her." (pg. 101)

"When we practice this noncharacterizing, nonattributing form of communication, it inevitably ends up sounding more sincere, more real, more original.

6th Language From the Language of Rules and Policies to the Language of Public Agreements

The reader is moved from relying on individual integrity toward greater organizational integrity. This idea is to assemble an organization that is created through organizational integrity from within. This language allows peers to create boundary transgressions. "The two principal outcomes of a language of public agreement are: -1– the experience of organizational integrity (in contrast to ordinary experiences of organizational unfairness, inattentiveness, or ineffectiveness, which create the demoralizing and enervating experience of disintegrity.)

-2– the use of violations as a resource for surfacing further inner contradictions for our learning (in contrast to treating violations as the professional equivalent of shameful sin.)"

"Disintegrity– its forms of unfairness, inattentiveness, and ineffectiveness, is all to common to contemporary work life, widely accepted as standard operating procedure."

"Deconstructive criticism creates a context for transforming conflict into a respectable and learning-rich clash of contradictory premises, beliefs, and assumptions."

7th Language From the Language of Constructive Criticism to the Language of Deconstructive Criticism

The language of conflict needs to be approached productively in order to make communication constructive. Destructive Criticism is one that demeans, depreciates, and elicits punishing communication and is intended to tear a person down. In contrast constructive criticism is timely, sympathetic, supportive, explicit, instructive, intended to build a person up. Even though everyone appreciates the intended build-up it is difficult to obtain a learning experience from the constructive criticism. Rather Keegan and Lahey prescribe Deconstructive criticism which in essence is trying to create a "truth-claiming" relationship. This novel approach is neither meant to build up or tear down but rather disassemble and review. This conflict language allows one to express opinion and evaluations without intending to provoke emotion, but rather institute discussion of growth.

Ten Challenges to Deconstructing Our Big Assumptions

1. There is probable merit to my perspective.
2. My perspective may not be accurate.
3. There is some coherence, if not merit to the other person's perspective.
4. There may be more than one legitimate interpretation.
5. The other person's view of my viewpoint is important information to my assessing whether I am right or identifying what merit there is to my view.
6. Our conflict may be the result of the separate commitments each of us holds, including commitments we are not always aware we hold.
7. Both of us have something to learn from the conversation.
8. We need to have two-way conversations to learn from each other.
9. If contradictions can be a source of our learning, then we can come to engage not only internal contradictions as a source of learning but interpersonal contradictions as well.
10. The goal of our conversation is for each of us to learn more about ourselves and the other as meaning makers.

*These challenges open our eyes to see the fact that there is a possibility in our eternal wisdom we may, in fact, be wrong.

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Running the Internal Languages

Keegan and Lahey related three stories from Susan, Emily, and Peter. Each person used the prescribed method of the 4 column approach to develop transformational language. The authors shared the process they each underwent to help work on their own commitments. Their stories and reveal how this approach assisted them in their pursuit of their own commitments.

Running the Social Languages

Furthering the Language of Ongoing Regard
For leaders the language of ongoing regard is essential. They need to develop a repertoire that is appreciative of the people they lead. Ongoing regard is a practical approach that can easily be instituted simply by the manner a leader leads.
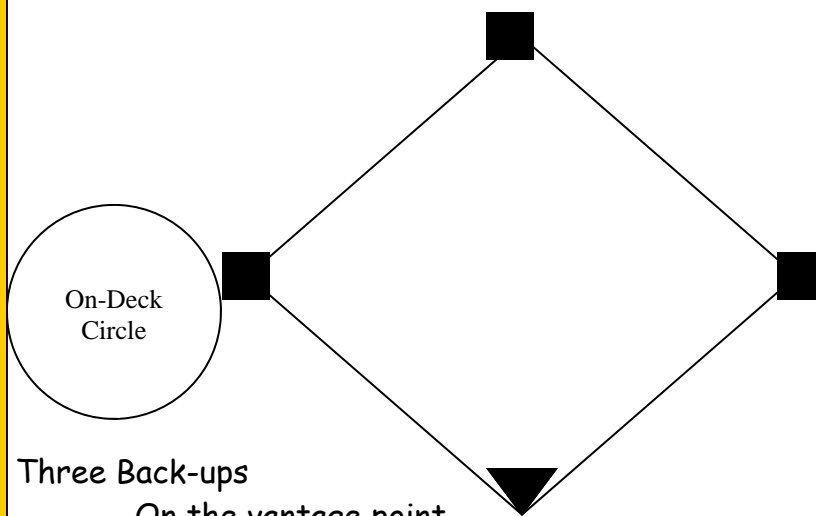
Furthering the Language of Public Agreement
Step 1– Identifying a juicy group problem
Step 2– Create an agreement
Step 3– Following the Fate Agreement

The Baseball Model for Deconstructive Conversation

On-Deck Circle

Three Back-ups
- On the vantage point
- On my theory of the conflict
-On my theory of the other person

"One thing that seems to be true of most leaders is, they are tired. We've come to a stunningly brilliant realization about this: most leaders tend to feel they are working to hard because (are you ready for this?) they– are- working– to –hard!"

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The Baseball Model Continued

This model is used to develop a sense of how you may want to work through a situation in which you are snagged with another individual. The three back-ups allow you time to critically consider the deconstructive purpose. Metaphorically speaking take deep breaths before stepping up to the plate. Once you have done this it is time to bat.

Getting to first: You agree I can come in (knock before entering)

Getting to second: You Agree I understand (Active Listening to clarify the gap)

Getting to third: You agree to continue (Searching and re-searching) "Can we agree to keep thinking about this?"

Getting Home: The conflict becomes a seminar

Critical Evaluation of Book

Keegan and Lahey have designed a very novel approach to deal with change in the work place. They have not merely suggested a multitude of change tools for the reader to use rather they have developed this book as a catalyst to form a greater understanding of yourself and then guide you to direct and plan ways to carry out your commitments. I thought it was very insightful how the book broke down my own internal thought patterns and I could actually visualize what I am doing wrong and things I am doing right. The problem I had when reading this book was getting past the internal language portion and correlate with the social languages. Keegan and Lahey present very insightful practical applications in the social languages portion of the book but I myself had a hard time connecting what I wrote down in the first four chapters to what they were describing in the second part of the book. I found myself with a "Big Assumption" but, "What should I do with it." The second portion of the book was meant to be a guide for the reader as well but I liked the internal guide that had me working my thoughts out on paper and the second portion was merely the variety of antidotes to help institute change in the way you present yourself and help you get what you are seeking. On the whole this book was very well written and kept me thinking and developing my own personal growth in my working environment.

Executive Book Summary:
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