

FEATURE

# Leadership

## *Thought by Thought*

BY JOAN HARDY EISON

**Leadership** is often measured in quantities of people, budget sizes and capital investment. This data is certainly important; however, the first to be led is the self.

Each of us leads our own thoughts; therefore, we are thought leaders.

At this very moment what is your leadership role? Aspiring leader? Business leader? Committee leader? Family leader? Whether you are on the verge or deeply involved, you are only a few thoughts away from enjoying it more. There are countless descriptions and theories on leadership; but, the most significant and influential is self leadership.

The term thought leader became popular in the early 1990s and was initially linked to information technology. Since that time it has been expanded and considered in many different ways. The term was often used to describe a futurist or person recognized among their peers and mentors for innovative ideas confidently demonstrating, promoting and sharing ideas as actionable insights. Peers and mentors look to thought leaders to lob in zingers, one after another, enlivening hum drum processes and inserting new options. Sometimes we refer to these people as "creative" and we find them in every imaginable segment -- sciences, humanities and even in government.

A distinguishing characteristic of a thought leader is the way in which others with whom they interact describe them and point to them as having a unique perspective or comprehensive understanding of something --- perhaps business acumen, the needs of customers, the broader marketplace or a world occurrence. Those external observers recognize thought leaders as people who "get IT" -- whatever IT is at that moment in time --- they assimilate and articulate the broader implications.

Who are these thought leaders and where can they be found?

Touch your own arm. Gaze in a mirror. You are a thought leader. I am a thought leader. We are all leading our own thoughts.

The role of thought leader is not exclusive to CEOs, high grossing sales representatives or employees of the year --- although, all of those are eligible. What's hot and what's not --- in your business or life experience changes quickly. Your recognition and awareness of thoughts and the phenomena of change is expressed through your insight and it becomes a currency to spend and distribute in the process of exercising projection and perspective. Thought leadership is as handy and necessary as the side and rear view mirrors attached to your car. By studying situations from various angles, even in reverse, a change in perspective can occur. Reflect for a moment and remember a few traffic lane changes and parking options that would have turned out significantly different had you not glanced in one of those mirrors, altered your perspective and changed your position.

## You led your thoughts.

How do these seemingly random thoughts morph into wisdom?

Information or data is all around us 24/7 whether we are asleep or awake. It just is.... It can't NOT come. And as such it is part of consciousness and unconsciousness. We don't have to be consciously aware of something for it to be happening. For example, our clocks are turning and ticking when we are asleep whether we look at them or not they display the progress of minutes and hours.

It is rather like vegetable soup, all mingling in a stock pot together. As any and every type of data is moving all around us our minds interact with it. We link some data items together by associating the potential "who/what/when/why." Whenever a match is made and related data aligns a transformation occurs in our thoughts and it becomes grouped information. From information it becomes a message which is furthered by the notion that this newly packaged information has a potential audience.



*Outquote....*

Who could use this information? What action could be taken with this information?

"Hey, I think that I might know something to do with this stuff!"

## You just led your thoughts into knowledge.

We tend to think of data as simple, like pebbles, a few here, a few there. When a quantity of pebbles are combined a structure emerges. For example, if a round, gallon bucket is filled that container becomes a structure which could be referred to as a gallon of pebbles. Someone notices the container --- data coming in --- and, assuming that this is not the very first time they have seen rock-like surfaces, prior information comes into play and forms a ball of knowledge about future uses for the pebbles in the bucket. Messages are developed for to potential audiences.

Worrisome thoughts: "Oh, if that bucket turns over and all of those pebbles spill on the floor, it will be a mess."

Hopeful thoughts: "I am learning to make dish gardens and these pebbles will be a perfect addition."

You have led your thoughts from data to information to knowledge to message. What happens next; and, when does knowledge blossom into wisdom?

As complex and theoretical as this reads on paper, we gravitate toward wisdom and readily assign thought leader status to many in our midst.

- Just ask Celia about that, she really knows about herbs.
- I'll call my aunt, she's a master gardener.
- Look it up at [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com). It's the on-line encyclopedia.
- I am really embarrassed about this. Dorinda is someone that I trust; I'll call her.

Where did those conclusions come from; and, how were actions and messages selected?

## Reflection. We took a brief inward journey.

We took a breath, paused and reflected on collected data which we had previously assimilated into knowledge --- remember that gallon bucket of pebbles? The evolutionary process of selectively sifting simple pieces of data into information into messages, translating action into knowledge becomes wisdom. To exercise the wisdom inherent in identifying someone to contact about herbs or gardening, or any other topic, we merely selected a few parameters such as what, why and when.

We are amazing beings and our internal guidance systems continuously access our collections of knowledge which influence our behavior. Behaviors are actions that we have practiced (executed) over and over again. The more we apply these practices the more we rely on them and gradually define them as our values and beliefs. Intelligent, discerning behavior is often referred to as wisdom. In the moment that we become aware that certain behaviors limit our connection to wisdom, that very awareness can initiate new behaviors which will lead to new practices redefining beliefs and approach the gateway to wisdom.

## I lead my thoughts.

## I make choices about my thoughts.

So, data is the basic ingredient collecting as information resulting in knowledge with the ultimate desire being wisdom, the wisdom of the high self, of the soul. The key is to collect data that is as pure as possible because use of flawed data could lead to erroneous assumptions.

- I can't ask Celia about that. She doesn't have time to help me.
- Since I'm not a master gardener my aunt would think that I didn't know what I was talking about.
- Searching the internet is a waste of time.
- There's no one that I can trust with my personal worries.

Now, here's the extra good news --- nothing is standing still. We can choose to cycle back to the same beliefs or actions; but, even then, we are not standing still. We continuously evolve, many of us with minimal conscious awareness. So, experience by experience, data is being collected and massaged into knowledge exerted in behaviors; and, often realized as wisdom. Every expression of our being initiates change --- altering one, altering many. The assimilation of all of those pieces and particles furthers wisdom among us. We are many; and, we are all one.

The spirit of leadership and certainly thought leadership lies not in what one writes or says. Rather, it is a way of being, genuinely influencing the immediate experience by advancing and sharing ideas creating an environment of success. The objective of this type of leadership is simple and direct: be helpful and move forward. No one has all the answers or all of the wisdom --- and that is truly a wonderful thing! Indeed, the cycle, or the journey, of discovering data, information, knowledge, and messages is so intriguing.

We can sense when someone is just trying to sound smart rather than be authentic. When you align with your own leading thoughts, the name plate on your office door or title on your business card won't matter. You will appreciate and recognize yourself for insight and vision. Links and connections will flow in your direction with minimal exertion on your part.

It has been said that leadership development is rooted in personal development and organizational transformation is rooted in individual transformation. Growth is natural and inevitable. Awakening to being the principle leader of your own thoughts may require a fundamental shift in mindset; but, it is one that is alluring and achievable. Others will be helpful; you will move forward becoming a more purposeful, a thought leader opening doorways to more joyful experiences.

The universe is transformation; our life is what our thoughts make it." - *Marcus Aurelius*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joan Hardy Eison is an organizational development professional and performance coach focusing on leadership and career management. Throughout her life she has had a passion for writing and written hundreds of training curriculums, workshops and has published over 40 articles. Joan has also served as an editor for and coached other authors. Joan earned an M. Ed. in Adult and Community Education from the University of South Carolina and a BA in Public Relations from Columbia College.



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