

## Leading Ways: QUICK SIX

There are a great variety of situations where a leader needs to make a very quick assessment of what is happening and decide on a course of action. These decisions often come with a lack of time to consider all of the ramifications of the choices we have, and we must only focus on the moment. Maybe a conflict has emerged, and as a leader you have been able to restrain your emotional reaction (congratulations!!), and now you want to decide what rational path might be best. Maybe you just need some guidance to understand what is going on in the here and now and need a structure for improving your situational assessment.

The **Quick Six** is a handy way of running down some important considerations when you are scrambling to improve the quality of a decision, handle a conflict, negotiate or just know what is going on in the interactions between you and someone else.

### RELATIONSHIP

Before any action it is always important to consider the relationship that is at stake. Relationships are an essential dynamic of leadership and they are forged, improved and sometimes damaged or destroyed in these critical moments. How important is your relationship with the other person or group to achieving the goals, now and in the future? Is this a short-term relationship or will you be working on projects long after this issue is over? How does the other party see and value this relationship? Is this a two-way relationship, or is the unevenness so extreme as to damage the quality of your work together? Do you see this relationship in similar ways or is there an imbalance that could be detrimental? Is the status quo of this relationship good enough or could you both benefit from it getting better? There is never complete information in any of these quick six considerations but framing the relationship can improve your effectiveness as a leader.

### POWER

This is a reality that can dramatically influence any situation immediately and because of this can disrupt what you want to achieve as a leader regardless if you are leading up, out or down. Power comes in many forms, but one useful way to think about it is whether it is formal power, often structural or political in its nature or informal power which covers a broad array of things including specialty knowledge, persuasiveness, experience, relationship capital and the ability to withdraw effort. Some questions to ask regarding power are: Who has the power now? Is it formal or informal? The formal power is easier to see but getting a clear understanding of the informal power is often more useful in improving your understanding of a situation. Is power in a state of flux? This often happens when the environment is changing and can lead to a shift in power. Is this a time when the leader might gain more power because of this flux? Finally, will my actions lead to a loss of power that I am unwilling to sustain at this time?

### QUALITY

By quality I mean whether the path that has been chosen, either a decision, a negotiation or a course of action, is the technically correct path or not. Often it seems matters should be able to be resolved in a rational, data driven or scientific manner. But even in the most rarefied scientific issues the

answers are often not obvious. There are better and worse courses that might be taken, but the final decision is likely to lie with intuition, power, tradition or just chance as it is with a knowable set of technically correct data. Some questions to ask in the context of quality are: What data do you have and how reliable is it? The data is objective, but is the interpretation that is being presented? Has the context of what you are doing changed since the data was originally collected? Technical correctness of any action or decision is often in the eye of the actor or decider. Smart leaders use the quick six framework to check the veracity of what has been presented, even if they are doing the presenting.

### **IMPORTANCE**

Deeply integrated with the quality of an action or decision is the importance of what is under consideration. If something is technically the correct thing to do but is of little importance it may dramatically change the assessment of the situation. There are two important contexts in which to consider. The first is the importance to the team, department, agency or organization. Is this issue mission critical? Is there some threat if this is not accomplished? How do others in the organization, particularly the leadership feel about this issue, problem, concern or opportunity? The other dimension is how important this matter is to you. Is your ego heavily invested in this decision or course of action? How has this ownership colored your judgment around the level of importance and even your sense of the quality of the decisions that have been reached? It is as hard to get an accurate assay of the importance to the institution and to you of a matter as it is to independently judge the value of the quality of what is at stake.

### **TIME**

Any assessment must include an awareness of the time horizon against which decisions need to be made. If time allows, it will almost always improve the quality of the outcome of the decision and the course of action. Some questions to explore are: Who is driving the timetable for this and what are their interests? Are there legitimate and objective reasons to slow or quicken this process? What relationship gains will I possibly secure by a delay and what is the value of this added level of engagement by others. Are there other values that can be enhanced by a delay, such as better data, better understanding of consequences or exploration of other options? Any delay is likely to produce better data, more buy-in and a richer set of options. The critical question is what the real value will they make an impact in any significant way on the outcome.

### **BUY-IN**

Finally, the quick six asks that you take a few minutes to consider the amount of buy-in needed in the undertaking by all relevant stakeholders. The first focus here of course is being aware of who these individuals or groups are and relatively how essential they are to the process and ultimate success. Involvement and collaboration are important, but they are also costly. Active consideration of the buy-in dimension can let the leader provide the proper amount of time and effort to invest in a decision or implementation process. More engagement can dramatically improve the quality of what is being considered, but it can also splinter the options into a miasma of choices and actually reduce the value and slow the process.

The quick six can be used in anticipation of a meeting, conflict, negotiation, or decision. The analysis provides a good foundation upon which to build other considerations. It is also focused enough to be useful in real time interactions, not only providing a valuable frame for analysis and action, but also a way to relieve some of the stress of the moment.