



## THE SIX BEST PRACTICES OF NATURAL LEADERSHIP

### How Natural Leaders Think

Natural leaders refuse to get stuck in fears, limitations and toxic negative thinking even when it is aimed at them. They are adept at pivoting their own thinking whether it is about their own performance, other people or outcomes.

Some see hurdles and think about how hard it will be to get over them. Natural leaders are able see what it is like to *be* over them. As a result, what others may believe to be impossible, they *know* to be possible.

Natural leaders focus on and appreciate the positive inclinations of other people even when they are not self-apparent, rather than thinking of others as objects of critique and competition. This kind of thinking emerges from a well-honed ability to sense and appreciate the very attributes that others most value about themselves ... to see their unacknowledged qualities and potential.

Natural leaders look for ways to expand the boundaries of their own ideas. They view themselves as learners rather than learned. They prize their ability to inch toward new understanding, by letting their ideas evolve in the presence of diverse thinking and dissent.

Natural leaders easily let go of attachment to former intellectual stances. Not that they suddenly reject all of the old in order to take on the new. They instead evolve forward with their thinking, letting go of the unnecessary and appreciating those ideas that add value in a new context. They also divest themselves of the assumption that if they engage in collective thought, they somehow erode their individual identity. Natural leaders recognize that even their most personal contributions ride on thoughts that have been spun by others and that all who contribute, deepen and further define their own uniqueness even while they experience their connectedness to the larger group.

*“All meaningful and lasting change starts first in your imagination and then works its way out. Imagination is more important than knowledge.*

*Albert Einstein*

## Using Pull Rather than Push

Pull refers to the tendency of anything that matters to us to draw or attract both ideas and events. One of the most subtle but powerful practices of natural leaders is their tendency to influence others through pull rather than push. Natural leaders send signals that create pull because they remind people of something they already care about. They sense and build on the best instincts of others.

Push is an attempt to impose ideas and/or behaviors on other people rather than connecting them to their own ideas, values and beliefs: to *override* the natural inclinations of other people by influencing them toward intents and purposes for which they can find no connection within themselves. The most egregious forms of push include coercion, control and outright force. But push can be attempted through more subtle manipulative processes. For this reason, the impact of push is sometimes hard to read. Push inevitably produces resistance, which may surface in multiple ways or be driven underground where it gains strength and cohesiveness and then blows back. It may also produce compliance which can easily be mistaken for buy-in. Push subtly diminishes another, the antithesis of better instincts. Push also often attempts to draw boundaries around ideas restricting access among disparate viewpoints.

The pull employed by natural leaders fosters cohesion rather than separation. It signals appreciation which is why it is a core best practice of natural leadership.

## Building Rich and Diverse Social Networks

A social network is the web of potential contributors to an intellectual outcome or product. At their best, social networks are the engine of nimble, innovative out of the box thinking. At their worst they produce cascades in which people that know and trust each other mutually reinforce misinformation.

Natural leaders tend to have rich and diverse social networks and they connect to people and information in a way that leverages that diversity of experience, knowledge and even dissent across boundaries and professions. Because their personal identity is not tied to their own intellectual stances, they find it easy to explore contrarian ideas with others.

Even though they invite ideas that are contrary to their own, they are drawn to others who, like themselves, trigger the best rather than the worst inclinations in others. So they are not pulled into toxic networks such as cliques, triangles and exclusionary sub groups.

*“It was unbelievable...it’s not science the way most of us have practiced it in our careers. But we all realized that we would never get biomarkers unless all of us parked our egos and intellectual-property noses outside the door and agreed that all of our data would be public immediately.”*

*Dr. John Q. Trojanowsk (in New York Times: Sharing Data Leads to Progress on Alzheimer’s, August 12, 2010)*

## Investing in Social Capital

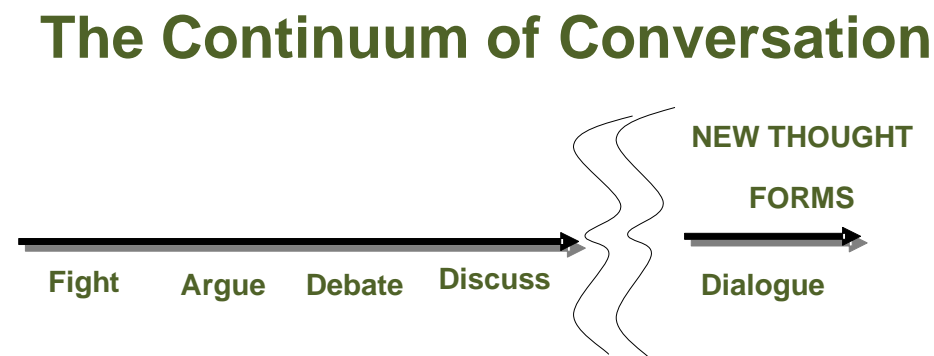
Social capital refers to the residual value of trust, respect, rapport and appreciation in a relationship. It is called social capital because in every interaction people either withdraw from or invest in this bank account, which then affects the next interchange.

Social capital creates a generative environment that encourages people to move out of intellectual comfort zones to see ways to continuously improve and refine execution. The broader and more diverse the thinking, the greater the bank account of social capital required.

Natural leaders build social capital through appreciation, rapport and trust. Appreciation is more than a skill. It is also an attitude. The skill of building rapport of course can be developed through good training. Trust is built through reliability, competence and sincerity.

## Engaging in Optimal Conversations

Optimal conversations trigger the best thoughts and instincts of everyone in the interchange. They access and peel open ideas and insights that would easily be missed. Natural leaders tease out ideas in a mutual process of discovery *rather* than simply defending a current stance. Their conversations are naturally collaborative because they focus on exploring and understanding. Natural leaders are comfortable with the wobble of ferment that occurs when a set of ideas has not yet popped into a new understanding. They are relentlessly focused on creating new thought forms. They therefore land on the dialogue end of the continuum illustrated below.



Fighting is an attempt to destroy either the ideas or even the personhood of another. It is aggressive, often mean spirited and usually toxic. Arguing has the same purpose to win with one

stance against another. It is “arguably” a bit more civilized but can often sink into a high degree of toxicity. In a debate each attempts to undermine or destroy the validity of an opposing stance. The word discussion comes from the same root word as that for percussion. Through discussion there is often a winner and a loser also. Its focus is advocacy of a current stance, the tendency to push information at each other. The outcome of discussion often is clarity of current stances and in fact can result in enhanced understanding and agreement in preparation for decision.

Dialog is a different form altogether. Its purpose is not to win and lose but to collaboratively share information in a way that enables people to not only increase their understanding but to create an intellectual outcome that is a new form. Dialog is the most effective engine of innovation; it includes appreciative inquiry and other forms of listening as well as a form of advocacy that engages in sharing ones best thoughts and ideas about a subject non-defensively.

### **The Flow of Engagement Processes**

The engagement process consists of the settings, events, venues, methods, activities and organizational design that support human interaction. Natural leaders enjoy the process itself for its own sake, not only the outcome. For this reason, their processes, even though they are often intense, are not marked by stress and hubris. They flow, and the people who work beside them mirror and often emulate this quality.