

Radical Inclusion: What the Post-9/11 World Should Have Taught Us About Leadership

GEN (R) MARTIN DEMPSEY AND ORI BRAFMAN.

Personalization: “Inclusion is about concentrating the what (i.e., the directive, the goal) and distributing the how.” Give subordinates reasonable freedom to personalize how to execute the tasks you have designated. Let them amaze you with their creativity.

Prior to becoming Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, GEN Martin Dempsey, Commander, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, flew to the remote mountains of Afghanistan to evaluate how junior leaders were adapting to fighting the Global War on Terror (GWOT). He wanted to improve Soldier training for this evolving environment. His visit to a frontline infantry captain was eye-opening, and he marveled at the wisdom of this young officer who introduced him to Ori Brafman’s classic book on leaderless organizations, The Starfish and the Spider (which would become a model for understanding terrorists arranged in networks). Upon his return to the United States, GEN Dempsey invited Mr. Brafman to advise him on possible

strategies that Army leaders could use as the GWOT continued.

Ori Brafman is an University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley) professor who gladly engaged with GEN Dempsey. They formed a strong bond, bringing a unique, combined perspective to the topic of leadership in the post-9/11 era. Based on their nearly decade-long conversations, they decided to produce leadership guidelines for the rapidly changing world in which we now find ourselves.

Two of the most important evolutions that they describe in the operating environment are the “digital echo” and the increasing “power of narratives.”

The **digital echo** represents the lightning fast speed with which “information” is passed through the internet and social media, often at the cost of accuracy and honesty. This creates challenges for leaders, often putting them in a reactive, as opposed to proactive, leadership stance. We have all seen how “information” surrounding political issues can spiral out of control, only later to be proven inaccurate or just plain wrong. Regardless, leaders often spend an inordinate amount of time dealing with these types of situations.

The **power of narratives** is also rising at a rapid rate. In the past, we would often find that most people had a shared understanding of the facts of a

situation. More recently, it appears that those on different sides of an argument are in a rush to create a narrative that favors their side, with both sides spinning the latest news, making it difficult to discern fact from opinion. Mr. Brafman dissects the narratives surrounding the 2017 UC Berkeley visit by conservative activist Milo Yiannopoulos as a classic example of how EVERYONE got the story wrong.

Why is this so important? Facts depend on expert validation to persist, while narratives simply need to be retold. “Narrative battles” are not won by simply proving that the opposing narrative is in some way inaccurate; they are won by drowning out the counter-message!

While the world and operating environment has been rapidly changing, leadership techniques have not adjusted at the same pace. For the remainder of the book, the authors share their concept of radical inclusion and recommend techniques that can be used to foster success in these evolving times. They include anecdotes from GEN Dempsey’s impressive 41-year military career and Mr. Brafman’s unique experiences at Berkeley.

Real inclusion is NOT about letting just anyone in; it’s about understanding the pillars of inclusion:

- **Participation:** allow everyone in the organization (like a captain in remote

Afghanistan) the opportunity to impact the entire organization

- **Personalization:** “Inclusion is about concentrating the *what* (i.e., the directive, the goal) and distributing the *how*.” Give subordinates reasonable freedom to personalize how to execute the tasks you have designated. Let them amaze you with their creativity.
- **Purpose:** create sense of belonging/commitment to your organization for ALL members

Inclusive Leader recommendations in this new environment:

1. Give them memories
 - a. Most important responsibility leaders have, make people feel they belong
 - b. Types of Memories to give:
 - i. Successes
 - ii. Failures
 - iii. Being cared for
 - iv. What right looks like
 - v. What wrong looks like
2. Make it matter (connect effort with meaning)
 - a. GEN Dempsey has kept a box with a card for each of the Soldiers that have died under his command on his desk as a continual reminder why what he does matters so much
 - b. We all want to believe that our efforts make a difference. It is the leader’s responsibility to make sense of things for their followers, so they understand how their actions fit into the big picture.
3. Learn to imagine
 - a. Wayne Gretzky, arguably the greatest Hockey player of all time, attributed his amazing success to “skating where the

puck is going, not to where it has been.”


- b. Definition of imagination: “a learned attribute; some combination of training, experience and eventually instinct that produces creativity in complex environments at the speed of TEAMWORK”
4. Develop a bias for action (prevent decision paralysis)
 - a. Recognize that “in our complex world, learning is active and iterative; we need to act, assess, and act again” for optimal results.
 5. Co-create context
 - a. Recognize that the best ideas do not always (or even often) come from the top of the organization. Figure out a way to collaborate at EVERY level of the organization, especially from those on the front lines.
 - b. How do you ensure that everyone

has an opportunity for input in a timely manner?

6. Relinquish control to build and sustain power
 - a. Leadership by concrete dominance is increasingly unsustainable in today’s operating environment. The most effective leaders will allow control to flow out of their hands and into the capable, trained hands of the members of our organizations.
 - b. “Real power is measured not in degree of control but rather in the ability to find optimum, affordable, enduring solutions to complex problems.”

Radical Inclusion is a superb addition to the leadership library of the 21st century leader who recognizes the changing environment and wants to maximize the **engagement** of all members of his or her organization.

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