BY DENNIS SPARKS

EXPLAIN, INSPIRE, LEAD

Tichy says 'Teachable Points of View' can energize others

JSD: In *The Cycle of Leadership: How Great Leaders Teach Their Companies to Win* (HarperBusiness, 2002), you write, "The essence of leading is not commanding, but teaching." You define a teaching organization as "one in which everyone is a teacher, everyone is a learner, and as a result, everyone gets smarter every day." In such organizations, "everyone in the organization is expected to be constantly in a teaching and learning mode. ... [T]rue learning takes place only when the leader/teacher invests the time and emotional energy to engage those around him or her in a dialogue that produces mutual understanding."

Tichy: People agree that great teachers don't stand at podiums with a megaphone yelling at students. Instead, they engage with students in ways in which both they and their students learn.

I work in health care settings, as well as in business and education. In a good residency program, attending doctors both teach and learn from the residents. But the minute doctors become administrators, they have a lobotomy, forget what worked with residents, and act as if command and control is the way to run a hospital.

The same thing is true with principals who may have been incredible teachers. As teachers, they created a culture in their classrooms in which everyone learned and everyone taught. Students who were better at something coached other students. When they become principals, all of a sudden they act as bureaucrats rather than as teachers who create a learning environment for other teachers.
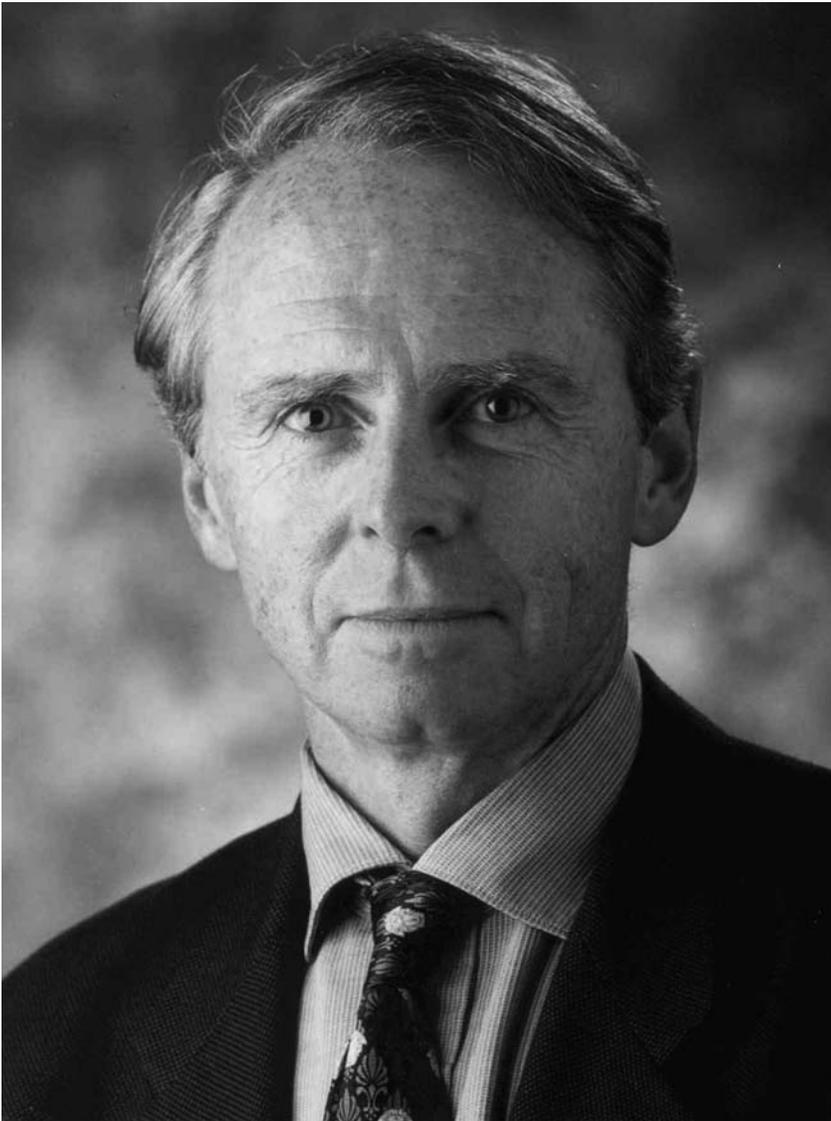
STRETCH GOALS WITH MILESTONES

JSD: I'd like to talk for a moment about the value of ambitious goals. You argue for "goals that stretch people's abilities" and write, "Winning

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leaders set goals that people think are impossible to achieve, and then help them to achieve them." Some leaders would argue that that's a recipe for discouragement and failure rather than motivation.

Tichy: That's true if there aren't milestones along the way through which confidence can be built. Without actions and milestones to measure progress, stretch goals are a recipe for disaster. When we link stretch goals, actions, and milestones, we can tap incredible emotional energy. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech is a perfect example of a stretch goal — people being judged by the content of their character, not the color of their skin — that has motivated individuals and groups over several decades.

Noel Tichy

need that is clear and palpable to everyone in the organization," "a mission that is inspiring and clearly worth achieving." Teachable Points of View can undoubtedly serve other purposes as well.

Tichy: The key elements about which leaders create Teachable Points of View are ideas, values, ways to energize people, and making tough yes-no decisions, which I call edge. In a school, the ideas may relate to the curriculum or instruction. The Teachable Point of View is an intellectual framing of a leader's key ideas in important areas. Values describe how stakeholders are going to behave in support of those ideas. It's also critically important that principals have a Teachable Point of View regarding how they will motivate various stakeholders. Because money is in short supply in schools, motivation comes instead from engagement, encouragement, and cheerleading. School principals also have to apply edge around the behavior of individuals, saying what behavior will and won't be allowed and enforcing those decisions.

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GREAT PRINCIPALS

JSD: You've recently applied your ideas with educators at the New York City Principals' Academy.

Tichy: New York City principals can impact 90,000 teachers and 1.2 million kids. I am convinced that if you want to leverage improvement in a school system, the most critical role is the principal. When you have a great principal, you can affect the culture of the school and teaching. Our goal is to help principals clarify their Teachable Points of View and for them to create Virtuous Teaching Cycles with various stakeholder groups ranging from parents to the union to students and teachers.

TEACHABLE POINTS OF VIEW

JSD: You just used two terms — Virtuous Teaching Cycles and Teachable Points of View — that I'd like to discuss in more detail. About Virtuous Teaching Cycles you wrote, "a leader commits to teaching, creates the conditions for being taught himor herself, and helps the students have the self-confidence to engage and teach as well." The starting point of these cycles is leaders developing a Teachable Point of View, or TPOV for short. A TPOV, you say, is "a cohesive set of ideas and concepts that a person is able to articulate clearly to others." It is critical, you believe, that leaders have a TPOV on an "urgent

ACT AND REFLECT

JSD: In *The Cycle of Leadership,* you wrote, "The very act of creating a Teachable Point of View makes people better leaders. ... [L]eaders come to understand their underlying assumptions about themselves, their organization, and business in general. When implicit knowledge becomes explicit, it can then be questioned, refined, and honed, which benefits both the leaders and the organizations."

Tichy: The great leaders I've observed have the ability to both act and reflect. If all they do is reflect, they suffer from analysis paralysis. If all they do is act, they are hip-shooters. I had the privilege of working for

and then with Jack Welch, the former CEO of GE, who was a great leader-teacher. People saw the action side of him, but the side very few people saw was him closing the door in his office to reflect, write, and bounce his ideas off people. I saw the same with Roger Enrico at PepsiCo and Larry Bossidy at Honeywell. They have the ability to do the hard reflective work and to put it in writing.

CLARIFY THOUGHTS BY WRITING

JSD: You acknowledge in your book that creating a TPOV is not a simple or easy process, noting, "It requires first doing the intellectual work of figuring out what our point of view is, and then the creative work of putting it into a form that makes it accessible and interesting to others." You recommend that leaders write their Teachable Points of View and

observe, "The process of articulating one's Teachable Point of View is not a one-time event. It is an ongoing, iterative, and interactive process."

Tichy: Far too few leaders write. Writing requires that we make a decision. Speaking our thoughts allows us to slip around quite a bit, which affects clarity and crispness. Poor leaders also have staff people do this work, and they react to it. That's very different than doing the first draft yourself. Welch never had a speechwriter. He prepared his own presentations and wrote his own annual report letters. That may not sound like much, but 90% of CEOs have someone else do it for them.

CREATE A VISION

JSD: As you well know, busy, action-oriented people often resist writing and the processes involved in

refining it. I'm curious how you engage leaders in this difficult intellectual work.

Tichy: I'm on my 12th book, and I avoid writing as much as anyone. I'm supposed to be writing right now, which makes this interview a form of avoidance. So I know firsthand how painful writing can be.

When I take a group of senior leaders away for three days to work on their Teachable Points of View, I begin by asking each of them to write about the business ideas they believe are driving or will drive their organizations. After they write, we get their ideas out on flip charts. People cannot hide, and it gives the group something to talk about. We spend three or four hours on each of the elements of Teachable Points of View — ideas, values, emotional energy, and edge. With each element, participants write,

NOEL TICHY

POSITION: Noel M. Tichy is a professor of organizational behavior and human resource management at the University of Michigan Stephen M. Ross School of Business, where he is the director of the Global Business Partnership.

For more than a decade, the partnership ran the Global Leadership Program, a 36-company consortium of Japanese, European, and North American companies who worked together to develop senior executives and conduct action research on globalization in China, India, Russia, and Brazil. He now heads the Global Leadership in Healthcare Program, working with CEOs and their senior teams from major medical centers in the U.S., along with teams in Europe and India. Tichy also conducts the Cycle of Leadership executive program at the University of Michigan. Most recently, he led the launch of the Global Corporate Citizenship Initiative in partnership with General Electric, Procter & Gamble, and 3M. The initiative was designed to create a national model for partnership opportunities between business and society, emphasizing free enterprise and democratic principles. Tichy consults widely in both the private and public sectors. He is a senior partner in Action Learning Associates.

EDUCATION: Tichy has a bachelor of arts degree in psychology from Colgate University and a doctorate in social psychology from Columbia University.

PROFESSIONAL HISTORY: In the mid-1980s, Tichy was head of GE's Leadership Center, where he led the transformation to a system of action learning at GE. From 1985 to 1987, Tichy was manager of management education for GE, where he directed its worldwide development efforts. Prior to joining the Michigan faculty, he served for nine years on the Columbia University Business School faculty.

HONORS AND AWARDS:
BusinessWeek rated Tichy one of the "Top 10 Management Gurus." He has served on the editorial boards of the *Academy of Management Review, Organizational Dynamics, Journal of Business Research,* and *Journal of Business Strategy.* He served as chairman of the Academy of Management's Organization and Management Theory Division and was a member of the board of governors of the American Society for Training and Development. He was named distinguished fellow by the National Academy of Human Resources in 1999, received the 1993 Best Practice Award from the American Society for Training and Development, and received the 1994 Sales and Marketing Executives International Educator of the Year Award.

PUBLICATIONS: Tichy is the author of numerous books and articles. His most recent book is *The Ethical Challenge: How to Lead With Unyielding Integrity* (with Andrew McGill, Jossey-Bass, 2003). He also authored *The Cycle of Leadership: How Great Leaders Teach Their Companies to Win* (with Nancy Cardwell, HarperBusiness, 2002) and *The Leadership Engine: How Winning Companies Build Leaders at Every Level* (with Eli Cohen, HarperCollins, 1997), which was named one of the top 10 business books in 1997 by *BusinessWeek.* He is co-author of *Every Business is a Growth Business* (with Ram Charan, Random House, 1998). In addition, Tichy is co-author of *Control Your Destiny or Someone Else Will* (with Stratford Sherman, HarperBusiness, 1994).

OTHER BOOKS INCLUDE:
• *Global Corporate Citizenship*, with Andrew R. McGill and Lynda St. Claire (Jossey-Bass, 1997).
• *Globalizing Management: Creating and Leading the Competitive Organization,* with Vladimir Pucik and Carole Barnett (Eds.) (John Wiley & Sons, 1992).
• *The Transformational Leader,* with Mary Anne Devanna (John Wiley & Sons, 1986).
• *Strategic Human Resource Management,* with Charles J. Fombrun and Mary Anne Devanna (Eds.) (John Wiley & Sons, 1984).
• *Managing Strategic Change: Technical, Political and Cultural Dynamics* (John Wiley & Sons, 1983).
• *Organization Design for Primary Health Care: The Case of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Health Center* (Praeger, 1977).

TO CONTINUE this conversation with Noel Tichy, contact him at the University of Michigan Business School, 700 E. University, C-0401, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1234, (734) 764-5134, fax (734) 936-2196, e-mail: tichy@umich.edu.

share, and negotiate to a final group agreement.

One writing exercise is particularly powerful. Two-thirds of the way through a three-day workshop, every member of the team works for one hour on a journalistic article that puts his or her organization on the cover of an appropriate magazine — say *Fortune* magazine — written from the perspective of several years in the future and explaining how the organization achieved success. I ask participants to write a narrative with lots of details. Inevitably, leaders provide very rich data as they articulate a lot of pieces that are just floating around in their heads. We usually have trouble stopping people at the end of an hour. Next, we ask each person to read his or her article to the entire group. Group members pull out the themes and then we go on to the next person. It is a very powerful way to get people in touch with the vision, as well as where they agree and disagree.

We asked New York City principals to prepare their articles as a cover story for *Time* or *Newsweek* describing what students, teachers, parents, and others were doing to make the school outstanding. Principals are asked to discuss test scores and other measures of learning and the interventions they and others used. Many principals apply the same process with their teachers.

USING STORIES

JSD: This brings us back to Virtuous Teaching Cycles. You recommend that leaders communicate their Teachable Points of View through "interactive teaching," a type of dialogue you emphasize is not the same as selling or telling. "Interactive teaching," you write, "occurs when the teacher respects the students and has a mindset that they probably know things that he or she doesn't, and when the students have the mindset that they have something to say and

that the teacher would be interested in hearing it." You also advocate weaving a Teachable Point of View into a story "that people can understand, relate to, and remember."

Tichy: I was very influenced by Howard Gardner's book, *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership* (HarperCollins, 1996). He says great leaders lead through three kinds of stories. The first is the "who I am" story, which explains the leader's values and motivation. The second is "who we are," which gives the group a sense of identity. The third is a "where we are going and how we'll get there" story. It's important that school leaders be able to tell these three stories, that there is alignment among the stories, and that others sign up and mobilize around them. We often end the workshop by asking people to do a five-minute vision speech on video in which they weave together these stories. People don't think in PowerPoint; they think in and remember stories. Great leaders have always intuitively known that.

LEADERSHIP IS AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

JSD: In *The Cycle of Leadership,* you note that good leaders are shaped by transformative events that define who they are as people.

Tichy: Leadership, in my view, is autobiographical. Who we are as leaders comes from the ups and downs of our life experience, not the books we have read or the courses we have taken. When people look back at what shaped them, inevitably it is the tough times. Really good leaders learn from those experiences.

To get at this, I ask participants in workshops to create a leadership journey line on a flipchart. They draw a graph with two axes. On the bottom is time. People can go back as far as they want; some go back all the way to birth or early childhood. The vertical axis has positive emotional energy

at the top and negative emotional energy at the bottom. In the middle is neutral energy. I ask people to plot their life journey lines as their energy goes up and down. A variety of things may bring us down — the death of a loved one, getting fired at work, a crisis in the organization or community. These things vary from person to person. People will self-edit so they don't share more than they're comfortable with.

John Chambers, the CEO of Cisco, is a good example. He had a learning disability as he was growing up in West Virginia. He was picked on and laughed at by other kids. A teacher even told him that he wouldn't graduate from high school. He says that today, the stock price falling rapidly at Cisco is nothing compared to being in 3rd grade and thinking you are dumb. Chambers ended up getting a law degree and an MBA, but he says that through his early experiences, he learned to treat people as he wanted to be treated, to stick with things through tough times, and to believe in the importance of a good education. That final area led to Cisco-sponsored programs for inner-city kids. You don't really understand John Chambers unless you understand the experiences that shaped him.

It's amazing how often people who've worked together for 20 years will do this exercise and afterward say something like, "I didn't know that about you. Now I understand." It's a very powerful exercise for leaders to do with their teams. It really gets participants thinking about who they are as leaders, and it helps team members understand one another in a very different way. I've done it with thousands of people, and it's a very powerful, positive exercise. ■

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