

Leadership for the Self – Leadership lessons from an ant and an elephant By Vince Poscente

*This article is based on the book, **The Ant and The Elephant: Leadership for the Self**, a parable and five-step action plan for transforming workplace performance. By learning ways to clarify a vision, engage team commitment, execute consistently, build confidence and control processes, the reader will have a better handle on guiding the elusive realm of subconscious thought. Word count for this article: 1,294 words.*

How will you lead change in your organization? How can you guarantee that change will last past a few weeks? What replaces command-and-control with a workforce that insists on more meaning in their work? These questions are haunting leaders in today's marketplace. These questions can all be answered by learning how an ant communicates with an elephant.

Before anyone can reach his or her full potential as a leader, he must first be a leader to himself. A leader must capitalize on innate talents, challenge the habits that hinder his growth and manage the negative emotions that frequently keep him from realizing his goals.

As you know, our minds are separated into two distinct spaces—the conscious and subconscious thought. Our “ant” is the intentional part of the brain—it houses our critical, analytical thoughts. Our “elephant,” however, is the instinctual, impulsive part of the brain—it houses emotions and memories and even guides the body to perform its vital functions. While we tend to know our conscious minds—or *ants*—rather well, we often overlook the power of our *elephantine* subconscious minds. Unfortunately, when we do, we squander a wellspring of human potential.

Imagine a tiny ant on the back of a massive African elephant. No matter how diligently that ant marches east, if the elephant he sits upon travels in the opposite direction, the ant will end up even farther west than his starting point. Similarly, we will find ourselves receding from our goals if our conscious and subconscious minds are not aligned. What elephant-like aspects of our personalities hold us back from meeting a challenge? How do our emotions get in the way of our ability to act and communicate effectively? What does it truly mean to commit to realizing a goal?

A good leader may recognize that he indulges elephant-like habits that keep him shy of his goal—but a *great* leader does something about it. He confronts the behaviors and routines that keep his subconscious stuck. He works to refashion deep-seated beliefs, attitudes and truths so that they support his conscious efforts. The *great* leader conquers his hidden fears, antes up and makes an emotional investment in his vision to show others the way to success.

On November 12, 1992, Dr. Lee Pulos delivered a speech in the areas of psychology and personal growth. At one point in the speech, he related a statistic based on fascinating scientific research: At birth, humans have approximately 120 billion glial cells, active neurons in the brain. Over time, through a natural process called pruning, unused neurons become dormant. As adults, we each end up with about ten billion active neurons available for conscious and subconscious brain activity.

Dr. Pulos revealed that in one second of time, the conscious mind uses about two thousand neurons. In that same second, the subconscious mind uses four billion neurons. This bears repeating: in *one second*, the subconscious mind uses four billion neurons. This means that every second there are two thousand neurons making conscious decisions and *four billion* neurons making subconscious decisions. Now, ask yourself: “Who’s in control?” Is it your conscious mind or your subconscious mind? Is it the ant or the elephant making decisions? As a leader, when you give a logical, coherent directive, what part of the brain have you reached? The ant sized conscious mind or the elephant sized subconscious?

There are 5Cs for you to get through to the elephantine subconscious and create, long-term, profound impact:

1. Clarity of Vision

First, you clarify your vision. After identifying your goal define the core reasons why it was so important to you and your organization. Keep asking yourself why your employees would want this particular objective. The journey has to mean something to your employees; otherwise, there would be no reason to put all the hard work into realizing it. Without a clarified vision and an emotional connection to the goal, you will not be able to get the commitment needed to achieve it.

ACTION STEP for Clarity of Vision:

Emotions are powerful motivators for both you and your teammates. Harness the power of emotions, and the world of leadership is yours. Consider what motivates your teammates as much as you consider what motivates you. You need to use those dreams and desires to inspire yourself and others.

2. Commitment

Realized how important your thoughts and actions are to your elephantine subconscious and the subconscious minds of your teammates. Commit to nurturing positive dominant thoughts. Learn how to lead and direct the subconscious through beliefs, attitudes and truths that are in sync with your goal. If you are truly going to lead a proverbial herd of elephants (your employee's collective subconscious minds) to the goal you have set, get them to envision having this goal.

ACTION STEP for Commitment:

In a world where we are now surrounded by instant gratification, real, profound change still tends to come slowly. When you are trying to inspire subconscious thought to change, you are correcting a lifetime of behavior. Be patient; stay the course; frustration is natural. If you are committed to the vision, you will achieve it in time.

3. Consistency

Use gold dots as a reminder for your goal that has an emotional buzz. Since the mid-eighties, Coca Cola Inc. has had a "gold dot" of sorts. "To put a Coke within reach of every human being on the planet." This goal has an emotional and crystal clear objective for Coke employees. Gold dots are a reminder for your objective. Each time your employees see a gold dot you they will be reminded of your collective goal.

ACTION STEP for Consistency:

Gold dots offer you two reminders: the first is that you will gravitate toward your current *dominant* thought, and the second is that you will come to believe this thought to be *true*. These gold dots will keep your dominant thoughts aligned and on target. Repeat these thoughts often enough and you will create a truth. You will paint a reality that will eventually happen.

4. Confidence

Negative patterns erode your confidence and that without confidence, you will not be able to stay the course and realize your objective. When you find yourself indulging negative thought patterns, recall that old rule of physics: *No two things can occupy the same place at the same time*. Clear away the negative ideas in order to nurture the positive ones.

ACTION STEP for Confidence:

Redirect negative thinking with a positive twist, stopping negative thoughts immediately and replace them with a detailed reminder of your corporate goal. With this technique, you will eventually eliminate suffering from negativity. You will strengthen confidence. The future you seek becomes a reality that just hasn't happened yet!

5. Control

We cannot completely control our environment. But we can control what we bring to our environment. Set routines prior to anything that requires peak performance. For your salespeople, have a set routine that keeps stress in check and has aligns effort with your goal.

Design flashcards that outline stressful scenarios. Imagine how well one would handle any given stressful situation. Ensure this is done consistently and repeatedly. You will ultimately influence how well one performs, in almost any given situation.

ACTION STEP for Control:

Leadership for the self has one goal: unite the powerful forces of conscious and subconscious thought to reach peak performance for our employees *and* ourselves. As leaders, the more we understand how to point the ant and the elephant in the same direction, the better the results we will enjoy.

Applying these 5Cs and action steps will result in your ant communicating effectively with the powerful elephant. Alignment of the ant and the elephant is a powerful solution for leadership; not only of others, but leadership of the self.

*About the author: **Vince Poscente** is the author of **The Ant and The Elephant: Leadership for the Self**. He is a business strategist focusing on aligning peak performers behind a common goal (www.beinvincible.com). The above article is an adaptation from **The Ant and The Elephant**, released across the USA October 1st, 2004. He can be reached directly at vince@beinvincible.com.*

