



April, 2019 *In The Know* Summary

## **Unlocking Leadership Mindtraps**

*How to Thrive in Complexity*

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**About the Book** | Leadership today is different than in simpler times, and our human instincts are wired for simpler times. In the past, change was slower, and we were less interconnected. We could rely on past experiences to help us understand what would happen next. In fact, we are hard wired to rely on our reflexes, but these shortcuts are not always relevant—and can lead us astray. They are mindtraps.

### **The Five Mindtraps**

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| 1 | <p><b>Trapped by Simple Stories.</b> Our desire for a simple story blinds us to the real one. Our brains have developed to create patterns of beginning, middle, and end. We connect causes and effects. When those patterns aren't satisfied, we experience it in our bodies as stress and confusion. We project forward from the past into the future and fill in the missing pieces so it all makes sense. Notice your stories and believe in them <i>less</i>.</p> <p><b>Key Question:</b> How is this person a hero?<br/><b>Key Habit:</b> Get into the habit of thinking of <i>three</i> different stories for any given scenario.</p>  |
| 2 | <p><b>Trapped by Rightness.</b> Just because something <i>feels</i> right, does not mean it <i>is</i> right. We look at the world and believe it is as we (each) see it. We think we see it as it <i>is</i>. In reality: we see it as we <i>are</i>. Our sense of being right is not a thought process. It is an emotion. Example: A new colleague joins the team participates in a meeting, and asks questions no one else thought to ask. We could say – Who is that person? How dare her! She's after my job! Or we could think, What great questions! No one thought to ask that.</p> <p><b>Key Question:</b> What do I believe? (Remember, we often have beliefs no one notices. Naming them as beliefs can open up others. Start listening to learn, rather than listening to fix.)<br/><b>Key Habit:</b> How could I be wrong? Accepting our own wrongness is a vital part of how we change.</p>   |
| 3 | <p><b>Trapped by Agreement.</b> Longing for alignment robs us of good ideas. Thousands of years ago, we were wired for connection, that was our sense of survival. Our brains make us experience social pain, which feels just like physical pain. It is <i>hard</i> to disagree. That can push us towards false agreement if we fear we are going to be rejected in some way. One thought is that disagreement should be fixed by <i>compromise</i>. That might have worked before, but in today's world, taking two ideas and merging to one mediocre one is not good. In world of complexity, <i>more options</i> are better. When we can't compromise, then we polarize. (Everyone who thinks like us is <i>right</i>, and everyone who does not is <i>wrong</i>.) The key is to re-define what agreement means.</p> <p><b>Key Question:</b> Could this conflict serve to deepen a relationship? (Not: "Are you willing to risk the relationship over this conflict?")<br/><b>Key Habit:</b> Disagree to expand solution set, rather than agreeing to contract it. Complex situations have so many possibilities.</p> |

- 4 **Trapped by Control.** Control is one of the mindtraps because, like the others, it leads us in the wrong direction in complex times. We believe being in control is critical to success and happiness. While our desire for control won't change, we can shape what control *means*. We can create a different set of ideas about *which things* we can control. We have to shift to thinking about *influence*. Be thoughtful about how we support the growth of things we want. A *direction* may be more important than a *target*. Example: Shopping for a house. I want that house. What is it that you want? More nature? Example: A leader noticed that he was always at the center of the wheel, and that team members always came to him with their issues. He started looking for patterns of issues over a period of weeks. Eventually, he was able to notice who had similar problems, and whom he could connect. Instead of giving answers, he connected team members.
- Key Question:** What can I help enable? What would enable me?  
**Key Habit:** Experiment at the edges. In complex systems, the center is the most resistant to change.
- 5 **Trapped by Ego.** "Shackled to who you are now, you can't reach for who you'll be next." The strongest trap is created by *the person we are wanting to seem to be*—to ourselves and to others. We believe that we have changed much in the past, but won't in the future. We're wired to (wrongly) believe that our big changes are behind us. Because so many of us don't think of ourselves as growing and changing into the future, we invest our energy into protecting the person we have become, rather than growing into the person we might be next. We protect and defend the identity we have rather than open up to new possibilities. Remember that we are always on a developmental path. This helps us walk into the future with more grace.
- Key Question:** Who do I want to be next? (Keeps us from falling into the trap of believing we are already there.)  
**Key Habit:** Listen to learn from yourself. Reflect on your own development.

### Discussion Highlights

- What is the most important shift I am going to make—if I am going to lead well in the future?
- In a situation of conflict ask, "How would you describe the story if the other person were the main character? Or "How would the other person tell the story?"
- How does a leader manage their own mindtraps, and how does a leader *help a team* manage its mindtraps?
- Example of how a leader got a team *energized* to disagree: One participant talked about a former boss who considered "group think" a cardinal sin. Boss implemented "Rule of 7" with a large group. He started by pointing (randomly) to one person in the room and then randomly counted (to the left or right) to 7. The seventh person would have to "play lawyer" and argue why a particular decision was a bad one. Boss made it safe to not agree, and ultimately this became part of the culture. You'd hear team members say, "I think that's a great idea, but let me put my lawyer at on and present an alternative..."
- At Apple, Steve Jobs famously said the "first idea" is not always the "best idea."
- What happens in an organization where consent / cooperation are highly valued? How do you facilitate discussion of alternatives?
- Post-mortem is after action review. Idea: conduct a "pre-mortem." Pre-mortem happens before an idea is implemented. Think of 100 ways this project could go sideways. Do it in a fun, enthusiastic way while everyone can be agreeable while poking at the project. Example: "The technology might not work," or "What if a meteor came down and blew up building?" (Crazy idea, but...) "What if there's a snowstorm?" (Useful thought to start contingency planning.)

- Is it Complicated or Complex?
  - Complicated is something you can write an SOP for. Metaphor for how to know if something is complex: There is a chair in the room, and that chair is connected to everything else in the room. When you move the chair, everything moves.
  - If it's complex, you need to do influence diagram. Figure out who is impacting the issue, and how can you influence it.
- To help unravel a challenge, ask: What is at stake for me here? What is the hardest part? How do I know this is true? Ask each question three times to keep un-peeling onion.
- Two steps: awareness and courage. Once I am aware, I am going to step into something different. And that takes courage.

### Related Resources

- Laura Mendelow's [blog](#)
- [Coaches Rising](#) (Trainings, podcasts)
- Resources with exercises and activities to add to your OD toolkit:
  - [Liberating Structures](#)
  - [Plexus Institute](#)
  - [ATD Book of Road Tested Activities](#) (Book)
  - [Becoming a Resonant Leader](#) (Workbook)
  - [The Big Book of Games](#) (Series)

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