

# Transformational Leadership in Turbulent Times

by Constant Hine and Robin Levy



Constant Hine has over 38 years' experience in the field of early childhood as a classroom teacher, adult educator, coach and consultant. She is a nationally recognized, dynamic and inspirational speaker and

author including her newest book, "Transformational Coaching for Early Childhood Educators" from Redleaf Press. She received a master's degree in teaching/ECE from Nova University, Florida. Since 1988 Hines' company, Horizons In Learning, has offered professional development services to early childhood professionals, leaders, coaches, agents of change, teachers and care-givers throughout North America. Hines specializes in transformational learning, coaching, and leadership that engages professionals to make lasting, deep and sustainable changes. She developed the GROOMER Framework for Change™, a mental model for coaches, leaders and agents of change to use to facilitate the change process. This framework is a relationship and inquiry-based transformational coaching approach to support sustainable habits of reflection, problem solving and lifelong learning.



Robin Levy has been in the field of early childhood education for 30 years in a variety of roles including: licensed family child care provider, classroom teacher, large center director, coach, consultant, adult educator and social and emotional

development specialist. Levy holds a master's degree in educational administration and policy from the University of Denver, is a Buell early childhood leadership program fellow, and has extensive experience using various coaching models. Levy specializes in transformational learning, intentional coaching and leadership strategies that engage professionals to make meaningful, profound and sustainable changes which foster continuous quality improvement in early childhood programs and agencies. Levy is a "coach's coach" working to broaden and deepen the skills and mastery of coaches and mentors (regardless of their actual title or role) using the GROOMER Framework for Change™, an approach for facilitating ongoing professional development using a continuum of intentional facilitation strategies.

*"Transformational leaders serve two crucial purposes which require courage and self-awareness: Awakening consciousness. Inspiring action."*

*Sackeena Gordon-Jones*

**T**ransformational leadership creates significant change in people and organizations. It influences perceptions and values and it impacts employee or follower motivation and expectations in a positive way. Today more than ever, the early care and education field needs transformational leaders to facilitate organizations, systems, and individuals within our workforce as we navigate unprecedented amounts of stress and change, as well as unknown future circumstances. COVID has created greater social exposure of historical problematic issues in ECE. These turbulent times demand rethinking responses at program and system levels while maintaining quality care for children.

Often defined as an approach that causes change in individuals and social systems, ideally transformational leadership creates positive change in followers, with the end goal of developing followers into leaders themselves. As change agents, transformational leaders guide people and organiza-

tions, partner with followers, empower teams, identify needed changes, and share a truly inspiring vision. As a strategy, they model these qualities to develop them in others. James MacGregor Burns introduced the concept of transformational leadership in 1978, calling it a process in which "leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation" (Burns, 1978).

According to Bernard M. Bass (1985), the transformational leader offers followers something more than just working for self-gain; they provide followers with an inspiring mission and vision and they empower followers to create an identity and to contribute to the greater good. Bass identifies four distinct transformational leadership behaviors that influence, motivate, and inspire followers. The outcome of these behaviors includes an awakening or expanding of follower consciousness.

**1. Idealized influence** – leads by example with charisma and ethics.

2. **Intellectual stimulation** – open, tolerant, innovative leader who encourages thinking.

3. **Individual consideration** – engages individual potential using coaching; acts as a caring supportive resource to followers.

4. **Inspirational motivation** – inspires commitment to energizing shared vision and achievement with challenging yet reasonable goals; motivates intrinsically and extrinsically.

In contrast, transactional leadership is typically more of an authoritarian approach based on a “give and take” relationship. It can involve rewards and punishments, suggesting that compliance is the desired outcome. Additionally, it is often associated with maintaining the status quo rather than aiming for progress or innovation. Transformational leaders can easily fall back into this more traditional approach when they are personally stressed, challenged by the unknown, and/or having trouble clarifying next steps.

It is not unusual for all people to revert to familiar habits when stressed and challenged, even if those habits do not work effectively and are not what is really needed or intended. For this reason, it is crucial for transformational leaders to be resilient, continually expanding their capacity to self-regulate and respond to overwhelming demands and challenges, and to help their followers to do the same.

Transformational leaders are resilient and reflective, taking precious time to contemplate new or deeper perspectives in changing circumstances. They model resiliency by making calm intentional decisions. They are an **idealized influence**, charismatically walking their talk with open-minded and authentic curiosity regarding the needs of the organization and their followers. Transforma-

tional leaders constantly reflect on how to be a role model for others, engage in ethical and mindful behaviors, instill pride and motivation, acknowledge both the value and significant contributions of others, and earn respect and trust among followers.

### TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER ACTION:

*Be the DJ of your mind by tuning out thoughts that are unsupportive, negative, judgmental (of others or yourself) or fear based. Say, “Not That!” instead. Even if you do not know a thought to replace the disempowering thought with, declare that the negative thought is not what you will choose to listen to. “Not That!” is a choice that opens new possibilities. One possible choice is to replace that thought with at least one gratitude; gratitude changes attitude.*

Setting the tone for how learning, growing and change are experienced within the organization, transformational leaders encourage **intellectual stimulation** in a culture of ongoing learning and innovation. Even when moving one small step at a time, and even if someone missteps and loses a bit of ground, each person’s individual effort matters.

*“In essence, through coaching, the leader facilitates the transformation of possibilities into realities.”*

*Sackeena Gordon-Jones*

When a misstep does occur, transformational leaders act as change agents, encouraging others to learn from their failures. Experiencing mistakes is a

predictable and normal part of change. Acceptance of learning from mistakes will be needed more than ever to navigate the new normal upon returning to work. There will be more modified schedules, varied environments to meet new physical distancing protocols, and possibly modified role expectations or responsibilities. The transformational leader is a partner in this experimentation process, consistently learning from their mistakes and reframing their own perceptions of their role and responsibilities.

### TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER ACTION:

*To create a culture of learning and innovation, encourage teams to start meetings by sharing big and small victories, and provide time to discuss lessons learned from mistakes and failures in an open forum, including your own lessons learned.*

Considering the current global pandemic, leaders must model and coach how to incorporate care, be present, and provide support for others. It is not a time to dismiss or minimize the needs and concerns of followers, including social, emotional, and/or spiritual apprehensions. Transformational leaders use coaching strategies to highlight strengths and unique contributions, individually facilitate growth, clarify barriers or challenges, and creatively think about what may bust those barriers.

A strong relationship with followers in the context of a coach or mentor relationship creates essential opportunities for the leader to be a caring and supportive resource, and to explore the impact of current circumstances such as physical distancing, possible illness of loved ones and so much more. It is a time to coach to motivate and engage so followers are willing and able to make the necessary adjustments to

effectively move forward into a tentative future. Such **individualized consideration** occurs with the leader actively paying attention to the strengths, needs, and challenges of each person. These authentic connections support each person's unique potential, and will be critical for the emotional, mental, and professional well-being of our early childhood workforce in the foreseeable future.

### TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER ACTION:

*Intentionally make time to develop daily reflective practices because thinking takes time. When challenged, ask yourself 20 questions about the given challenge and DO NOT try to answer those questions or find solutions. Explore the best questions to ask, expand your curiosity. By strengthening your own reflective practices, you will become a more skillful reflective thinking partner and coach for others. Practice using the same strategy with others to foster reflective thinking.*

To provide **inspirational motivation**, transformational leaders embody and communicate optimism about the future and upcoming objectives. They communicate high and reasonable goals, provide meaningful context for the tasks at hand, and believe that together they can achieve their associated mission. Because a follower's emotional connection to their work influences their level of engagement, commitment, and willingness to take risks, it is important for leaders to acknowledge the significance each person brings to the whole organization. Acknowledgment helps followers recognize that each person contributes to the shared vision.

### TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER ACTION:

*Staying optimistic is a choice. A choice of what to think, and of what thoughts are worth listening to. Every thought is not the truth. Become aware, mindful of your thoughts and choose wisely which to believe. Thoughts create emotional responses and resulting behaviors or actions. Let kindness, care, and compassion guide choices of which thoughts to listen to, believe and give your attention.*

Being resilient by expanding one's capacity to overcome misfortune and recover from stress of change is essential. Furthermore, strategies for promoting intrinsic motivation, fostering aspirations for self-development, and encouraging opportunities for honest engagement about personal and professional well-being are critical data to inform the transformational leader's choices for how best to support, inspire and motivate followers.

*"...People are seeking feelings of personal significance. People (in all jobs and roles) want to feel that they matter and that the work they do matters."*

*Mark C. Crowley*

Resilience connects to persistence, in that not only does a resilient person bounce back, recover from change, and overcome misfortune, but in the face of challenge they keep going and keep trying. These days, many people feel a distressing loss of control, which can trigger automatic self-regulation responses associated with fight, flight or freeze. This unsettling and disempowering sense of overwhelm is a typical emotional response to stress, requiring even the most resilient people to attend to their actions and behaviors when triggered.

There is no doubt that today, stress and overwhelm are prevalent and

affect all aspects of our lives—physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. Stress is a nonspecific response of the body to any demand for change. It is the result of an imbalance between life's demands and one's ability to respond to those demands. There are four basic principles to transform stress and build resilience (Hine, 2019):

**1. Increase response-ability.** Decrease demands and increase the ability to respond to demands proactively using physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual intervention and prevention strategies. Differentiate which demands are external—email, traffic, finances, work, weather, other people—and which are internal—beliefs, assumptions, judgments, expectations, thoughts, feelings—and then prioritize decreasing internal demands.

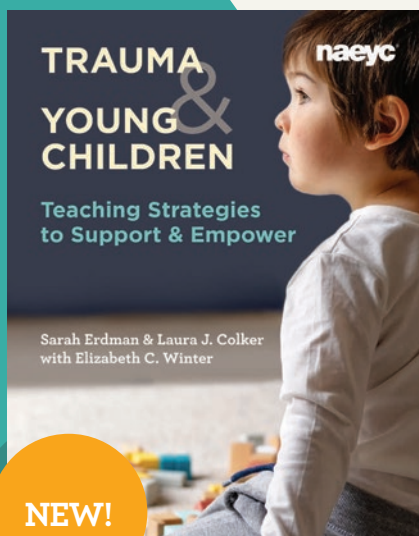
**2. Start where you have choice and control.** Expand awareness about where you do and do not have choice and control. Focus first on where you have 100 percent control—your thoughts, perspective, internal demands and how to expand your capacity to respond proactively to any circumstance or internal demand.

**3. Reframe perceptions to empower.** Increase awareness of and reframe disempowering perceptions, thoughts, and feelings that generate behaviors, actions, and habits. Be the DJ of your mind and explore how to reframe perceptions to intentionally impact desirable results.

**4. Focus on what you want, not what you worry about.** What you focus on expands, so focus toward a new way of thinking or acting. Energy follows focus! Clarify responsive new ways of thinking or acting to adopt, even if you do not know how.

Transformational leaders practice reflection and model mindful self-regulation, in order to balance the





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unpredictable demands of life. They consciously and intentionally navigate beliefs, thoughts, and feelings to create connections with others and empower others to see possibility. They reflect on how these actions impact behaviors and they plan proactively to influence future results and outcomes, all while deliberately preventing feelings of overwhelm. The ability to respond, that intentional self-regulation, is where individuals have power and control of their responses to choose and create a path forward. If transformational leaders practice the four distinct behaviors that influence and inspire followers and colleagues, then by definition transformational leaders promote resilience in their followers.

### TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER ACTION:

*Connection is a choice grounded in vulnerability that expands resiliency. Intentionally choose connection to others, animals, or nature. It is a form*

*of selfless offering of yourself and your attention. Giving is an antidote to self-absorption, fear, and feelings of being lost or alone. Choose thoughts that lead toward connection.*

The truth is we can all lead from any chair by becoming an inspiration for others. We can all model hope and possibility using the power of choice. By making intentional choices about what to think and where to focus our attention, by choosing connection, care, and compassion, the natural result is a desire to give and to be of service to others. Transformational leaders impact consciousness and inspire action in others, in order to creatively respond to the extraordinary demands in these turbulent times. And, by fostering care, encouraging reflective practices, supporting adaptability, and investing in the development of those around us, we can all be transformational leaders.

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