

# FROM HERE TO CERTAINTY: BECOMING CEO AND HOW A TRUSTED LEADERSHIP ADVISOR (TLA) HELPED THE CLIENT GET THERE

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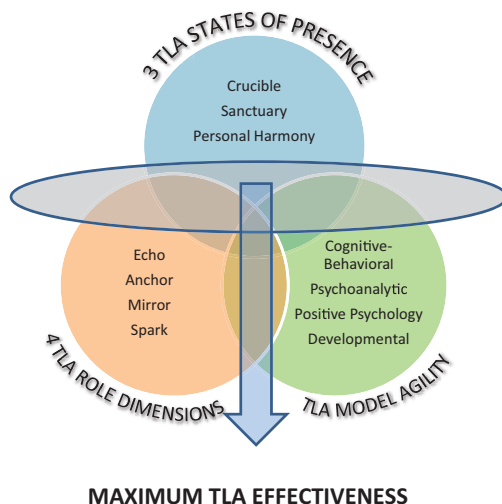
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An in-depth case study is used to illustrate the transition senior consultants can make from the role of executive coach to a role conceptualized by the author as trusted leadership advisor (TLA) in long-term engagements with senior business executives. In this engagement, spanning several years, the client ultimately became CEO of a global entity. Factors addressed in the case include the client's development issues, his progress, and the challenge of his simultaneously making developmental progress while managing a difficult boss and understanding how the company culture in some ways exacerbated his leadership issues. A number of key practice factors are specified as potential guidance for practitioners already working or aspiring to work with CEOs and other senior business leaders. These factors, embedded in the application of an integrated practice model, include how the TLA guided and conceptualized the engagement, useful tools including written summaries and constructive triangulation, and the management of multiple roles.

**Keywords:** trusted leadership advisor, executive coach, executive development, integrated practice model

Rarely is a new CEO fully ready to meet the relentless demands and pressures of this role. Even those internal CEO successor candidates who have been intentionally groomed and well mentored for the job can find the reality of it daunting and significantly more fragile than anticipated—even when business conditions are positive. However, the challenge of finding one's own sturdy footing and leadership cadence as a CEO is exponentially complicated when the business conditions are as negative as they were when Vince assumed the helm of a 6-billion-dollar company, Zentex. Recently spun out of a global manufacturing organization, Zentex was saddled with debt, came with a number of challenging liabilities, and some analysts doomed it to fail.

The purpose of this article is to convey how Vince evolved as a leader who eventually became the Zentex CEO and to illustrate the role that his trusted leadership advisor (TLA) played in his career trajectory. The TLA role is discussed in the context of an integrated practice model (see [Figure 1](#)). The major factors in this model are three states of presence, four practice dimensions, and model agility—or the use of different psychological models, as described by [Kauffman and Hodgetts \(2016\)](#). This integrated practice model will be discussed below, in the section “How a TLA



*Figure 1.* Trusted leadership advisor (TLA) integrated practice model. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

Helped the Client Become CEO.” The repetitive sequence of practitioner actions in client meetings is seen in [Figure 2](#).

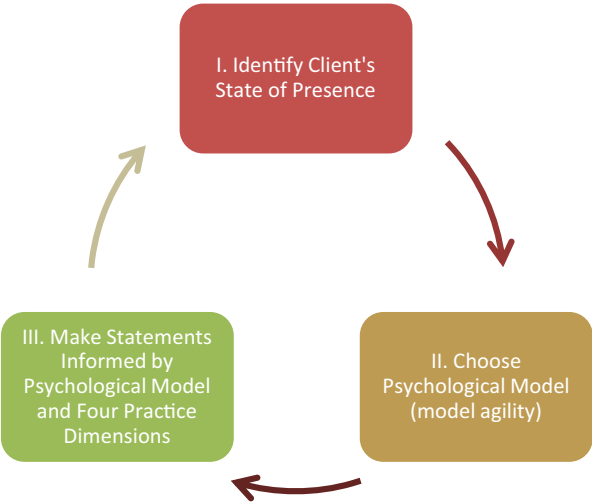
The consultant’s 8-year interaction with Vince has been unfolding through four distinct phases: emergence, convergence, divergence, and coalescence. The terminology for these phases is intended to both (a) guide the reader’s understanding of the “flow” of this long-term engagement and (b) indicate key transition points in the client’s internalization of learning and change as related to his executive development. Further, these four phases provide a structure for organizing and discussing relevant client data, as well as for underscoring the contextual complexity faced in a client-consultant relationship that has remained focused, objective, and trusting—even as problematic boss and culture factors swirled about them.

### Phase 1: Emergence

What “emerged” in this first phase of the consultant’s work with Vince was the expected executive coaching start-up information—information about the client as provided by his boss plus additional observations by a member of the company’s board who the consultant knew well. What also emerged was, as is often the case in working with senior executives, the importance of managing multiple relationships effectively and maintaining appropriate boundaries of confidentiality. Although a full discussion of this critical issue is beyond the scope of this paper, it was thoroughly discussed with Vince, and how it was handled enriched the work. Specifically, Vince remained the primary client, both the parent company and Zentex were the paying sponsors, and the chief human-resource officers of both the parent and Zentex became partners in the work by providing an ongoing flow of collateral information.

The value of such collateral information cannot be overstated. In other words, the overall effectiveness of an executive coach (and later the TLA) is increased immensely by frequent and timely input from key company observers. Vince’s boss and the aforementioned board member were also sources of timely observations, and the TLA used these relationships to convey both the progress Vince was making and his potential readiness for greater responsibility.

How to manage these multiple relationships and ensure a trusting relationship with the client in such a long-term engagement is perhaps reflexive for the author based on three decades of experience. However, it is important to note that in the work with Vince, she regularly discussed and received clearance from him on topics she intended to cover in her conversations, particularly with



**Note:** This sequence of practitioner actions may be repeated a number of times in a client meeting

3 TLA States of Presence	TLA Model Agility	4 TLA Role Dimensions
<b>Crucible</b> – Managing the intensity of executive’s most demanding business challenges	<b>Cognitive-Behavioral</b> – Challenging client’s thoughts about effective leadership	<b>Echo</b> – Repeating necessary leadership messages at opportune times
<b>Sanctuary</b> – Emphasizing executive’s capabilities during times of heightened vulnerability and loneliness	<b>Psychoanalytic</b> – Using underlying psychodynamic material to provide insights about client’s leadership behavior	<b>Anchor</b> – Reinforcing client’s insights and lessons learned in previous coaching
<b>Personal Harmony</b> – Promoting executive’s contentment and psychological preparation for post-career life phase	<b>Positive Psychology</b> – Providing affirmation of client’s leadership strengths	<b>Mirror</b> – Ensuring client’s objective self-awareness and timely actions
	<b>Developmental</b> – Expanding client’s beliefs and assumptions about effective leadership	<b>Spark</b> – Igniting client’s fresh thoughts and bolder actions for business success

Figure 2. Using the trusted leadership advisor (TLA) integrated practice model: The repetitive sequence of practitioner actions. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

his boss and the board member. In short, throughout this engagement, the TLA perceived and used her access to the boss and to the board member as an opportunity for constructive triangulation.

Initial information about Vince provided by organizational sources was amplified by data the author gathered through his life history, details of his career progress, and psychometric measures.<sup>1</sup> Vince was one of four executive vice presidents reporting to the CEO of a 30-billion-dollar global manufacturing company. Trained as a chemical engineer, he also held an MBA, and early in his career he gravitated to the commercial side of the business. One of his first mentors had influenced this career direction, saying, “Don’t get hung up on being the best engineer. You’ve got something else—something special that makes you great for the business side.” This sound advice was echoed in Vince’s own words: “It’s all about the customers, and I love being with them—this is off-the-chart excitement for me because you manage through influence, creating and positioning ideas that really work for them.”

<sup>1</sup> The psychometric battery consisted of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal, Life Styles Inventory 1, Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R), and the BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQi).

When the CEO significantly increased Vince's business operating responsibilities and added a few functional areas as well, he said to Vince, "You are going to have to work differently to handle all this effectively—would you be open to working with a coach?" Vince agreed to have a noncommittal "chemistry check" meeting with the author—who had already worked with the CEO and another member of the executive leadership team (ELT).

Handsome, quick-witted, warm, and gregarious, Vince also exuded instant charm, authenticity, and a willingness to trust that quickly ignited high-quality conversation with his prospective executive coach. Within the first 10 min, he provided a telling self-appraisal: "I'm a high-touch visceral kind of leader, but given all of this responsibility, I can't continue this way." The coach made a special note of this plus his comment, "Growing into this role is a big jump because now I'm one of them. I like it OK—seeing how the company really works—but truthfully, I would have been happy being a business-unit director my entire career." At the end of this meeting, Vince agreed to a 1-year coaching engagement that included monthly meetings, plus full email and phone access on an as-needed basis. He saw the author's work with others on the ELT as a plus in terms of her understanding of his boss and the culture, and her four-phase model (data-gathering, feedback, coaching, and consolidation) made sense to him as an engineer. He also said he would make the coaching a top priority, and he appreciated the boundary of confidentiality as practiced by this coach.<sup>2</sup>

In the coaching agenda-setting meeting attended by Vince, his boss, and the author,<sup>3</sup> the CEO's respect for Vince was as clear as his frustration about disappointing business results. He emphasized that ideal coaching outcomes would be for Vince (a) to drive greater accountability among the business presidents who reported to him and (b) to "step up" the strategic skills needed to accelerate business growth.

In the executive coach's debrief with Vince after this meeting, he said he agreed with his boss's observations but also asserted it would be "tough to maintain" his behavior-change effort. In his words,

For me to drive stuff more, I'll need to be less deferential. I'll need to be more aggressive in pushing my views forward, especially when I disagree with my boss. And I can't shut down in the ELT because I'm worrying about those peer relationships and especially about the CEO and what he's thinking about my views.

Vince also mentioned to his boss's limitations as a leader, especially his failure to make timely staff changes and to establish a clear strategic direction for the company. The CEO's issues would later be confirmed by the coach's board contact. Further, through the course of her work with Vince, she would realize that in criticizing Vince the boss was using projection as a defense. Her efforts to convey this interpretation to the CEO were met with only a modicum of success.

A rich array of other information emerged during the data-gathering phase of this executive-coaching engagement—data that further informed the areas for coaching. Specifically, key themes from Vince's life history provided a compelling window into the leader he had become—and preferred to be. These themes included his (a) strong relationship-orientation ("I connect through people—this is really key for me"); (b) inclination to "fix" issues; (c) sense of fairness; (d) trusting nature and reflexive willingness to give others multiple opportunities to prove themselves; (e) extreme loyalty ("You just do what's asked of you"); (f) combination of interpersonal skills, integrity, and authenticity; (g) optimism and psychological resilience; and (h) tenacity ("I like it when somebody says I can't do something—that really motivates me").

<sup>2</sup>When working individually with senior business leaders, I consider the executive the "client" and the organization as the paying "sponsor" of the work. This means that key data elicited during the engagement, including life-history material, testing results, and organization-based interviews, are held in confidence. However, there is enough information shared with the boss and HR partner (if there is one) throughout the engagement so that they are aware of the foci of the coaching, quality of the executive's participation, and progress (or lack of same) being made, and they are often given guidance about ways that they can help support an ideal outcome from this development investment.

<sup>3</sup>The author prefers to have the corporate human-resource officer (CHRO) as a partner who, along with the boss, provides key collateral observations throughout the engagement. However, this role would not be filled until a few years later. When the CHRO joined the ELT, he became another source of collateral information for TLA.

A review of Vince's 30-year career in this company revealed a strong pattern of success. This included a rapid rise through marketing, expat tenure in Europe, and successful P&L stints before he was made an executive vice president, became a member of the CEO's leadership team, and ultimately was appointed Zentex CEO.

The objective of the psychological testing was to increase Vince's self-awareness, specifically as it related to *how* he was leading. As Hogan and Kaiser (2008) wrote, "Being able to manage yourself is at least as important for your career as being able to manage others. Self-management begins with self-awareness which means understanding your personality" (p. 7). The psychological-testing data provided information that further underscored key aspects of Vince's leadership style. Cognitively these included his superior innate ability, adroit analytical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Not surprisingly, he was a great "fixer." In terms of personality, Vince was a strong extrovert, highly affiliative, and greatly focused on the well-being and success of others. The data also indicated a cooperative and collaborative (nonoppositional) nature—that is, he was not given to conflict or political power dynamics. Other data points indicated low neuroticism and high levels of curiosity, agreeableness, altruism, and conscientiousness. Vince's emotional intelligence was high average but would have been in the superior range had it not been for a lower subscale score on self-actualization.

The one inconsistency in Vince's psychological data involved self-actualization—and this is notable. Specifically, one measure (Life Styles Inventory 1) yielded a high score on his interest in becoming his most effective self, while another (the BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory) yielded a low score. In time the TLA would understand this data inconsistency as an aspiration that had unconsciously been suppressed and then released once Vince began to seriously contemplate becoming a CEO (see the section on the divergence phase below).

At the end of the feedback phase the author integrated major themes from Vince's life history, testing data, and his boss's input on areas for progress and considered this data in the context of various leadership theories. It appeared, and Vince agreed, that his preferred way of leading most approximated Greenleaf's (1998) conceptualization of "servant leadership." These leadership aspects included his focus on empowering others, empathy, achieving consensus through active listening and persuasion (vs. coercive tactics), and trusting others' good intentions. The fact that he had spent 30 years being socialized in such a hierarchical and centralized culture further intensified his developmental challenge of being more aggressive and less deferential.

Vince and his TLA agreed that success in the coaching phase would be rewarded by a focus on his not overdoing his strengths. As Kaplan and Kaiser (2009) wrote, "Only by grappling with strengths employed to excess can you strike a balance on two basic pairs of opposites: strategic versus operational leadership and forceful versus enabling leadership" (p. 101). Therefore, the primary coaching area was how Vince was managing people, with emphasis on his being less tolerant of mediocrity, more demanding about accountability, and not letting his "fairness" value get in the way of there being consequences for direct reports who did not meet established objectives. They would also focus on his being less deferential with his boss and peers, especially when there needed to be more candid truth-telling about business results, operational issues, and particularly on strategic issues that were not being fully addressed in the ELT.

To gauge progress being made, the author used a tool she developed: the visual leadership metaphor (VLM).<sup>4</sup> Vince's first three-frame depiction of his "leadership journey" can be seen in Figure 3. Clearly, he grasped the leadership change he needed to make: the transition from a task-oriented and duty-bound responder to a strategic influencer.

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<sup>4</sup>VLM is a tool created specifically to assess the progress of a coaching engagement. The executive's language is given to an artist who draws the imagery. This sequence of three images (current, transitional, and future leadership states) is then laminated on a sheet of paper with the imagery on one side and the language for each state on the back. One copy is given to the executive and the other is kept in his or her file. It is referred to frequently throughout the coaching with the coach's question, "Which frame are you in now?" The goal is for the executive to feel he or she has reached Frame 3 by the end of the coaching. Executives are encouraged to keep their VLMs in a visible place as a reminder of their coaching goals and reinforcement of progress being made.

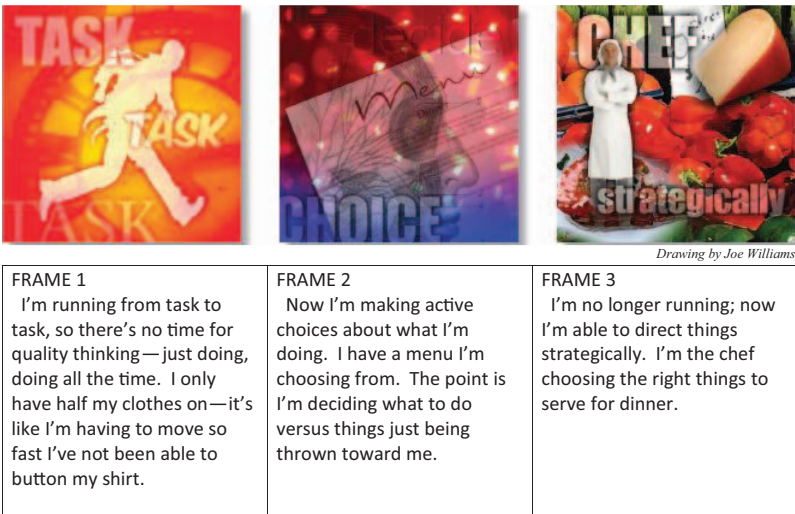


Figure 3. Vince's visual leadership metaphor (VLM) # 1.

Early in this first year the coach commented on Vince's tendency to accept excuses and to be excessively empathic with others. While this dimension of emotional intelligence has been established as an important leadership competency (Goleman, 1998), it was another strength that was problematic in its excess. As Hicks and Dess (2008) wrote,

Leaders must be able to appeal to logic and reason and acknowledge the feelings of others so that people feel the decisions are correct. However, over-identifying with others and confusing empathy with sympathy is inappropriate and makes it more difficult to make those tough decisions.

This was an important insight for Vince who said,

This makes me think of the theme of fairness and how it drives behavior that is not aggressive enough, and the theme of empathy can be seen by others as my being naïve. With these themes, the eye-opener for me is the need to be more assertive. I can't discard empathy and fairness but I need to be able to manage them and be more assertive, too. I also need to stop accepting excuses. This is a culture where people can readily explain why results aren't there, and those explanations are just accepted so there really aren't any consequences. There are not many fearless people here—and this is something that I need to be. (p. 19)

Good progress was made during the coaching engagement given Vince's intention to grow, openness to feedback, the flow of collateral information from his boss and others, and the quality of the relationship with his executive coach. Of note was the fact that Vince had no personal power or material drives; what motivated him most was the success of the company and the progress of others. However, over time, the need for him to increase the use of his positional power—especially as related to driving the accountability of others—would prove to be the most demanding aspect of his growth as a leader. Ongoing boss and culture factors would continue to challenge forward momentum of work with Vince as he moved into the convergence phase with his TLA.

Phase 2: Convergence

At the end of the 1-year coaching engagement Vince acknowledged progress made and referenced his first VLM, saying, "I do feel more like the chef who's choosing the right things to serve for dinner, but I'm a work-in-progress, too." He invited the author to continue to work with him—thus, signaling her transition from executive coach to his TLA—a relationship that would continue for



several years. The major differences between the roles of executive coach and TLA can be seen in Table 1. Notably, in the TLA role, she would become more directive about Vince’s leadership behavior, and strive to deepen his internalization of lessons learned in the coaching. Ultimately, she would help prepare him for becoming a CEO and support his effective transition into that role.

Over the next 3 years the TLA’s work with Vince would involve the “convergence” of key factors in his evolution as a leader. These factors included (a) the aforementioned insights about his leadership, (b) deeper understanding of his boss’s leadership limitations and how these were at times projected onto him, and (c) recognition of how negative aspects of the culture impeded his progress as a leader—especially as the culture fed his most empathic leadership behavior.

The effects of his boss’s use of coercive power (Greenleaf, 1998)—that is, imposing his will and his overt complaints about the inadequacies of others on the ELT in terms of driving results and formulating strategy—badly contaminated the atmosphere of the senior leadership team. In fact, it was not and would not become a team because Vince and his peers were not inclined to challenge the CEO, and they were unable to influence a more productive dialogue. Yes, Vince needed to strengthen his strategic impact and be less deferential, but to some extent these development goals

Table 1  
*Differences Between Executive Coach and Trusted Leadership Advisor (TLA) Roles*

Factors	Executive coach	TLA
How the work starts	Typically initiated by boss or CHRO	By invitation of a coached executive
The clients	Typically mid-senior-level leaders or high-potential employees in public, not-for-profit, and entrepreneurial organizations	Top executives—corporate (C-level) leaders, business-unit presidents, potential C-level successors, leaders of not-for-profit entities and entrepreneurial ventures
Focus of the work	Increased leadership effectiveness; grooming for next role	Internalizing and leveraging insights, lessons learned, and behavior change(s) made in coaching; supporting ongoing leadership effectiveness
Consultant’s stance	Coaching (not directive)	Consulting (directive/advising)
Engagement duration	Typically several months to a year	Many years (even through an executive’s entire leadership tenure)
Meeting frequency	Monthly meetings plus email and phone	Typically on an “as needed” basis plus phone and email
Nature of relationship	Strong boundary held between client and executive coach	Permeable boundary between client and TLA (e.g., meals shared, joint business trips, attendance at company celebratory events)
Confidentiality	Strong boundary held but includes flow of collateral info from boss, CHRO, and possibly board member(s)	Same
States of presence (crucible, sanctuary, personal harmony)	Tool for establishing rapport and credibility with client	The “glue” in a longstanding and valued relationship between client and TLA
Practice dimensions (echo, anchor, mirror, spark)	Used to guide coaching actions and achieve desired outcomes	Used as tool for deepening internalization of coaching outcomes and ensuring ongoing leadership effectiveness
Financial support	Paid by company	Same

Note. CHRO = corporate human-resoure officer.

were inevitably thwarted in the deflated atmosphere of the ELT dominated by the leadership limitations of its CEO.

Regarding the culture, work with Vince was frustrated by its being as hierarchical, autocratic, and centralized as it ever was. This was also a culture that prided itself on being a global “family.” However, this cradle-to-grave employment mindset was now becoming a real impediment to the company’s growth. Because explicit performance feedback was more of an exception than the norm, the TLA would sharpen Vince’s recognition of this issue and urge his having timely and fierce performance-management conversations with his direct reports. Increasingly, he would reinforce expectations and the fact that there would be consequences (e.g., reduced bonus potential, possible loss of job) for missed objectives or other failed execution.

During this convergence phase the TLA continued to receive input from the CEO, who both acknowledged Vince’s progress and maintained that he needed to push even harder on others’ performance. Input from the board contact was pointed; “Everyone loves Vince, you can’t help but like the guy, but this is simply not enough now. He’s got to deliver stronger results if he’s to be considered even as an emergency CEO-succession candidate.”

In an effort to break through further with Vince—but not betray the confidentiality she held with both the CEO and the board member—the TLA emphasized how he was underplaying his positional power. Although Greenleaf (1998) maintained that “true leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a deep desire to help others” (p. 4), Vince was practicing this in the extreme. His deeply embedded pattern of helping and “fixing” had, in fact, fostered codependent relationships with some of his senior business leaders. This pattern only served to increase his boss’s and board members’ reservations about him as a forceful, results-oriented leader.

To gauge progress during the convergence phase, Vince’s language in his second VLM (see Figure 4) was especially useful. Vince and the TLA concentrated on what it would take for him to be the “fearless” leader he believed he needed to be in a business climate that had become increasingly volatile. Although Vince had made excellent progress, especially on driving clarity and alignment on key business objectives, it was still difficult for him to replace underperformers. The TLA continued to use collateral input, including another compelling comment from the CEO:

Vince still hasn’t dealt with that big president problem. That guy hasn’t made a quarter in nearly 2 years. I gave Vince every chance to step up to it but he didn’t; instead he made excuses for him, he protected him, and he said that he could fix him.

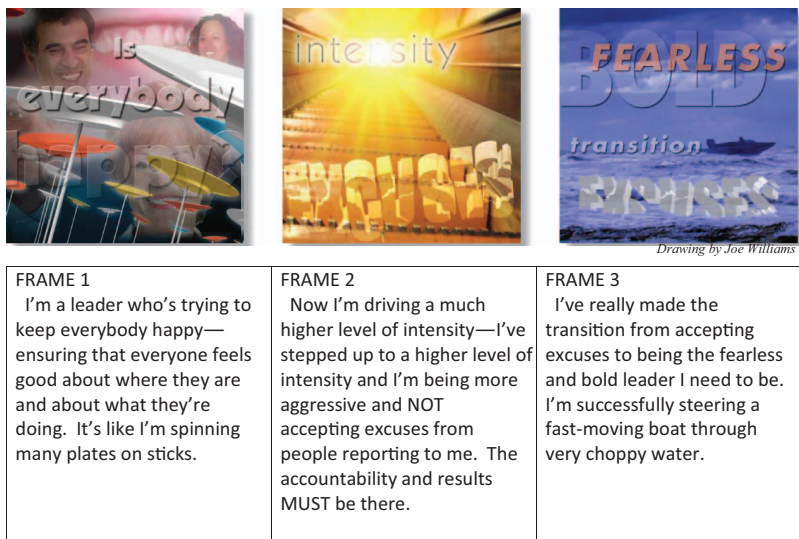


Figure 4. Vince’s visual leadership metaphor (VLM) # 2.



Vince didn't completely share the CEO's views on this president, especially about the need to replace him, but his TLA emphasized that Vince's preference for "having a warm body rather than nobody" in this role would continue to block significant business progress.

As this convergence phase continued it was clear that Vince was examining his leadership differently. In one meeting he asked the revealing question, "When am I a thought-partner and when am I fostering their proactive behavior?" Although it was a provocative question, it also raised the TLA's concern that Vince was putting too much of a positive spin (thought-partner) on what might fundamentally be a rationalization for his fostering codependent behavior. She replied,

These people are locked into a familiar cadence with you. They're accustomed to dumping their problems at your doorstep and you stepping up to solve them. You need to rebrand yourself by sending a clear message that you're a different leader now—a leader who is demanding more accountability and proactive problem-solving from them. A leader who does not confuse activity with actual results. A leader who does not accept excuses. A leader who still values relationships but your relationships will not transcend the necessity of people meeting their objectives and accelerating business results.

As this convergence phase progressed the TLA sensed Vince's growing frustration with his boss. She chose to affirm and reinforce what she believed to be his major talents and the positive implications of these for his future. She also initiated conversations about how he might forge more complementarity with his boss. In a written summary to Vince after one of their meetings the TLA wrote,

Given the differences in your respective styles, there is potential for greater complementarity that could have positive effects, especially in terms of learning from each other. On my wish list for your learning from him is the capacity for synthetic thinking, especially in terms of weaving together key market factors. Obviously, you already possess this but he does at a lightning speed level. On my wish list for him from you: more emotional intelligence—especially patient attunement to the perspectives of others.

By the end of this convergence phase Vince had made real headway, but the most striking development of all was the heightened awareness of what would constitute his self-actualization. Through candid conversations with his TLA, Vince realized that he wanted to be a CEO. Based on her consulting experience, the TLA shared key criteria (see [Table 2](#)) for this role and simultaneously kept him focused on maintaining a constructive relationship with his CEO, who was taking steps to divest a business unit from the company. Based on his industry knowledge and experience, Vince saw himself as a viable candidate to run this entity. In efforts to at least neutralize reservations the CEO had about this, the TLA reinforced with his boss her view of the leadership capabilities that indicated Vince's readiness for the opportunity.

### Phase 3: Divergence

Over the next couple of years Vince would make further progress in terms of driving greater accountability among his key leaders and accelerating business results. Notably, in this "divergence" phase, his own career contentment began to assume prominence on a par with his concerns about that of others. Significantly, after revisiting the data point of his desire for self-actualization, a clearer picture (as indicated above) emerged about his CEO aspiration. Vince could now state this aspiration with confidence and, with the TLA's urging, he positioned himself with the CEO as a sound candidate to run the unit the company was about to divest. In Vince's words,

I can see myself doing this. I want to do it. I know it won't be easy, but I believe I can give it a good shot and create a culture that will be very different from this one. It will be a culture unburdened by heavy process. It will be a culture where things get done in a simpler, faster, and more empowered manner.

In this divergence phase Vince's recognition of his CEO aspiration had a number of growth-promoting effects. Most significantly, he started to lift the 30-year emotional albatross of loyalty to company, deference to authority, and attachment to his Mr. Nice Guy persona. Further, the more the TLA reminded him that key decision-makers questioned his ability to be an effective CEO of the divested entity, the more focused and intense he became in pursuit of this objective. In short, he was

Table 2  
*Key CEO Succession Criteria: Four Clusters*

1. Leadership
• Setting a compelling vision
• Strategic focus, pattern recognition
• Bias for action/driving results/ensuring accountability
• Enterprise thinking
• Market-facing instincts/intense customer focus
• Penetrating mindset or “total brain leadership”—integration of left brain (analytical) and right brain (interpersonal) capabilities
• Ethics and integrity <sup>a</sup>
2. Knowledge/experience
• Business acumen and macro view of the business
• Operations depth
• General management (P&L responsibility)
• Global perspective
• Navigating change/dealing with ambiguity in both growth and recessionary market cycles
• Managing innovation
3. People
• Talent management (entire spectrum including recruiting and developing top talent)
• Mentoring top talent/building bench strength
• Relationship-building with all key (internal and external) stakeholders including board members and across all geopolitical boundaries
• Making tough calls on people—ensuring right people in right roles and influencing the right conditions for them to succeed
4. Behavior
• Courage
• Executive presence (gravitas, fluid communications skill)
• Emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-management, attunement to others including empathic resonance, and forming relationships that are not just transactional)
• Pragmatic optimism
• Truth telling—giving candid and timely performance feedback
• Rapid decision-making

<sup>a</sup> Focus on safety and the environment can be included here.

true to that theme in his life history; “I like it when somebody says I can’t do something—that really motivates me.” Finally, as Vince envisioned this next chapter in his career, he began separating mentally and emotionally from both the parent culture and from longstanding relationships, that is, the people who would not be joining him in the spun-out company if he were appointed its CEO.

Of CEO succession, [Saporito and Winum \(2012\)](#), wrote:

These volatile and chaotic times are demanding more from boards and company leaders than at any other time in history and to ensure the continuity of business, the selection and transitioning of a company’s CEO has been elevated to the most important undertaking an organization can engage in. (p. 1)

However, it is important to note that Vince’s appointment as Zentex CEO was not the result of a formal CEO succession process. Rather, the CEO of the parent and those board members wanted an internal candidate and deemed Vince to be the best qualified. Surely, he possessed many qualifications as he assumed this role, but he did not have the benefit of a careful period of grooming, and there was no process to thoroughly assess his readiness and manage his transition into the role. He was in for quite a ride.

Once Vince was appointed CEO there was an overlap period between his ongoing EVP role and starting as CEO of Zentex, and he knew he needed to monitor his reflexive sense of loyalty.

Specifically, he could not afford to have an inordinate level of energy siphoned off by old responsibilities as he faced the demands of establishing the new company. His most urgent priorities included (a) remaining tough in the divestiture negotiations, (b) starting proactive strategic planning, (c) creating an organizational structure that supported strategic priorities, (d) identifying the right people for his leadership team (people who were both highly qualified and temperamentally suited to a team-based leadership approach), and (e) focusing on culture—specifically how his “new world order” would be a necessary departure from the previous culture of the business unit.

Further, during this overlap period there were inevitable moments when anxiety about the enormity of the CEO role crept into his confidence and excitement about this opportunity. With an eye toward minimizing such anxiety, the TLA kept striking two chords: (a) how the growth he had had as leader boded well in terms of his ensuring accountabilities, driving results, and motivating an engaged workforce, and (b) how the fight for the survival of this new company was a challenge of such magnitude that it would serve as an antidote to his regressing to less effective leadership behaviors.

Toward the end of that year Vince sent this handwritten note to the TLA:

Thank you! You helped me realize that this is what I wanted, and you made it clear what it takes to be a successful CEO. Without my trusted leadership advisor, I would not be a CEO today. I thank you and wish you a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday.

#### Phase 4: Coalescence

Zentex had been spun out from its global parent with a very aggressive capital structure that, in light of weak commodities and a stressed high-yield market, put the company at risk of insolvency. With Zentex at the brink of disaster in its first year, Vince had no time to ease into his new CEO role. For the company to survive he would need to rely on the “coalescence” of his business acumen, relevant experiences, and evolution as a leader. He would need to realize his expectation of forging a culture of pace, excitement, and empowerment. He would have to resist the force of old habits. Soon after he became CEO in the summer of 2015 his TLA wrote in one of her meeting summaries,

This is the moment, this is the time for you to resist the force of old leadership habits and to persist with the new because if you don’t, you will fail as a leader, this company will fail, you will not achieve self-actualization, and you will set yourself up for an existential depression at the end of this career.<sup>5</sup>

Vince knew that he needed to remain tough on people and this was reflected in his third VLM (see Figure 5). He would not repeat history in terms of how he managed talent. He would not foster codependent behavior. Instead, he would drive a transformation plan and ensure others’ alignment with its central objectives. He would marshal both internal and certain external resources to include industry experts, business analysts, bankers, as well as his TLA in the fight for Zentex’s survival. He would stabilize the company by the end of 2017 and then commence the more savory work of setting its growth strategy and plan, executing well on that plan, and delivering the shareholder value necessary for the company’s robust future.

Several months into his tenure as CEO Vince received his first evaluation from the board. Overall, he was seen as an “exceptional leader,” but the board indicated there was still more for him, as a first-time CEO, to learn, especially given challenging marketplace dynamics. Vince was praised for his understanding of the business, high integrity, openness, ability to accept constructive feedback, approachability, and active listening. Not surprisingly, he was rated especially high on the quality of his relationships with Wall Street analysts and investors, as well as with board members and staff.

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<sup>5</sup> By suggesting the potential for an existential depression, the TLA used Erikson’s (1950) life-stage theory to reinforce Vince’s efforts to integrate all he had learned with all he needed to do now to succeed as CEO of Zentex.

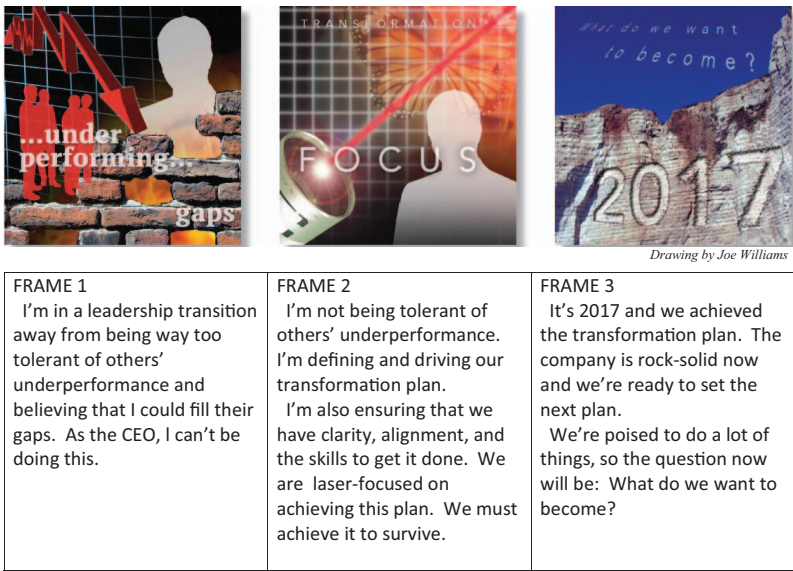


Figure 5. Vince’s visual leadership metaphor (VLM) # 3.

The board evaluation struck a patient tone in terms of Vince achieving his individual objectives, Zentex meeting its forecasts, and the strategic clarity that would accelerate growth. However, the messages related to the effectiveness of his direct reports were more pointed. The major question was had he assembled a leadership team that could quickly address the compelling short-term business issues and help stabilize the company for future growth? The TLA knew that, to some extent, board members were running old tapes on Vince, and so she asked him to orchestrate her introduction to the board chairman. With her own access to him she could play an ambassadorial role<sup>6</sup> in terms of conveying the real changes Vince had made as a leader, and simultaneously, the chairman could be established as a collateral source of ongoing observations about Vince’s effectiveness. However, she also knew Vince was still grappling with staff performance challenges. She confronted herself: What more do I need to do now? How can I intensify my efforts to help ensure that Vince achieves his next level of effectiveness, especially as it relates to the people issues? After her next meeting with Vince she sent a long written summary<sup>7</sup> that in part read:

First-time CEOs rarely get a glittering first board evaluation and, further, you still have time given the fact that your board is explicitly saying you are “the right CEO” for the job. BUT you do not have a lot of time to deliver the shareholder value the board needs to see. Marketplace dynamics aside (yes, this buys you a little forgiveness), their areas of concerns are serious as related to people and results. . . . There’s a clarion call for you to raise your game. As the evaluation read, “He will need to activate the part of his personality that is demanding so that the management team is held accountable to meet the timing, benefits, costs, and quality of operations that they commit to in the plan.”

Based on what I’ve observed in other companies, I think they’ll give you the rest of this year; and if the results aren’t there, you’ll be super vulnerable. One of the most encouraging things you said was, “I do feel like I’m the right person for this role. I also feel like everyone is looking to me to be calm.” Of course

<sup>6</sup>This aspect of a TLA’s role cannot be underestimated in the work with C-level leaders. Specifically, there is often lag time between what has been perceived about a business leader’s behavior and what is recognized as the developmental progress he or she has actually made in executive coaching and subsequent work with a TLA.

<sup>7</sup>These monthly written summaries were an important tool for reinforcing key points from their meetings, as well as for providing additional direction.

they are—because if you're looking nervous and uncertain, guess how that will cascade down into the company? The key ingredients for your staying calm and driving results are (a) your certainty about the direction and planning, (b) the right people in key roles, and (c) maintaining a pervasive sense of urgency in the culture.

In an effort to support Vince's rapport and productive relationship with his chairman (who had left his seat on the Zentex parent company board), the TLA tapped her contact on the parent board for input about him. This information emphasized the importance of their establishing clear role descriptions, scheduling weekly conversations, and Vince's making sure he could access other board members without going through the chairman. Finally, knowing that his chairman was disinclined to admit a mistake served to sharpen Vince's attunement to how they discussed the thornier issues. Of note was the fact that Vince was comfortable with having a nonexecutive chairman. In his words, "I think this is better governance and our division of duties is good." It was also helpful that Vince's chairman, a former CEO, had no unresolved executive-leadership issues of his own, did not want Vince's job, and was primarily driven to see the company deliver huge shareholder value as quickly as possible. Their complementarity was evident in Vince's words, "This is all good because we have to take out a lot of cost so I can't hesitate, and he'll push me to take it down to the bone."

Despite Vince's best efforts to assemble a strong leadership team, certain issues emerged with his CFO (chief financial officer) and CHRO, both hired from the outside. The CFO seemed to lack an understanding of the inner workings of Zentex's business units—the insights about what was really driving business results or lack of same. The CHRO needed to be less defensive and to channel his competitive instincts so he formed more collaborative working relationships with peers on Vince's leadership team. The TLA reinforced the need for Vince to provide timely and candid feedback to both, to be explicit about the expectations that would constitute their success, and to not regress into filling their gaps or being more patient than the circumstances warranted. Specifically, she emphasized that he would have to make changes—as his board expected him to do—if these team members did not adjust. Although the TLA appreciated Vince's perspective about establishing a stable team for a team-based leadership atmosphere to take hold, she advised Vince to not burn too much political capital with the board if, in fact, these staff changes were clearly indicated. At this writing, the CFO and CHRO continue to make progress.

Finally, of the most problematic business president, Vince said, "I keep giving him a lot of room and I keep thinking he'll turn. He's a very good person with deeply held beliefs about protecting people that get in the way of his doing what he needs to do." The TLA insisted,

We know you still don't have the talent you need in the profit and loss (P&L) roles. I'm urging you to solve this biggest problem ASAP. Without the right people in the right roles and you influencing the right environment for them to be successful, even the most brilliant strategy will fall flat and you won't win in the marketplace. If I had a dollar for every negative comment board members and your former boss have made about him—and about you in terms of not already replacing him—I'd be drinking a very expensive champagne right now.

The search to replace this business president produced a highly qualified candidate strong enough to be a potential successor to Vince. This was key, as the board would soon be raising the CEO-succession issue. The TLA conducted a prehire assessment and provided the candidate feedback with a focus on his establishing a strong working relationship with Vince, as well as his assimilating well into the Zentex culture.

As Vince became tougher in the scrutiny of people's performance, he yielded to his own compelling question, "Why haven't I done this before?" This was a coalescent moment in which the TLA emphasized five factors: (a) his having been socialized in a company culture that was more polite than tough as related to performance management; (b) the strong match between that culture and his personality; (c) the unforgiving spotlight and scrutiny on him as a CEO, especially one who was fighting for his company's survival—he simply had no time now for tolerating underperformers; (d) ego—the recognition that if he does not lead people well and continue to execute on the transformation plan, he will fail and not attain the self-actualization he desires; and (e) how this

failure would cascade and adversely affect the lives of thousands of others. Vince connected the dots in a manner that boded well for his most effective leadership.

Shortly after the TLA met the Zentex chairman, he conveyed a number of encouraging observations about Vince's leadership. He described Vince as sincere, transparent, without hidden agendas, and possessing an impressive knowledge of the operating and financial details of the company. He saw Vince as a big-picture thinker who could convey strategy and his vision of the future in a clear and accessible manner. He was also pleased with Vince's ability to take in contrary views and to generate good dialogue with the board. At the same time, the chairman echoed a theme from Vince's board evaluation; "Vince is now facing more tough decisions. Some involve people. It's important he continue to make the 'tough calls' and not blink."

In her next meeting with Vince the TLA shared the chairman's positive views and she also commented,

You are going to have to keep fighting against your innate type. This means you can't accept excuses, can't be distracted from the business imperatives, and you must stay battle-strong, too (enough sleep, good diet, and sufficient exercise). And, of course, you'll need to continue to scrutinize your talent. Think about this as Act 1, Scene 1, in terms of the cast of people making up your leadership team now. The board is watching this closely, so set a mental deadline and if, in your gut, you really know that you've got some players whom you need to replace, do it sooner rather than later.

After a year the Zentex share price was up nearly 250%, profitable quarters were reported, and the company even yielded a small dividend. At this writing, the company still faces steep challenges given a volatile global marketplace and a host of financial issues. However, Vince is navigating well with his leadership team and is concentrating on the execution of a 5-point transformation plan (a) reducing costs, (b) optimizing the business portfolio, (c) growing market positions, (d) refocusing investments, and (e) creating an entrepreneurial culture with a simplified organizational structure and commitment to a safe and sustainable future.

Further, Vince's continued focus on *how* he's leading—that is, the coalescence of his strong business acumen and his making use of behavioral insights about his leadership—appears to be good insurance against his regressing to familiar but less productive ways of leading. After Vince had had a number of favorable interactions with analysts, investors, and his board about the transformation plan, his TLA wrote to him in one of her monthly summaries,

It sounds as if you've nailed the transformation plan; now it's all about maintaining traction, i.e., executing on the plan. The bridge between plan and execution, as you know, is people. A critical question for you now is this: Will you continue to use insights about your leadership to ensure the survival of this company?

When Vince acknowledged this she added, "Remember, insight is cheap unless you use it."

### How a TLA Helped the Client Become CEO

The role of the TLA, as conceived by the author, involves a deep and enduring relationship between an external consultant and a senior executive that is committed to the ongoing effectiveness of that business leader.<sup>8</sup> The TLA, through the integration and use of relevant psychological insights, business factors, and a holistic orientation to and caring for the client, is maintained as one of the executive's closest advisors, especially with respect to people issues. This relationship begins after

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<sup>8</sup>It is the author's intention to illuminate and position the role of the TLA as an essential development resource for senior business leaders including C-level executives. Clarity about the training, experiential, behavioral, and other requirements for this role has yet to be established—or researched. However, based on over 30 years of experience, the author underscores a combination of factors as central to being an effective TLA: (a) business understanding (its roles, structures, and processes), (b) at least a decade of consultation to senior business leaders, (c) strong emotional intelligence, and (d) training in the behavioral sciences.



the successful completion of an executive-coaching engagement when the executive has asked to continue the consultation, in view of the depth of their mutual respect, chemistry, and trust. As Silsbee (2008) wrote, “Continuations should be conducted consciously and intentionally; extensions of coaching are invitations to make conscious choices about what is needed now, which may be quite different from what was needed earlier in the engagement” (p. 266).

The stakes kept getting exponentially higher in the work with Vince—especially once he became CEO of Zentex. During the coalescence phase, in particular, they would continue to focus on Vince’s handling of top-talent issues, leveraging the depth, candor, and trust inherent in their relationship. In this long-term relationship the TLA intensifies being a courageous truth-teller and a vigilant voice for her client’s effective leadership.

It is important to emphasize that the TLA role is not merely a semantic shift; that is, it is not merely calling one’s self a *trusted leadership advisor* instead of an *executive coach*.<sup>9</sup> Rather, it is a realm of practice that has been *earned* by TLAs. Through an initial executive-coaching relationship, the executive and the consultant have had important history together that has helped prepare the former for ongoing career challenges. Further, the relationship is now a consulting one that is perpetuated by something more than the TLA’s credibility, good advice, commitment, good chemistry, and trust with a business leader—these are the entrance criteria.

Long-term TLA relationships thrive based on the leader’s willingness to be even more vulnerable and the TLA’s nonjudgmental understanding of and compassion for that vulnerability. Metaphorically, the TLA stands as the lighthouse in calm and especially in thundering storms, helping to ease the intense loneliness and terrifying moments of personal doubt or business despair that can be experienced by even the most seasoned CEOs. These are frequent events or moments that often only the external TLA can address. This is especially true for those TLAs who have blended their training in the behavioral sciences with a clear understanding of the ominous—and thrilling—realities of 21st-century global business dynamics.

### Three States of Presence

In the author’s experience the most significant factor in the value and perpetuation of the TLA’s long-term relationships with senior business leaders (such as Vince) is the quality of his or her *presence* in these relationships. Wasylshyn (2015), wrote

The TLA’s presence is the glue that binds the client to him or her; this relates to how we ‘show up,’ how we commit ourselves to these relationships, and how we anchor ourselves in the tumultuous seas upon which our clients strive to sail. (p. 287)

The words of another CEO in Vince’s industry captured the essence of this long-term relationship from the client’s perspective:

As time passes, the (business) challenges change, but strategy, execution, and people are always the big three. Having a trusted (leadership) advisor, someone who—no matter what the issue—is there to reflect, walk all the way around the issue with you, challenge, and most importantly make sure the elephant in the room is getting on the table quickly and dealt with effectively—this is invaluable. (Wasylshyn, 2014, p. 55)

The author has articulated three specific, albeit discontinuous, states of presence referred to as *crucible*, *sanctuary*, and *personal harmony* (Wasylshyn, 2015). It is suggested that the accurate “reading” of the client’s state of presence, as signaled by how he or she arrives for a meeting, informs the TLA’s presence and guides the work to be done in that meeting, thus ensuring that client needs are identified and addressed appropriately. Generally, these needs require the TLA be (a) a

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<sup>9</sup> Given what some perceive as the growing commoditization of executive coaching, some colleagues have suggested decision-makers may respond positively to a new title for the consultants providing coaching services throughout the world currently.

dependable truth-teller through the fiercest business pressures (crucible state of presence); (b) an encouraging and perspective-making partner when the executive is faced with demoralizing criticism or is wracked by the pervasive loneliness of the executive role (sanctuary state); and (c) a perceptive, holistic guide as an executive approaches the last phase of a career (personal harmony state of presence).

Even as the TLA offers sound consultation on matters related to the executive's leadership effectiveness, *how* that consultation is provided—that is, the likelihood of it being received/acted upon—is most dependent on the TLA's accurate assessment of the client's state of presence. Lee and Frisch (2015) maintained that this presence is akin to the role of presence in psychotherapeutic work, and the author agrees. As Geller and Greenberg (2002), wrote, "Therapists' presence is understood as the ultimate state of moment-by-moment receptivity and deep relational contact. It involves a *being* with the client rather than a *doing* to the client" (p. 85).

It is the TLA's exquisite attunement to the other and suspension of the self that ensures this *being with the client* atmosphere. It is empathic resonance (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002) on steroids, with the TLA conveying one of the most compelling human messages of all (*I see you*) then building on this "seeing" with focused doses of caring, objectivity, and consultation. For the author, identifying a client's state of presence involves a rapid mental review of these questions: How does my client look and sound right now? What am I going to say that conveys my understanding of this state? How will I weave the intimacy of our history and what I know about his or her business circumstances with the strength of my "I see you" message? How can I ensure that this client leaves our meeting feeling better than when we started it?

After 30 years of practice and hundreds of executive clients, this internal questioning process occurs for the author, as it does for other senior practitioners, in a fluid almost unconscious state. Further, over the last decade, her committed practice of mindfulness has significantly enriched the quality of her own presence and nimble ability to adjust based on client need. Her mantra is "Be here now" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). This reflexive mental discipline is the foundation upon which the TLA begins a meeting, deepens the connection with the client, and guides meaningful interactions.

#### Four Practice Dimensions

Further, four practice dimensions of the TLA role—echo, anchor, mirror, and spark—inform the specific actions taken by the TLA. Like the states of presence, these dimensions are also discontinuous but provide an accessible mental framework for the nimble adjustments the TLA often has to make when working with a senior business leader. Wasylyshyn (2015), wrote:

There are times when the TLA must vehemently repeat certain observations or direction (echo dimension). There are times when the client must be reminded of a leadership lesson learned in previous coaching (anchor dimension). There are times when the client must be helped to "see" some aspect of the self or others that he or she is avoiding or otherwise defending against (mirror dimension). And finally, there are times when the TLA can help ignite a different approach or fresh idea (spark dimension) with proactive implications for the client's successful leadership. (p. 292)

Taken together, the client's states of presence, the TLA's agile use of different psychological models (see the consideration of model agility in the "Discussion" section below), and the TLA role dimensions provide a model that can contribute to the development of those who aspire to work with top business leaders, as well as enrich the practice of consultants who are already engaged in this work.

#### Application of an Integrated Practice Model: States of Presence, Model Agility, and TLA Role Dimensions

In all the phases (emergence, convergence, divergence, and coalescence) of the engagement with Vince, the executive coach, and later TLA, used the three states of presence, different psychological models (model agility), and four TLA role dimensions to maximize impact. As indicated above, the integration of these three factors provides a useful practice model that is applicable in initial

coaching engagements, as well as in subsequent TLA relationships. Further, there is often a repetitive sequence of practitioner actions in a client meeting—a repetitive sequence informed by the client states of presence, model agility, and TLA role dimensions.

However, once the coach has been invited to continue working with an executive—that is, when the coach transitions into the TLA role—the work is significantly intensified by all that has preceded it with the client including, as indicated above, deepened levels of mutual respect and trust. Further, in this atmosphere of intimacy with the client, the TLA has earned an extraordinary level of permission to say whatever needs to be said without risking the rancor or misunderstanding of the client. This is a privilege to be guarded and to be guided by the purity of the TLA's overarching intention: to help evoke the client's best leadership. What follows below are statements that were made by the TLA through the four stages of her work with Vince—statements that are offered here as an open window or as practice-in-motion. The work continues with Vince, but its unfolding thus far may offer guidance for other consultants working with senior business leaders.

### Statements From the Emergence Phase

During the emergence phase, the first year when she was Vince's executive coach, the author ignited Vince's deeper understanding of himself as a leader. By integrating life-history themes, personality data, and contextual information (company culture), the coach helped increase his self-awareness and provided insights as they pertained to his leadership preferences. Vince was in a crucible state of presence most of this year, primarily because of relentless issues in the business units reporting to him. Vince's boss was also a significant factor given his criticisms of Vince, the pressure he applied, his unclear performance expectations, and the fact that he rarely acknowledged or affirmed the favorable business progress Vince was making.

The TLA could recognize Vince's crucible state of presence from both his facial features (less smiling, more furrowed brow) and the more rapid pace of his speech. At these times, her comments were intended to ease pressures of the moment and guide his proactive behavior:

This is the quarter to intensify candid performance feedback to the business presidents reporting to you. You need to emphasize that there will be consequences for unmet objectives.

I know you're not ready to replace that business president but the longer you keep him in place, the more political capital you're burning with the CEO and the longer it's going to take for that business to begin to yield decent results.

Vince's sanctuary state of presence was usually evident from his slight eye-rolling and comments in the can-you-believe-this realm as related to the tension with his boss and, at times, with the CFO, who was a friend but who, in ELT meetings, could be as equally caustic as the CEO. In these moments the TLA focused on reinforcing Vince's major leadership assets and neutralizing his frustration. Her comments included:

Do not overpersonalize comments made in the ELT. Take what's valid but also remember that, to some degree, these criticisms are less about you and more about your boss's limitations as a leader; he's using projection as a defense.

Stay clear about your litany of distinctive strengths, including grasp of the industry, technical knowledge, innate depth, superb problem-solving skills, client relationships, and a string of "wins" in the business, too.

### Statements From the Convergence Phase

During the ensuing 6 years—but before he became CEO—Vince continued to evolve as a leader. This was primarily due to his connecting the dots, that is, seeing the convergence of the leadership issues he wanted to change with an increased awareness of how his boss's way of leading and certain culture factors complicated and even impeded his change efforts.

When they were in the crucible state, the TLA often exhorted Vince's efforts to change:

Yes, we know how you want to preserve relationships but your CEO doesn't give a flying you-know-what about that; get even more demanding with your direct reports so you can point to better execution, increased operational efficiency, and real strategic planning progress, too.

You sound as if you're still being more deferential in ELT meetings with both your peers and the CEO. Use the next round of business reviews to reveal how you've changed on this.

Be more intentional about building your "brand" with the board; when you're presenting there, make sure you balance your pragmatic optimism with objective appraisal of ongoing business issues.

When in the sanctuary state of presence with Vince during the convergence phase, the TLA continued to reinforce his strengths, maintain perspective, beat back negative cognitions, and used collateral information from others in the organization. Further, she took opportunistic advantage of thoughts he was starting to have about the next stage of his career.

You might be feeling deflated about that last ELT meeting but what I heard from the CHRO was that you actually did quite well in there and that the CEO's ranting had more to do with other issues than with you.

By now it's really clear to me that you do not do much "basking" in the wake of good things happening in the business. If you did this, it would have cascading positive effects in the organization as well as help you feel the sense of accomplishment and contentment you deserve.

These thoughts that you're having now about the next phase in your career—I think we should stay in a conversation about them for at least two reasons. First, this can have a palliative effect given all the crap you're dealing with currently. And second, this can be a motivational pull toward the future—that proverbial light at the end of a dark tunnel—a different future in which you may get what you're really starting to see for yourself.

### Statements From the Divergence Phase

The focus of Vince's meetings during the divergence phase—the year before he became CEO of Zentex—was primarily on his management of people, but there was also a major turn (as indicated above) in these discussions. This involved his potential for another role, a different future, his self-actualization. He had clarified his aspiration to become a CEO and recognized that it might be realized if he were chosen to lead a business unit his company was going to divest. In meetings with his TLA, they moved between crucible and sanctuary states of presence.

When in a sanctuary state of presence, Vince was releasing thoughts related to his loyalty to the company, Mr. Nice Guy identity, and the relationships he might have to leave behind if he were to become CEO of the divested entity. His TLA emphasized:

Your clarity and excitement about the future will increase as you remain loyal to yourself and how you marshal your time in the service of planning for that future.

Your Mr. Nice Guy self is hard-wired; I'm honoring that and, anyway, there's no such thing as a personality transplant. What we're pursuing is a behavioral shift: you being who you are but with an "edge"—especially as it relates to your timely decisions about people: Who's really got the right stuff and who doesn't, and what you need to do with those who do not.

You are revered by countless people here, and those feelings for you will not evaporate if you become a CEO. At the same time, if you get to build a new company, it's others' competence not reverence for you that will jump start the potential for that company's success.

When in a crucible state of presence together, the TLA worked on easing anxiety related to the role stretch for him as a leader and the extent to which the deck was stacked against the success for the divestiture. She also sought to maintain perspective with comments that included:

Remember, you possess an outstanding grasp of these businesses, and that knowledge will serve you well.

You have already mapped an organizational structure, identified talented people who will come with the deal, and vowed to recruit from the outside the other A players you need for your leadership team.

You know the culture you want to create in this new organization—the simplicity, openness, trust, and team-based leadership that will help get this company stabilized and positioned for growth.

Start identifying the explicit things you'll do before you officially become CEO—actions that will increase your strategic thinking, as well as how you'll build proactive rapport with your chairman and the other board members.

### Statements From the Coalescence Phase

Surely there was much that had coalesced in Vince's mind that fueled his excitement and confidence about becoming CEO of Zentex. However, when this reality hit in the summer of 2015 he found himself taking the proverbial drink from a fire hose. Each time his TLA met him during this coalescence phase (ongoing now), the unrelenting pressures were clearly visible, mostly in his face, which, although still welcoming and cheerful in its expression, revealed his worry and lack of sleep. Nevertheless, in tandem with the worry and fatigue, the TLA observed something else during this fight for Zentex's survival: Vince did not sound fearful or defeated or depressed. She knew he was temperamentally resilient and optimistic, but there was clearly a greater underlying force—a force that would anchor and drive Vince's efforts to save Zentex. It was his grit.

Based on her research [Duckworth \(2016\)](#) concluded, "In the long run . . . grit may matter more than talent" (p. xv). Vince had plenty of talent, plus a massive level of industry-based knowledge and experience. But it was his passion and perseverance, the core components of grit, that were serving him so well now. As Vince and his TLA moved in and out of crucible and sanctuary states of presence, she remained focused on the passion and perseverance he displayed for the huge leadership challenge before him. She expected that the flames of the crucible state could be kept at a campfire level, avoiding a full-fledged inferno, by her staying focused on his grit.

In the crucible moments now, the TLA's comments, influenced by the four practice dimensions, still ring true as she continues working with Vince:

Remember to keep your chairman in the loop on your evolving strategy to drive growth, as well as on how you're taking out costs. You do not want to be perceived as just a great operator. You do not want to be perceived as just a great operator. You do not want to be perceived as just a great operator. (Echo dimension)

The board is watching what you do about certain people on your leadership team. Do not repeat history by being too easy on them. Do not cut underperformers too many breaks. Be demanding with your expectations, and if they do not adjust, set a timeframe for replacing them. (Anchor dimension)

It sounds like you're still being too generous with your time. Force yourself to be more discerning about it. Look in the mirror and get in the habit of asking questions like, "Does this meeting really deserve my time?" "Do I really need to make that trip?" (Mirror dimension)

Congratulations; you've hired a really talented guy in that president's role—someone who could be on the short list to succeed you. If it shapes up that way, start thinking about him as your successor and focus on having different conversations with him; get the board comfortable with him; and maintain your efforts to actively groom him, thus building his readiness to succeed you. (Spark dimension)

### Discussion

This case study is based on the developmental progress of a corporate business leader who worked on certain leadership-behavior issues, retained his executive coach as his TLA for several years, and ultimately became CEO of a 6-billion-dollar global company. It is also a case study that addresses the not uncommon circumstance of an executive-development engagement complicated by boss and

culture factors that can contaminate—or at least protract—progress in terms of the client's meaningful and sustained behavior change. The TLA's acute awareness, vigilance, and interpretive use of these boss and culture factors were key factors in Vince's development before becoming CEO of Zentex. Further, this case is used to (a) deepen an understanding of the TLA role as conceptualized by the author and, more generally, to (b) share a TLA integrated practice model (see Figure 1) that has implications for the perpetuation of longer term consultative relationships with senior business leaders.

From an overarching perspective this work demanded a mix of practice assets familiar to most seasoned senior consultants. Specifically, the TLA persisted in (a) managing/using a web of senior "power" relationships including Vince's boss, a board member of the parent company, the CHRO of the parent, and the Zentex board chairman; (b) making rapid practice adjustments when with her client (using the three states of presence and four practice dimensions); (c) orchestrating/acknowledging Vince's distinct phases of progress (emergence, convergence, divergence, and coalescence); and (d) leveraging progress made (ongoing use of leadership insights gained, and reinforcing proactive leadership behavior).

Of particular note in terms of leveraging progress made was the TLA's use of a specific development tool, the VLM (see Figures 3, 4, and 5). This was a practical and efficient way to gauge progress, revisiting Vince's own words about his desired leadership growth and then acknowledging his actual progress. Metaphorically, Vince had transitioned from a chef choosing the right food, to a fearless leader steering through choppy waters, to, finally, a CEO leading his company's survival: chef, captain, transformation CEO—a leadership progression of particular intensity.

Two other practice tools were of notable value in the ongoing work with Vince. First was the author's use of written summaries after each meeting. Based on detailed notes she took in their meetings, these follow-up summaries served multiple purposes: They (a) highlighted areas for Vince's continued reflection, (b) built on key leadership insights, and (c) prodded him further toward taking specific actions when necessary. The second practice tool was the author's use of constructive triangulation with company observers, a board member, and Vince. Initially during the executive-coaching phase of their work, she used her frequent conversations with these individuals to ensure that they were aware of the developmental progress Vince was making. As TLA, she used these interactions primarily to ensure that Vince had an accurate read on how he was perceived as a leader and the implications of those perceptions for their ongoing consultation.

Given the unfolding of this case, the differences between the coach and TLA roles may seem more subtle than significant. However, the role differences are, in fact, significant given the degrees of candor, permission, trust, and vulnerability the client either revealed or afforded his TLA throughout their working relationship. Further, his primary leadership issue—being more demanding of others' performance—may have seemed more repetitive than indicative of the real change he made. The incremental leadership behavior changes he made occurred at a pace and level of commitment that contributed to their being internalized in a manner that served him consistently well, especially once he became a CEO.

In addition, as indicated earlier in this article, the role transition from executive coach to TLA is not just a new role title for people in the executive-coaching field. It is a step onto another plane of practice intensity—and practice opportunity. In referring to new senior leaders and others to come, Waslyshyn (2014) wrote:

Trusted [leadership] advisors will not only leverage their past experiences, they will also seize the present and the future differently—especially in their work with the next generation of top business leaders. . . . All of these brilliant wunderkind are moving fast, they are bold, they are certain about where they're going, but they can also stumble badly because they have not had enough time on the planet nor sufficient mentoring to be fully effective leaders. In the constancy of relationships with their trusted [leadership] advisors, they should flourish as they learn how to integrate their passion for innovation and value creation with the hard lessons of how to lead people well. (pp. 239–240)

The interest of senior executives in working with executive coaches and TLAs will likely be amplified given a business climate that is increasingly complex economically, socially, and geopolitically. Further, we will continue to see younger high-potential leaders move into C-level roles.



Charan (2009) was prescient when he noted this years ago: “The big developing economies—Brazil, China, India, and Russia—are going to have a tremendous appetite for it [executive coaching] because management there is very youthful” (p. 93). And, as in the work with Vince, consultants will also need to help senior executives navigate inevitable boss and company-culture issues that go beyond their clients. In the work with Vince, the company-culture issues were, in some ways, so ego syntonic that the developmental “behavior change” agenda for him to become more aggressive and bold in managing his direct reports was made more difficult. Specifically, the “family,” cradle-to-grave employment mindset short-circuited candid and timely performance feedback and inevitably found leaders like Vince doing more to protect and fill in the performance gaps of people reporting to them than accelerating actions to replace them.

On the other hand, the issues related to the leadership limitations of Vince’s boss became sufficiently ego dystonic for Vince that he eventually replaced deference to authority with the self-empowerment required in the CEO role. There was no question that he had learned a lot from this boss and that he admired and respected his boss’s laser sharp and analytical mind. However, this boss was also emblematic of an intensely hierarchical and centralized culture in which even senior leaders, including Vince, did more looking up and asking for permission than taking independent action and fostering the empowerment of others. Vince had also wearied of the bureaucracy and weight of an intensely process-bound culture; he could envision faster, leaner, and more simplified ways of running a global organization. And from the perspective of his self-actualization, he became increasingly aware of the need to separate from this culture and to forge his next career chapter elsewhere.

When Vince became the CEO of Zentex he was operating in an atmosphere of considerable volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, for which the acronym VUCA is often used (Stiehm & Townsend, 2002). No one approach in his initial coaching and throughout subsequent years in the work with his TLA could address the relentless demands of his work-related reality. Greenleaf’s model of “servant leadership” was helpful in deepening Vince’s understanding of his preferred way of leading, how that conflicted with his boss’s style, and how the dark side of that leadership approach necessitated certain changes in his leadership. Beyond this, it was the TLA’s use of different psychological models that contributed to the impact of this leadership consultation.

A closer look at how the TLA actually worked with Vince highlights the integration of three factors in this longstanding consulting relationship (see Figure 1). As indicated above, these factors are (a) the primary importance of the TLA’s *presence* in the work, (b) the use of four role dimensions to guide actions taken in the consultation, and (c) the TLA’s ability to use different psychological models (model agility). The combination of the TLA’s attunement to the states of presence and her use of the four practice dimensions in their meetings enabled her to meet Vince where he needed to be met and be a constructive resource. However, the use of model agility warrants consideration as a significant practice factor.

## Model Agility

Turner and Goodrich (2010), emphasized the “need for eclecticism, or multiple theoretical approaches and techniques, that can be utilized within the same coaching assignment to guide decision making and interventions at different levels . . . and at different stages of the coaching engagement over time” (p. 40). Kauffman and Hodgetts (2016), in defining and commenting on the value of model agility wrote,

Model agility is the capacity to apply multiple conceptual frameworks to a given coaching situation as needed. . . . We believe that model agility can lead to better coaching outcomes because it expands the repertoire of interventions a coach can call upon in any given moment. (p. 158)

In the work with Vince his TLA, a clinically trained psychologist with a business background, made use of the four psychological models discussed by Kauffman and Hodgetts (2016); cognitive behavioral, psychoanalytic, positive psychology, and development psychology. Regarding development psychology, the author used both adult development (AD; Kauffman & Hodgetts, 2016) and life-stage theory as postulated by Erikson (1950). Together, these development models helped enrich Vince’s thinking about effective leadership, and they forewarned him about the potential emotional costs of life-stage-development tasks that are not fully accomplished.

### Cognitive–Behavioral Model

Use of the cognitive–behavioral therapy (CBT) model was useful in challenging Vince’s thinking about effective leadership. As [Kauffman and Hodgetts \(2016\)](#), wrote, “Coaching from a CBT perspective examines a client’s assumptions and core beliefs and how these inform perceptions of the world and the stream of automatic thoughts that ensue” (p. 159). Vince was helped to recognize that what he believed to be “fair” treatment of his direct reports—individuals who were actually ill-equipped to meet their objectives—was actually unfair to both them and to the organization. By keeping them in their roles, he was colluding with their misperceptions of effectiveness instead of facilitating their moving on to other career opportunities in which they could be truly successful. And by retaining mediocre performers, Vince was in fact contributing to disappointing business results.

He also came to recognize how the combination of his fairness and empathy for others influenced his willingness to accept excuses and fueled a perception of him as naïve. Further, the TLA challenged his belief about the value of his “fixing” others’ work-related problems with the fact that this actually sabotaged others’ empowerment by fostering their codependency with him.

### Psychoanalytic Model

The psychoanalytic model was used in making connections between themes from Vince’s life history and key aspects of his leadership behavior. Most prominent of these themes was what she condensed as his need to be the good and pleasing soldier. This involved the premium he placed on maintaining positive relationships, avoiding conflict, being deferential to authority, and maintaining loyalty to others that could overshadow his fully objective appraisal of their capabilities. Over time, it became apparent to the TLA that the strength of Vince’s interpersonal skills served a defensive purpose—albeit not in a conscious manipulative manner. The more appealing and engaging he was, the less likely that he would incur the ire of others and the more likely he would retain and build on his reputation as one of the most caring and authentic executives in the company.

In hindsight, had the TLA done more to bring this psychological material into his conscious awareness, she may have influenced his behavioral change sooner. Further, she could have made more use of Vince’s positive transference to her. Again, in hindsight, she recognizes Vince’s need to please and to be liked—as he invariably was in countless earlier life relationships starting with his mother who adored him—was an expectation he held in the relationship with her. If she had made this relationship dynamic more conscious in the work with Vince ([Kilburg, 2004](#)), would they have made more progress sooner? Specifically, in the convergence and divergence phases of the work, could she have been more aggressive in challenging him to worry less about the quality of peer relationships, to be less deferential with his boss, and to be more confrontational with nonperforming direct reports? Could she have confronted him more emphatically based on the critical input she was receiving from her sources of collateral information? She believes she could have—and will be doing so in her ensuing work with Vince.

### Positive Psychology Model

The TLA made most use of the positive psychology model ([Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000](#)), particularly when she recognized Vince’s sanctuary state of presence. At these times she provided encouraging affirmation of his leadership strengths while remaining cognizant of the challenges before him. Her focus on the importance of Vince’s “basking” in business successes and progress was primarily intended to create what [Fredrickson \(2001\)](#) referred to as “positive upward spirals” that help release the positive emotional energy essential for sustaining self-motivation and effective leadership.

### Development–Psychology Models

Finally, the TLA made use of development psychology in two ways. First, from the perspective of AD, she helped Vince expand his beliefs and assumptions about effective leadership. As [Kauffman and Hodgetts \(2016\)](#) wrote, “More complex and sophisticated ways of making meaning lead to greater effectiveness . . . and higher states of cognitive and emotional complexity” (p. 162). For example, Vince’s

recognition of how the combination of his fairness value, empathy, and willingness to trust fed a perception of him as “naïve” was an important breakthrough that helped foster his more demanding leadership.

Second, by referencing life-stage-development theory (Erikson, 1950), she explained the Stage 7 concept of generativity and reinforced his efforts to mentor others—as time realistically allowed. She also emphasized Erikson’s Stage 8 (ego integration vs. despair), to remind Vince that his continued use of leadership lessons learned and insights being accrued in their work would serve as insurance against postcareer existential depression.

Although this TLA integrated practice model has influenced successful outcomes with hundreds of business leaders with whom the author has been privileged to work, it has not had the benefit of empirical research. Key research questions might include: How significant are the states of presence (crucible, sanctuary, and personal harmony) in consultation to top business executives? What are the pros and cons of long-term TLA relationships? How valuable are the four TLA practice dimensions (echo, anchor, mirror, and spark) in accelerating the progress of leaders focused on making specific behavior changes? How important is the consultant’s model agility in the work with senior business leaders? Would this practice model be helpful to consultants working with leaders in the not-for-profit sector?

Given the relentlessness of current business pressures, executive coaching and TLA work should continue to thrive in the subspecialty of consulting psychology. Further, most encouraging for the ongoing credibility of coaching psychologists is an emerging model of foundational coaching psychology competencies (Vandaveer, Lowman, Pearlman, & Brannick, 2016). Is it possible that this work may serve as an empirically based prelude to identifying the core competencies for the role of the TLA?

The TLA will continue to support Vince in achieving his primary objective of stabilizing Zentex by 2017 and then leading its strategically sound future. In the meantime an ongoing flow of collateral input will enrich the consultation. This is seen as a major contextual factor in successful TLA consultation. Wasylshyn (2003) wrote, “The ideal [is] . . . a partnership between trusted internal and external resources who work together in exquisite candor and harmony to ensure the [current and] next generation of a company’s leadership” (p. 326). How this information is elicited, managed, and used with Vince requires the TLA’s most vigilant attunement to both maintaining proper boundaries and confidentiality with her sources. From the CHRO, she will have a view of the day-to-day issues as related to Vince’s leadership. And from the board chairman, Vince’s boss, she will have an objective perspective on both the viability of the business and the board’s confidence in Vince as the CEO. Finally, with Vince there will be the continued movement between crucible and sanctuary states of presence—but assuming the success of Zentex, there will also be opportunistic moments for Vince and the TLA in the personal harmony state of presence, especially as they consider his impending retirement.

With a nod to Milan Kundera’s book, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (Kundera, 1984), Sherman (2010) referred to the retirement life stage as “the bearable lightness of being.” He wrote:

There is a gradual but observable shift in the balance of activity to rest or repose as we move into the later years of life. . . . There is an implicit need to find one’s own mix of activity and repose. At another level, this can be viewed as the ontological balance or mix of doing to being. . . . Formal retirement is frequently the occasion on which the meaning of this becomes radically apparent and needs to be confronted, publicly and privately. (p. 8)

In bemoaning the frequent question about what he was going to do in retirement, Sherman (2010) wrote, “I was beginning to be troubled about being asked the same question, with its inherent weightiness. . . . I was developing a nagging impulse to respond, ‘How about *being*?’ What would it be like to just *be* rather than do?” (p. 9)

Discussions with Vince in a personal harmony state of presence should be catalytic for his next life phase, that is, the shift from CEO intensity to a self-created and more restful *being*. These conversations will begin after plans for Vince’s succession have taken shape.<sup>10</sup> In these conversations, the TLA will focus on promoting his sense of contentment and psychological preparation for

<sup>10</sup> The TLA will urge Zentex to create a comprehensive succession-planning process.

life after Zentex. She will likely have the opportunity to reinforce how, in the end, Vince's development efforts were not "tough to maintain" as he indicated they might be when they first met. She will get to review his leadership accomplishments and his "something special" that influenced and found him exponentially surpassing his "being happy as a business-unit director." These discussions should provide a jump-start for his holistic life-planning that will focus on personal priorities, too—including his wife, family, avocational interests, and other ways he may want to give service during his retirement years. However, perhaps most of all, these discussions will acknowledge, celebrate—and maybe even bask in—the truth of his self-actualization.

### Concluding Thoughts

Although there are numerous marketplace factors that still cloud the certainty of Zentex's successful future, the TLA has no question about Vince applying the full force of his leadership and positional power to achieve the company's transformation. This case study underscores the value that TLAs can bring in supporting the effectiveness of CEOs like Vince. In the intimacy, safety, and long-term nature of these distinctive relationships, senior executives are guided, affirmed, constructively challenged, and comforted, too, as they meet business objectives in a world that has become increasingly uncertain. This uncertainty is fueled by economic, geopolitical, sociological, technological, and perhaps even terrorist factors that will not abate. In this sense, Vince's story is every CEO's story, and this story is the familiar script of every senior-leadership team in every company everywhere grappling with the intensity of 21st-century business dynamics.

As we consider this intensity, a number of issues—or uncertainties—emerge. Who is qualified to be a TLA? How can we accelerate the development of the next generation of TLAs? How do we ignite empirical research efforts that examine and inform this realm of practice? These issues require focused discourse within the fields of both consulting psychology and executive education. In the meantime a major issue or clarion call is this: that current TLAs remain as certain and fearless as we need to be to foster the ongoing certainty and fearlessness of our clients—clients like Vince.

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