

# Influence

in•flu•ence ['ɪnfluəns] *ability to effect change in your sphere of responsibility*

## POLL: Who's your hero?

THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL campaign has kept the topic of leadership in the national spotlight for many months. Candidates have been on the media's hot seat about people who influence their ideology, policies and character.

### Officially, whom do top political leaders admire?

- President George W. Bush  
- RONALD REAGAN
- Senator Hillary Clinton  
- ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
- Senator John McCain  
- THEODORE ROOSEVELT
- Senator Barack Obama  
- ABRAHAM LINCOLN

### Who do America's youth rate as their role models?

Mothers topped the list with 81% of girls and 75% of boys in a 2007 survey of 4,000 youths, ages 8 to 17, commissioned by Girl Scouts of America.

### What about you?

Who has shaped your vision or practice of leadership most?

PLEASE PARTICIPATE IN OUR POLL AT [VJHOLCOMB.COM](http://VJHOLCOMB.COM).



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## Learning to Lead

*Is the way you think part of the solution or part of the problem?*

SELDOM DOES SOLVING A PROBLEM begin with self-scrutiny about how the way we think links to actual results. Yet, organizational challenges often reflect individual actions that are not aligned with stated business goals. Counterproductive behaviors manifest everyday, to some degree, in most organizations: Opposite points of view are discouraged. Criticism is dismissed as "not my fault". Effort is made to "work around" certain people. Inefficient procedures are tolerated because correcting them might be disruptive or unpopular.

These types of behaviors undermine individual and team performance. When defensiveness becomes pervasive, the organization cannot achieve its potential.

**The tendency toward defensive reasoning represents a universal human trait.** When confronted with problems, most people avoid examining how they may have contributed. They blame others or circumstances outside their control. People will ignore, distort, or cover up truth that is threatening (as in "doing an Enron").

**By contrast, productive reasoning allows new information to be absorbed and translated into new behaviors—the definition of learning.** Creative problem solving requires breaking patterns of defensive thinking and protective behaviors.

*Creative problem-solving requires breaking patterns of defensive thinking.*

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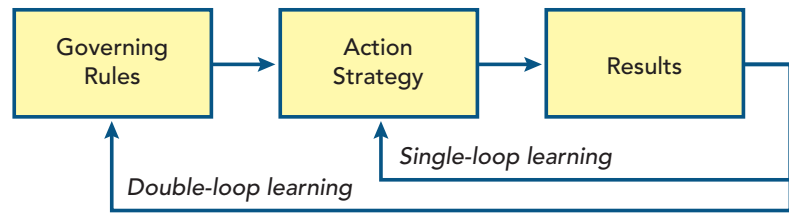
## Learning to Lead

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Consequently, the way leaders *think* becomes critical to modeling effective problem solving, paving the way for learning throughout the organization.

**Embracing a learning mindset must be intentional.** Most people, including leaders, are blindly unaware of contradictions between how they think they act versus how they really act. When asked about standards that govern their actions, individuals will describe rules they *believe* they use. However, when their actual behavior is observed, a different set of governing rules usually emerges.<sup>(1)</sup>

**Because of this paradox, even leaders tend to use single-loop learning.** Single-loop routines focus on refining processes and action steps. Rarely, if ever, is *double-loop learning*



employed to uncover and correct errors in reasoning that produced the strategy in the first place. Leaders have been trained in getting their way and getting along. Building consensus becomes the goal, so contradictory agendas, hidden biases and other unspoken motivations remain underground. Moreover, fear, embarrassment and shame keeps people at all levels from double-loop learning.

**A leader's personal commitment to double-loop learning offers a good place to start, then to lead by example.** Double-loop thinking represents skillful awareness of one's reasoning process. Coaching can

accelerate a leader's ability to develop and employ this skill with finesse. When leaders are able to engage others in productive reasoning, the organization harnesses the power of learning that allows new, creative strategies to break through.

[1] THEORY FIRST DEVELOPED BY CHRIS ARGYRIS AND DONALD SCHÖN (1974, 1978, 1982) AND SUBSEQUENTLY EXPANDED BY ORGANIZATIONAL AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGISTS. ARGYRIS AND SCHÖN PIONEERED ACTION SCIENCE, THE STUDY OF HOW HUMAN BEINGS DESIGN THEIR ACTIONS IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS. FORMER MIT PROFESSOR DONALD SCHÖN DIED IN 1997. AS THIS ISSUE WENT TO PRESS, ARGYRIS IS PROFESSOR EMERITUS AT HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL.

# Power Coaching for Change Agents

*Is your organization facing a reorganization, merger, or other significant change?  
Are your leaders prepared to manage the human side?*

**Power Coaching equips leaders to become more effective in the role of change agent within 90 days.** Starting

with the first 2-hour power coaching session, individuals learn how to leverage existing strengths to fit specific organizational needs. The 90-day program includes seven, 2-hour coaching sessions, assessments and strategic feedback. One follow-up session takes place about six weeks after the main program has been completed.



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**leaders.** Our specialty is

coaching to enable talented men and

women to grow and contribute faster and more skillfully.

VJHA Coaching Programs are delivered only by experienced leadership development professionals.

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## Try “Double-Loop” Learning

1. Identify an experience of failure that keeps recurring in your work (or personal) life.

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2. Describe the problem.

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3. What assumptions, beliefs, or value judgments do you bring to the situation that may contribute to the problem?

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4. What next steps can you take?

- Get feedback to test assumptions
- Develop new/additional skills
- Play to other strengths
- Other

### Power Coaching Tip

Write down specific action steps for each area you selected above.

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### More at VJHolcomb.com

#### Teaching Smart People How to Learn, by Chris Argyris

Competitive success depends on learning, and learning is a function of how people reason about their own behavior. Yet most people, including those in leadership roles, avoid examining critically the way their actions may contribute to problems. This classic article by Chris Argyris shows how companies can increase success by continuously improving managers' and employees' reasoning patterns and problem-solving. Booklets of the 64-page article can be ordered from McGraw Hill.

**Find the link at [vjholcomb.com/influence](http://vjholcomb.com/influence)**