

BUILDING INNOVATIVE TEAMS

By Ali Cammelletti

Have you ever encountered someone who exuded passion about his or her career, hobbies, family, or even the beauty of life in general? I had the privilege of meeting such a person named Paresh on my recent plane ride home from Peru. The conversation started after Paresh volunteered to switch seats so our families could sit together. I remember talking about family, where we were both traveling to and from (my family was on the way home from Peru, and he and his family were visiting potential colleges), and then about our line of work.

Of all of the people I could have been seated next to, it turned out to be Paresh Shah, who is a keynote speaker, the founder of Lifter Leadership, and a partner in The Non-Obvious Company. We connected about topics such as the women's movement, trust in the workplace, creating innovation through Non-Obvious thinking techniques, amazing new approaches to effective leadership, and my favorite topic, gratitude.

At the end of the flight, he gifted me a little bracelet and his card, sharing his TEDxYouth talk on Lifter Leadership with me. After being drawn to this simple purple bracelet with little whales on it and continuing to wear it each day, I realized I needed to watch his talk. That is when I understood his message completely.

TEDxYouth invited Paresh to come to Hong Kong and present his Lifters talk to the youth of the region because they believe the younger generation will start to create change in our world very soon. They felt so strongly that young people needed to hear his powerful message that his talk was streamed live to elementary, secondary, and high schools. I, too, resonate deeply with the four "Mindshifts" that organizations must make to embrace Lifter Leadership and realize the power it has to engage today's workers, drive innovation, build trust with customers, and change the world.

What struck me was how the Lifter Leadership approach was universal, so relevant to today's times of broken leadership and the ways it could resonate with all people, young or old, men or women, senior leaders or frontline workers, and people from all cultures. When Paresh shared the inspiring stories of Lifters he met on the road, he lit up like fireworks at 30,000 feet, knowing his Lifter message was changing the hearts and minds of CEOs, governments, line workers, and youth everywhere—he was a man on a mission to change



the world. A Harvard MBA and leadership guru—well-versed in mindfulness, yoga, and ancient wisdom—was now shepherding a message, along with practical methodology, on how positivity, purpose, compassion, and creativity were not only compatible with success, they were essential to success and survival.

This reminds me of a story recently shared by a client. A vendor in the vacation rental industry told a homeowner how lucky he was to work with Bennington Properties, the company that manages his home. He said, “I would follow the owner of this company into a burning house.” Why? Knowing Robert Bennington, I knew exactly why! It is because he is a Lifter! His leadership team and employees are so loyal and appreciative of him. He uplifts his employees, his customers, his partners, and his community. They will follow his lead anywhere, knowing his integrity and intentions are always positive. Many members of his team have worked there for decades.

Lifter Leadership can help solve the five biggest problems companies face:

📦 THE NEED FOR INNOVATION

88 percent of CEOs are unhappy with the pace of innovation. (Fredrik Harenstam, Ben Thuriac-Aleman & Rick Eagar, “Systemizing Breakthrough Innovation,” Arthur D. Little, February 2015)

📦 EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION

Seven out of ten workers are disengaged in America. (Society for Human Resources Management)

📦 BUILDING TRUST AND LOYALTY WITH CUSTOMERS

Only 56 percent of consumers trust companies. (Edelman, “2019 Edelman Trust Barometer,” January 20, 2019)

📦 LEADING WITH PURPOSE

64 percent of CEOs say corporate social responsibility is crucial to their business. (PwC, “19th Annual Global CEO Survey,” January 2016)

📦 REDUCING WORKPLACE AND ACADEMIC STRESS

75 percent of employees have more on-the-job stress than they might have had a generation ago. (Rashaun Roberts, Paula L. Grubb & James W. Grosch, “Alleviating Job Stress in Nurses,” NIOSH & Medscape, June 25, 2012).

I personally see each of these challenges in companies I coach. It is real, and it takes a toll on employees, leaders, company performance, and all of their futures.

I am watching middle managers struggle with the stress and how to manage each of these areas. Many managers want a quick fix, which is common in today’s world. However, progressive leaders understand that working through these challenges takes a systematic approach, inner reflection, a consistent message, patience, and a desire to make a difference and be purpose-driven.

After hearing that 70 percent of our workforce in 2020 will be millennials and Gen Z, the need for this major shift becomes even more apparent. As Paresh points out in an entertaining and endearing dig at his Indian father, “Older generations have always criticized younger people, and much of the criticism of new, younger workers is misguided and unfair because we are leading them with outdated approaches . . . This generation wants to work with companies with strong Lifter cultures that have purpose, positivity, authenticity, and integrity—they simply won’t stand for less any longer and they really shouldn’t.”

We cannot do things the way we have in the past because it no longer works, and we must embrace this change *now*. The Lifter Leadership model our new frequent flyer friend shared with us is the first holistic, teachable way to address all five challenges above. Solving these problems will not happen overnight, but the Lifter principles and skills make sense, and many practices can be conveyed in a short hop from Los Angeles to Seattle with time left over for some Netflix.

Lifter Leadership creates engaged, innovative, loyal ambassadors for your organization by applying the Four Lifter Mindshifts. Paresh says, “Mindsets often can be too rigid. People get fixated and rigid, when, in fact, we need to adapt and evolve. Society is rapidly going through a major transformation. Just look at the contrast and chaos in the world. It’s a clear indication that the world is shifting into a new era, a whole new world.

We need to evolve the way we think, speak, and behave, and it doesn’t happen overnight. Like anything new, it takes practice. The “Four Lifter Leadership Mindshifts” Paresh shared reminded me one of my favorite books, which I use as the foundation of relationship-building sales: *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz. The Four Lifter Mindshifts are these: The Hunt is Over, Tune or Consequences, Be a Yes AND Leader, and Take Invictus Action. Here’s my take on them:

1 THE HUNT IS OVER

In the outgoing model, much of business has been about exerting power over others (customers, employees, suppliers, competitors). Lifters move beyond being transactional to bring purpose and positivity to serve those around them, rather than seeing them as prey to hunt.

Robert Bennington recently proposed the following purpose for his leadership team, asking for their feedback: “Change people’s lives, make dreams come true, and live lives of abundant, overflowing joy.” He shared that he is working to have a full-time coach on staff to work with his leadership team on aligning their individual purpose with a corporate purpose.

Decades ago, few executives would have been as bold as Bennington. Today such boldness is more commonplace and not so far-fetched, from a bottom-line perspective. *Newsweek* recently published an article explaining that people with a sense of *purpose* live longer. The article defined purpose as “a self-organizing life aim that stimulates goals, promotes healthy behaviors, and gives meaning to life.” Who wouldn’t want that in a company they work for? Scientists aren’t able to identify the exact link between living longer and having a purpose. Some people suspect it could be due to preventing genes linked to inflammation, a major factor in disease, pain, and workplace absenteeism and presentism.

2 TUNE OR CONSEQUENCES

This second Lifter Mindshift is all about embodying authenticity and integrity in every aspect of your business—your products, marketing, internal processes, and treatment of others. Paresh talked about how sensitive today’s younger generation is to inauthenticity and how attuned it is to authenticity. These young workers have no tolerance for companies Instagramming pictures of their executives doing “socially responsible” deeds while treating workers unethically across the globe or dumping toxins in the environment. Customers and workers will proactively, or often subconsciously, move toward companies they feel are authentic and shy away from those they feel are dishonest. I have been working with Robert and his team to discuss the company values and how his leadership

team can embody them during 2019 as a goal for the company. We have been digging into how employees are living the values and what it looks like when the values are compromised. The goal is to celebrate successes and coach employees on opportunities, striving to live the values in all ways.

3 BE A YES-AND LEADER

This is one of my favorite Mindshifts and speaks straight to my heart. In the outgoing model, organizations would box people into specific role types and stereotypes—front-line cooks and cleaners, quantitative people, salespeople, operational people, etc. Jobs would be defined in a constrained way that left little room for people to express their unique creativity.

Who wants that?

With so many organizations struggling with diversity and innovation, the Lifter Mindshift gives people permission to express their “Yes AND” gifts and skills. It helps organizations recognize, tap into, and skill up to benefit from encouraging their team members to align their own passions, interests, and uniqueness with their responsibilities. Part of the reason so many workers are disengaged is that they feel they are treated like automata who do not think.

When Lifter leaders help employees apply their unique gifts to their jobs, even in the smallest of ways, they unlock a treasure trove of commitment, innovation, passion, and drive that they never saw before. When I look at Robert’s “Yes AND,” I see a business owner and father of six who homeschools his children and takes his boys sailing to learn about math, physics, geography, oceanography, government, and marine biology. His leadership team is constantly in awe of him and his dedication to the business and his family.

4 TAKE INVICTUS ACTION

Lifters take action in compassionate ways and seek ways to help everyone win, not just a few people. One of the skills taught under this Mindshift of Taking Invictus Action is “Redefining victory.” For many business owners, having a thriving business is a victory. For Robert, supporting and growing the people who make his business thrive is victory. This action, in turn, creates a leadership team that does the same with its members, in their individual departments. The members then flow this same purposeful action into their everyday encounters with coworkers, guests, suppliers, the community, and even so-called competitors they cooperate with to serve customers if needed. Everybody wins!

This Mindshift was inspired by Nelson Mandela’s campaign to forge unity in the divided country of South Africa—creating true beauty, harmony, and victory of a new kind.

This is a high-level overview of the Lifter Leadership approach and the Four Lifter Mindshifts Paresh shared with us. What resonates most with me about these Mindshifts, is that they apply to all employees, from owners to front-line staff. Each Mindshift has specific teachable and learnable skills, and teams enjoy practicing them. We know the Lifters in our lives and workplaces. They make things better, and people are drawn to them.

“ IT’S A WHOLE NEW WORLD BEING CREATED, AND LIFTERS ARE THE NEW LEADERS OF THIS WORLD. ”

—Paresh Shah

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