

The Path™ : a practical instrument for transformational leadership

By Kees P.M. Kouwenhoven and Paul J. Weermeijer

In this day and age, in which society transforms rapidly and by fits and starts, people and organisations will have to surf on the waves of change. If they do not, they will get into trouble sooner or later. In practice, however, change management is not as straightforward as it seems. More often than not, it causes additional workload for the organisation and the people working in it, and with that has become a source of stress and burnout in itself. Moreover, the effects of change processes at organisations tend to be of a ‘cosmetic’ nature, minor adjustments to the status quo. In the present situation, this simply will not do. Breakthrough management and transformational leadership are required, on an individual as well as an organisational level.

The Path™ : the Method

A new method has become available to help force such breakthroughs and transformations: The Path™, which was developed by the American author and communication expert Laurie Beth Jones. Kees Kouwenhoven and Paul Weermeijer are licensed to disseminate this concept by means of workshops and individual coaching. The Path™ method is simple and very practical. However, the concept should not be seen as a ‘doctrine’, a therapy or a trick for obtaining quick success. It involves an assertive ‘do-it-yourself’ approach and requires motivation, commitment, effort, stamina and courage. Its outcome strongly depends on what the participant is prepared to put into it. Paul and Kees have personally experienced this some years ago, when they rose to the challenge of applying the method in their professional and personal lives.

Personal mission and vision

In terms of content, the method and the accompanying exercise book, ‘The Path Field Guide’, act like a kind of funnel and revolve around four existential questions: Who am I? What are my core capabilities? What do I want? What do I do? Ultimately, the answers

to these questions will effortlessly lead to a personal mission statement, or, in other words, to the life task each human being is given at birth. This personal mission statement is only one sentence long. With this mission statement as a point of departure, we try and discover our talents and desires. These, in turn, form the basis of our vision, a kind of idealised image of the future, visualised as if it is already a reality. This vision represents one’s life as it would look after several years of living according to the mission. All aspects of life (health, housing, work, finances, relationships, etc.) will be addressed and described concretely and in detail. Subsequently, we draw up an action plan in steps, which will guide us through ‘the creative tension zone’ between the current situation and our vision.

Simplicity

The Path™ is a complete concept and contains everything needed for us to gain better insight into ourselves, our possibilities, our talents or our organisation. Its structural simplicity is the method’s silent force. While unsuspectingly walking The Path™, guided by the exercise book, we very quickly reach our essential being. Subsequently, this insight leads us to our *raison d’être* or mission, the core value at the centre of our existence and the tasks it poses to us. The personal mission acts as a guideline for the many decisions we are faced with in the course of our lives. It focuses and directs our thoughts and actions. This is essential for achieving our goals.

The Quest for Meaning

Why is it that such a simple method can help achieve true transformation? We feel that there are several reasons for this. First of all, we have noticed that people seem to be more open to it. The general public (and organisations) attach more value to questions about meaning. More and more people take the time to stop and think about the meaning of life. It has also become common knowledge that one is, to a large extent, responsible for the recurring

patterns in one's life, and the choice to either persist in them or break them. The second possible reason is that methods are becoming increasingly succinct and effective. The systematic development of methods has eliminated the need for endless methodological introspection and fieldwork. The third possible reason is the 'transformation' strategy that forms the essence of The Path™ method.

Transformation strategy

True transformation requires more than a conventional strategy, objectives and actions. All too often, these processes are bogged down by excessive complexity, effort and resistance. Much like a rocket leaving its launch pad, a transformation requires a certain 'lift-off speed' in order to gain and retain momentum.

When using The Path™ method, the participants derive this lift-off speed from the 'discovery' of

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their mission and the 'gravitational pull' of their vision. The awareness of being able to give true meaning to their lives, gives people the power of flight. In addition, transformation requires a different manifestation from people and organisations (which, by the way, does not necessarily involve turning one's life upside down, as many people already live by their mission to a large extent). The Path™ method helps the participants achieve this transformation by forcing them to describing the desired situation in detail. The (collective) human spirit cannot abide the co-existence of two possibly conflicting images: the actual situation and the desired situation. The human spirit goes into 'overdrive' and focuses on the dominant image. In the context of The Path™, this is the vision. In our daily practice, we have witnessed how astonishingly powerful this effect is. Finally, transformation also requires active incorporation of the resulting innovation. The steps of the action plan that is part of The Path™ make sure that the mission and vision actually take shape, often in a surprising way. Step by step, you start living by your mission and vision, and before you notice it, it becomes second nature.

A Personal Journey of Discovery

The Path™ is like a personal journey of discovery. It invites us to look at ourselves and

our possibilities in a different way, from a position of openness and innocence, in its purest sense of the word, i.e. 'not knowing'. By now, many people around the world have made this journey and have applied the method successfully. This process is the source of much joy, as it encourages us to mobilise one of the most precious values we humans have been endowed with: the freedom to choose at any given moment who we want to be. This is the foundation of our existence.

Pitfalls

An important pitfall on this journey towards discovering our mission is that, without noticing it, we could fall back on familiar convictions and patterns. This is why it is so important to create a space where we can

'park' our old thought patterns. It takes courage to break thought and behavioural patterns that are

familiar and therefore safe, and take those first steps on untrodden paths. To many participants, this is a difficult task. The Path™ workshop is a highly suitable platform for taking on this challenge. Additionally, discovering our personal mission primarily demands that one thinks *BIG*. Do we have the courage to visualise ourselves attaining our highest possible goal? This is a skill many of us lose in the course of our lives. If we have the courage to think big, The Path™ will not disappoint us. Applying the method will lead to the discovery of many treasures that were hidden or presumed lost. This includes opportunities to change the course of our future or that of our organisation in a way that *really* makes a difference.

Workshops

The Path™ has two training methods: individual coaching and a two-day workshop followed by two follow-up sessions. Both methods use the exercise book, 'The Path Field Guide', which also serves as journal in which the participant logs his thoughts, emotions and

insights as he develops his unique mission and vision. The aim of the programme is to enable the participants to mobilise their own power and talents by formulating a personal mission

statement and vision. The trainers consider it their specific task to encourage the workshop participants to push the envelope of their familiar thought patterns and to act accordingly.

*Source: L.B. Jones, The Path: Creating your mission statement for work and life, Hyperion, New York
(translation in Dutch: Uw Missie. Kosmos-Z&K Uitgevers, Utrecht)*

Paul Weermeijer commands more than 20 years of experience in various management positions in the field of corporate communication. This includes working as the head of Internal and External Relations at the Dutch multinational Randstad and working independently as a communication consultant. Paul currently counsels and coaches both individuals and organisations. As such, he is more than ever inspired by his personal mission 'To encourage and mobilise talent'.

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Kees Kouwenhoven is a coach and consultant. After working as Director of the Human Resources Management group of PricewaterhouseCoopers in the Netherlands for sixteen years, he became an independent consultant. Through The Path™ method, he discovered his personal mission, 'to inspire myself and others to create and experience joy'. Kees applies this mission by assisting individuals in developing and practising their own mission. He also assists companies in bringing more joy into their organisation.