

SEEING UNLIMITED POSSIBILITIES
WITH NEW PERSPECTIVES

VISIONSHIFT

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STRATEGIES, LLC

ENGAGE. POSITION. INFLUENCE. CONVERT.

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Seeing Unlimited Possibilities with New Perspectives

We can often find opportunities not in new circumstances but in those that already exist. We just have to look at them with new eyes, with more than one perspective, set of assumptions, and preconceived expectations. A **VisionShift** gives rise to sparks of genius, innovation, creativity, and breakthrough thinking. It contributes to shaping the circumstances that can lead to tremendous personal and professional results.

A VisionShift is something you can do for your own thinking and awareness, but it's also something you can induce in others with the right vocabulary.

VisionShift, as I apply the term, is a tool to change how people respond to situations and conversations. Walking into any situation or engaging in conversation is often pre-loaded with various types of conscious and unconscious bias and assumptions from all parties. The idea of “first impressions” is often a visual one and from that, we make the leap to characterizing aspects of an individual or settings we come across before we know them.

This is known in psychology as “thin slicing” experience or a type of instant cognition called “System 1” that is instantaneous, immediate, and without rational thought. It can be thought of as the application of intuition, which when left on its own, often leads to erroneous impressions. This cognitive bias is known as *fundamental attribution error (FAE)*, *correspondence bias*, or *attribution effect*. In the absence of proper context, it's the tendency to believe that what people do reflects who they are

That's why our brains also use “System 2” thinking, which is the slower, purposeful, and rational approach to evaluating people and circumstances. System 2 keeps our assumptions from going too far into the weeds.

We know from psychology that many ordinary conversations between people occur at lower attention levels. For example, asking someone, “Hey Tom, how are you?” sets up an expected response of something like, “Doing good...thanks.” Not a lot of conscious attention is needed with such brief conversations because we *expect* the low-engagement response. Small talk is low cognitive processing talk because there’s probably more than one thought train occurring simultaneously. Listening requires paying attention, and there are so many internal and external distractions vying for attention that make it difficult.

But by interjecting novelty language or expressions into conversations and situations, normal cognitive processing is jolted from a low attention state into one of alertness. Neuroscience reveals that our brains are novelty-seeking organs, and novelty triggers the release of dopamine in the brain as a reward, encouraging us to find out more.

EXAMPLE OF CONVERSATIONAL VISIONSHIFT

Several years ago, I was the guest of a guest at a New Year’s weekend celebration sponsored by MGM Resorts in Las Vegas. One afternoon, our small group was treated to entertainment at the flagship location of Top Golf. Shortly after the party started, the entire C-Suite of MGM Resorts stopped by to say hello. After introductions and small talk, I struck up a conversation with the vice-president of sales. He then asked me, “What line of work are you in, Donn?”

...Let me pause the action here. There are two roads I could go down with my response. One is a dead-end reply that would sound something like, “I’m a leadership influence strategist and write books on applying influence and persuasion strategies...” That type of response sounds like it came from a job description, and such responses usually result in a banal follow-up comment from the other party such as, “Oh, that’s interesting. So what brings you to Vegas?”

That’s a complete missed opportunity to convey the value I and my programs bring to organizations. I am my own brand ambassador and any employee, contractor, consultant, or entrepreneur should think about being one for their own brand and business.

Several years ago I spoke at a company conference where the executives were sitting in the first row of the audience. I stepped down off the stage as I began my keynote and introduced myself to each one of the ten executives. I asked them their name and what they did for the company. Each and every one of them responded with either their job title or a line from their job description. **They failed to communicate to me the value they provided the organization with their responses!** It's not their fault... no one ever taught them how to be their own personal or company brand ambassador.

...OK, back to my Vegas story...

I saw this VP's question as an opportunity to convey the value I and my programs offered: "I make senior executives — just like you — look like superstars by helping them build strong responsive leadership teams..."

The VP stood motionless for a couple of seconds and I could see by his expression he was experiencing a VisionShift. My response alerted his attention, which was my intent, and set up his next question, which was also my intent: "How do you do that?" is what he asked next.

That's the **golden question** because it invites deeper engagement, participation, and a higher level of meaningful exchange between parties.

I responded to his inquiry with: "My ROI-focused leadership influence workshops and masterclasses ensure that your leadership team is equipped with the weapons of mass persuasion that let them garner more business and revenue for the organization..."

Again, he stood motionless for a few seconds as the VisionShift continued. He then called over the other C-Suite VPs with: "Hey guys...come over here...you need to talk to Donn."

As the other VPs approached, the sales VP started the conversation with: "I asked Donn what line of work he was in, and...Donn....tell them *exactly* what you told me..."

I repeated my original response and the follow-up, and then I began asking the VPs questions about problems or challenges they were having with leadership team development and what's not worked for them. Instead of pitching my programs, I came off as a trusted advisor by asking them questions so I could get a grasp of the issues with which they were dealing.

The very next evening our group was invited to have dinner with the C-Suite from a different casino/resort. I happened to be seated next to a VP of Operations. Over pre-dinner conversations, he got around to asking me what type of work I did.

Yes, you guessed it. **Same** lead-in statement; **same** follow-up question; **same** follow-up response. I used the same lead-in and follow-up because both sets of executives worked with leadership teams in their organizations. If I had been addressed by a VP of Human Resources, my lead-in and follow-up would likely have focused on how my programs address disengagement and productivity challenges.

As a result, I banked a lot of Frequent Flier miles flying back and forth between Austin and Las Vegas over 6 months working with their leadership teams.

EXAMPLE OF SITUATIONAL VISIONSHIFT

Back in 2003 when I worked at Intel Corporation, a division director recommended me for a week-long intensive course called "Managing Through People." It was for Intel managers who would be stepping into greater positions of authority, accountability, and responsibility.

The program was held in a resort located in the Cascade Mountains outside Portland, Oregon. Of the 120 participants, I was the only manager without an engineering background in attendance. Each of the 20 tables had 6 participants and your team for the week was the people at your table.

At my table were two male managers (former F-16 pilots) and three women engineering managers. The program began without any fanfare with our first exercise: Our team survived a plane crash in the desert. We had managed to salvage this list of items to use to effect a rescue and locate food and water:

- Book of matches
- Airplane blankets
- 20 feet of nylon rope
- Sewing kit
- 50 kg tanks of oxygen
- 10 cans of soda
- Life raft
- Bottle opener
- Magnetic compass
- Single-blade pocketknife
- Signal flares
- First aid kit
- Snakebite kit
- Safety razor blade
- Airplane pillows

We had 30 minutes to come up with plan.

The two former F-16 pilots (who I referred to as “Maverick” and “Goose”) immediately put their heads together to develop a rescue plan. After several minutes, it dawned on me and the three women at my table that Maverick and Goose were going to develop a plan without input from the four of us. We were invisible to them.

Only the top 20% of attendees would be recommended for promotion after the week-long class. I was determined to be in that top 20% but it didn't look good starting out.

At the end of 30 minutes, the facilitator asked individual tables for their solutions to the rescue and food/water problem. Most teams had some plan for rescue involving the items from the list but said they ran out of time when it came to food and water.

When it was our team's turn to respond, Maverick was the self-appointed spokesperson for the group and reported the same rescue solutions as the others. When the facilitator asked about resolving the food and water issue, he said "we ran out of time." Well...

...it was then that it dawned on me that the course title was "Managing Through People" and that's when I stood up and said (while pointing to my women teammates): "We solved the problem of food and water..."

MY "KOBAYASHI MARU" INCIDENT (STAR TREK)

(Let me set up what follows with this: As a Star Trek fan from way back, this was my "Kobayashi Maru Incident." For those of you not so enlightened about Star Trek, the "Kobayashi Maru" was a simulation exercise that future Star Fleet captains had to go through. It was designed as a no-win scenario dilemma that tested the individual's character knowing that one decision could save everyone — or no one at all. Cadet James T. Kirk was the only cadet who resolved the simulation exercise because he secretly reprogrammed it to avoid the no-win scenario. Cadet Kirk didn't believe in the no-win scenario. Neither did I.)

The facilitator then asked me to elaborate. That's when situational VisionShift happened.

I replied with: "Well, the exercise didn't specifically state which desert we crashed in, so we chose the Mojave Desert of Southern California. The exercise didn't state what time of year the crash took place, so we chose the spring. The Mojave in the spring offers cooler temperatures, fresh water, and plentiful game for food."

Teams at other tables began smiling and nodding in agreement with our creative solution. The facilitator then asked me: "What would you have done if game weren't plentiful where you crashed?"

Again, the VisionShift quickly went into high gear. I replied with "Oh, we would eat the sand, *which is there...*" (say it fast to get the effect). Dead silence in the room for 5 seconds...I then repeated my response more slowly this way: "We would eat the sand — **comma** — which is there..."



I changed the rules of the game; I reframed the scenario because I didn't like the no-win scenario.

It took another 5 seconds before one guy at a far table stood up while laughing and applauding. At that point, other tables saw the humor in my use of grammatical trickery with my response. Quickly, the room erupted with laughter and applause.

Our team won the "Most Creative Solution" award for the exercise because it was designed **not** to have a solution, but to **observe which tables would engage all participants**. The program was, after all, called "Managing Through People."

A DIFFERENT TYPE OF VISIONSHIFT

I once spoke to a Christian men's group and mingled with the crowd afterwards. A distinguished-looking African American gentleman caught my attention while working his way through the group. He was engaging men in the crowd individually and was having brief conversations with each. He looked like a man on a mission, and that aroused my curiosity to check him out.

As I approached him I overheard him say to one man, “Hello, I have a gift for you...” whereupon he removed from his suit jacket pocket a small plastic bag containing a small seed. Of course, the response from the recipient was always, “What’s this for?” (the equivalent of “How do you do that?”). This gentleman answered that question with another question: “Are you familiar with John 12:24?” Before anyone could respond, he quickly quotes the verse: *“Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”*

It turns out that the story of the regenerated wheat seed is a metaphor for an organization he founded called “Regeneration House.” Regeneration House helps men transition from various addictions, behaviors, and the prison experience to a regenerated life devoid of such distractions, dangers, and destruction. The organization achieves this goal by promoting a Christian worldview and lifestyle.

The wheat seed in the small plastic bag was a tangible symbol of his mission, and I was struck by his VisionShift approach to making people aware in the crowd of his organization and need for support. In fact, I was so impressed with his entire VisionShift setup and delivery, I became the Chairman of the Board for Regeneration House and served for one year in that capacity. I also believed in his work to make men better husbands, fathers, sons, and individuals overall.

Your VisionShift approach, whether through conversations or situations, helps you locate, connect, and attract others who are looking for, listening for, and even hoping for someone or something offering value for them. For me, I was looking for ways to be more involved with my community other than donating money.

I never thought that discovering that value would appear as a wheat seed in a small plastic bag.

CREATING VISIONSHIFT CONDITIONS

The most fundamental practice of VisionShifting is to create engagement by structuring responses (and questions) that are designed to further a conversation. When in social situations, for example, you don't have to wait for someone to ask you what line of work you're in; instead, take the initiative to ask first, which is usually followed by the other party asking you the same question. Your response must use a vocabulary that leads the other party to ask, "How do you do that?"

That first response is what I call your "lead-in statement." It's novel enough to pique someone's interest and to get them to ask that follow-up question. The follow-up response conveys the value of your expertise. **It's your brand promise.**

In the movie, *Ford vs. Ferrari*, there's a scene where Matt Damon as Carroll Shelby introduces himself to a crowd: "My name's Carroll Shelby. I build race cars." That worked for Shelby because the crowd already knew who he was, but in situations where the other party or parties don't know who you are, you may have to go with the lead-in statement/follow-up response approach.

I'll be honest...coming up with really good lead-in statements and follow-up responses takes time and many iterations before you find a few that work well.

Here are considerations to keep in mind:

- **What do you or your organization do differently than the competition — what do you or the organization offer that no one else does?**
- **How would you describe your target audience? What are their interests, passions, needs, personalities?**
- **What aspirational needs do your products and services fulfill for clients/ customers/members?**
- **What is the "personality" of your organization? What drives your brand promise (the experience others have with your brand)?**

VISIONSHIFT LEAD-IN STATEMENT AND FOLLOW-UP RESPONSE EXAMPLES

A well-developed lead-in statement (also called a “talking point”) becomes a strategic asset that helps others visualize a brand experience with you or your organization.

Here’s a basic talking point/lead-in statement template:

“I work with <a target audience> who want <some outcome> and <some result>.”

<some outcome> + <some result> = the brand picture you paint with your talking points/lead-in statement. That’s why the above four questions are so important.

What follow-up questions do these lead-in statements generate?

- “I’m a *career accelerator* for *high-achieving professionals...*”
(versus “I’m a career coach for executives...”)
- “I’m a *human firewall* for *executives dealing with bad press...*”
(versus “I’m a corporate public relations spokesperson...”)
- “I’m an *impenetrable buffer* for *executives dealing with corporate crises...*” (versus
“I’m a crisis management consultant...”)
- “I’m a *pattern detective for organizations looking for hidden relationships in data*”
(versus “I’m a data analytics professional...”)

At the annual ACFE Global Fraud Conference, I often work with attendees to help them develop their VisionShift lead-in statements and follow-up responses.

In one instance, I worked with Jan who was a bank fraud examiner who, when asked: “What is it that you do?” kept responding with different variations of her job title. Then she pulled sentences from her job description. As we kept repeating the exercise, I could see her frustration building.

Finally, I asked Jan to assume that I had no idea what a bank fraud examiner did, and she finally hit on it: “I keep the bad guys away from other people’s money!” and **that was it!**

Then I asked her, “Well, how do you do THAT?” and her positioning statement was perfect as it addressed the **emotional concerns** bank customers have: “As a bank fraud examiner, I not only provide customers with *account security*, but I also see to it that they have *peace of mind* that their money is safe.” **Bingo!**

In another instance, Jim is a corporate security consultant — that’s what he tells people when they ask him what kind of work he does. After working with Jim for a few minutes (he was a quick study), he came up with this great set-up statement: “I keep clients off the front page, keep executives alive and out of jail, and make suppliers accountable...”

I had no choice but to follow up with: “Wow...how do you do THAT?” After a few minutes of tweaking his follow-up response, we came up with: “Domestic and international clients want my converged security expertise that integrates fraud prevention and deterrence as well as physical, personal, and cybersecurity applications that offer full-circle protective measures.”

Who wouldn’t want to know about how Jim could help them with that focused positioning statement?

Here are some templates for you to work with and some real examples I’ve used.

EXAMPLE 1:

QUESTION: “What kind of work do you do?”

LEAD-IN: “< *Target audience* > hire me to help them < *achieve some valued outcome, but stated in away that prompts the next question...* >

QUESTION: “Well, how do you do THAT?”

RESPONSE: “As a *<what do you do?>*, I *<show/teach/help who?>* how to *<do what?>* that helps them *<gain what value or benefit?>*”

EXAMPLE 2:

Here are some actual VisionShifting talking points I’ve used in the past:

QUESTION: “What do you do?”

LEAD-IN: “I show *fast-track leaders* how to *build an “unfair” advantage in the marketplace* that *renders their competition irrelevant.*”

QUESTION: “How do you do THAT?”

RESPONSE “As a *positioning and influence strategist*, my *programs reveal influential and persuasive techniques* that help *leaders gain new allies, advocates, champions, clients, and customers...*”

EXAMPLE 3:

QUESTION: “What line of work are you in?”

LEAD-IN: “Companies hire me to rehabilitate ineffective leaders...”

QUESTION: “How in the world do you do THAT?”

RESPONSE: “As a *brand leverage catalyst*, I *teach strategies* for *building strong leadership platforms and brand equity* that *result in higher employee engagement and greater productivity...*”

You get bonus points if you can add this **conversation extender** to your response:

“If you like to know more, I’d be happy to set up a call or meeting to show you how *<you/your organization>* can work with your company to help you *<avoid some pain, eliminate a fear of loss.>*”

You're not asking for the sale; you're asking for another meeting. The purpose of any initial meeting is *not* to sell someone on something but to *get another meeting*.

OK, NOW IT'S YOUR TURN

YOUR TURN: WRITE YOUR OWN SETUP STATEMENTS AND TALKING POINTS

“What do you do?”

“I help/provide/teach/show [who?]: _____

how to [Do what?]: _____

so they can [achieve what benefit, outcome or gain]: _____

_____.

“How do you do that?”

“As a [what specifically do you do?]: _____,

my [knowledge/skill/expertise/program]: _____

provide [what benefit, value, advantage?]: _____

for [who specifically? Who is the ultimate beneficiary of what you provide?]: _____

_____.

to help them [achieve some ultimate outcome they want or need]: _____

_____.

Here's a chance for you to create your VisionShift strategy. Use this template to help you develop your lead-in statement and your follow-up response. Just be prepared to go through a lot of iterations before you produce a lead-in statement that forces the follow-up question: “How do you do THAT?”

Donn LeVie Jr. is a respected leadership influence strategist/consultant, award-winning author, leadership coach and mentor, and global speaker who focuses on how people speak (**linguistics**), how they think (**cognitive psychology**), and how they make decisions (**behavioral economics**).

In his roles leading people and programs for Fortune 100 companies (**Phillips Petroleum, Motorola, Intel Corp.**), government agencies (**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**), and academia (**the University of Houston Downtown College – Department of Natural Sciences and Mathematics**), Donn has been directly involved with global oceanographic research projects, multimillion-dollar offshore oil and gas exploration programs, high-tech chip design initiatives, and teaching fundamentals of petroleum exploration and production to undergraduate students.

Donn stepped away from the corporate world in 2013 to launch **Donn LeVie Jr. STRATEGIES, LLC**. Over his career he's spoken at more than 70 conferences and since 2011 has been a regular presenter and leadership strategist at the annual Global Fraud Conference sponsored by the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners.

Donn's client and audience list spans organizations from the public, private and education sectors, including the FBI, Dept. of Education Inspector General's Office, New York Port Authority, National Science Foundation, FDIC, Enterprise Holdings, Ernst & Young, the City of Nashville, Franklin and Marshall College, and many more. As an author,

Donn's books have won the Global eBook Award and the International Book Award (*Confessions of a Hiring Manager*, 2012; *Strategic Career Engagement*, 2016). Donn's newly released books, *From the Underworld to the Boardroom: True Tales of Fraud, Corruption, Counterfeiting, and Cons* and *STACKING THE DECK: Career Strategies for Outsmarting the Competition* are available only through his programs.

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