

What is “Engaging from the Heart?”

Leadership Metaformation is all about engaging God, the people around us and life itself from the heart. But what exactly does “heart engaging” mean?

Let’s start at the beginning. LMP’s fundamental goal is building leaders who look and act like Jesus. That’s simple to say—the challenge is in figuring out how to effectively produce them. The key is to follow Jesus’ own change methods.

Jesus himself repeatedly stated that actions come from the heart. For example, he held that “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” If actions originate inside us, then *changing our actions has to start with the heart as well.*

That doesn’t sound like an earth-shaking revelation--until you examine how we actually approach change. For instance, think of some behavior in your life that you want to be different—keeping your desk clean, or reining in your anger, or exercising regularly. What’s the first thing you would do to change that?

For most of us, what comes to mind first is discipline. We’d set a new standard of behavior, and then use willpower to conform our actions to it. For instance, if our exercise time is falling by the wayside, we’d set up a schedule, find someone to be accountable to, or set the alarm clock for a half hour earlier. We’d start by addressing the outward behavior.

If we’ve tried that several times and it isn’t working, we might go down a layer and start looking for answers in our past. What memories, healing issues or vows are holding us back? What lies have we believed that keep us bound? That’s a great step, but it’s a rare individual who really looks into his or her soul and asks, “What do I want so badly that is motivating this behavior? Where does the energy comes from that drives this?”



Two Paths to Change

Do you see the progression? *We tend to work from the outside in:* from outward discipline down (after a while) to identity issues like wounds and vows, and then (rarely) down to the level of the core desires like love, belonging or security that drive our actions.

However, that’s working at change backward! Change Jesus’ way starts from the inside, with desire, and then works outward to identity and behavior. The little-known key to change is that when the deep desires of our hearts are filled in relationship with God, then outward discipline can do its work. But when we discipline ourselves without engaging the heart (dealing with what drives the behavior), discipline either fails or simply covers over the real problem.

Therefore, *Engaging from the Heart is change starting from the inside and working out.* It is going deep, to the level of desire, and making desire fulfilled the foundation of our change process.

A Practical Example

For instance, I recently observed a conflict between two young leaders. One (a dominant D/I on the DISC), was aggressively trying to get his (high S) buddy to do what he wanted. The “D” was leaning across the table, talking fast, asking direct questions, challenging. All the while his compatriot shrank into his seat, looking more and more like he wanted to crawl under the table to get away.

I pulled the aggressive “D” aside, and mentioned that he seemed to be overpowering his friend, who was not comfortable at all with his direct approach to the conversation. That led (after some initial defensiveness) to a great conversation.

Here’s a list of replies someone in that situation might have made. Which responses are engaging from the heart?

1. *“We’re good friends and we were having a good discussion.”*
2. *“He was not being honest with me and I needed to confront it.”*
3. *“That looked worse to you than it was--we have a great relationship. I’ll check with him and make sure he’s ok.”*
4. *“Yeah, I got a little aggressive. I’ll work on keeping a better rein on my emotions.”*
5. *“I guess I blew it this time--I better go apologize.”*
6. *“Okay, I have a habit of doing that. Will you hold me accountable not to do it again?”*
7. *“Why do I keep doing that? What does it give me to dominate him?”*

The first two responses externalize things. There is no problem or it’s the other persons’ fault. The third response is the first that opens the door—barely—to the idea that I may have made a mistake. But up through number five all the statements are all about something I **did** wrong—its a past mistake, now outside of me, that I just need to clean up and discipline myself so it doesn’t happen again.

Number six is the first to admit that I **am** the problem—I have a repeating pattern of this kind of action, its not just a one-time mistake or slip of the tongue. However, this person is still treating the symptoms (the outward behavior) as something to be disciplined instead of looking for the cause and the cure.

The final response is the only one that truly engages the heart. It assumes that my actions come from who I am, and asks, “What is in me that produces this behavior?” I engage the challenges I face as a mirror that reveals my heart, instead of merely as practical obstacles to be overcome.

Implications

When leaders learn to engage from the heart, they become healthier emotionally and spiritually. By learning to fill their desires within healthy relationships with God and others, they become more likely to fulfill their destiny, and less likely to see their unfilled, unexamined desires rise up and destroy their lives. Heart engaging is the key to accelerated spiritual growth and leadership longevity.