

**James Mapes**  
**TotalPicture Radio Interview**  
**True Leadership**

Welcome to our special Leadership Channel podcast on [TotalPicture Radio](#). This is Peter Clayton reporting.

I'm delighted to have back on the show today [James Mapes](#) who is the founder of Quantum Leap Thinking. He is the creator of The Transformation Coach and best selling author and a highly acclaimed business speaker, consultant, seminar leader and personal excellence coach. I'm really happy because James has agreed to do a series of leadership podcasts with me. Today we're going to talk about True Leadership, which is one of the programs that he presents oftentimes mainly to large corporate clients.

James, welcome back to TotalPicture Radio.

**James:** Well, it's a pleasure to be here, Peter. Thank you for having me.

**Peter:** This program is called True Leadership: The Neuroscience of Effective Leaders. Give us a little bit of background on how you developed this program.

**James:** It came out of one fact and that is that having read many books about leadership, listening to speakers on leadership, it is absolutely confusing because it seems to be a point of view. You'll hear from one person that it's about the ability to create a strong vision which is wonderful; with other people, it is instilling the integrity of leadership and it goes on and on. I got to tell you after I spend all these years avoiding talking about leadership, I decided to throw myself into learning what is the bottom line, what are the traits of a true leader.

**Peter:** Let's talk about some of these traits.

**James:** Let's play a quick game.

**Peter:** Okay.

**James:** Let me ask you to name two business leaders either living or deceased that you feel were true leaders.

**Peter:** Steve Jobs and Jack Welch.

**James:** Give me three or four what you consider traits that made them who they are.

**Peter:** Steve Jobs – and I think certainly anyone who I feel is a great leader it starts to me with really being passionate and really believing in something and I think certainly with both Steve Jobs and Jack Welch, you could say these were both and are both very passionate individuals who care deeply about their companies and who also have the ability to communicate to the people who work within their organizations, their vision of that organization and the culture that they are trying to create for an organization.

**James:** What are some other traits of leadership that you feel are important?

**Peter:** Communication skills and authenticity I think is important. I think it's really important especially in today's world, James. I mean you know phony-baloney when you see a phony-baloney, right? So I think being authentic and being transparent is also something that certainly would probably five years ago wouldn't have been considered as being a trait of a great leader but I think today it's really important.

**James:** I think you've been around this business a long time as well, I think, because a lot of people might say morals or kindness and so forth. What I do in this presentation right at the top is to get people to name their leaders and what they feel that are their traits and you hit a couple of them. A lot of people will say first of all, well, they're honest or they have integrity or their leadership style was important. Well the reality is that culture often dictates what we feel leadership should be. In fact, the style, I mean if you look at Gandhi or you look at Margaret Thatcher or you look at Joan of Arc, they were all effective leaders along with the business leaders that you named but they also had different styles. So the style of leadership, let's take Jack Welch

who is one of the people you mentioned, kindness is not necessarily what I would consider a trait.

**Peter:** Yeah, when your nickname is Neutron Jack, I guess –

**James:** I guess not, right? Yeah, he is the man that studied so he had something. See I had to step out of the box for this. I had to scrape away my Midwestern upbringing about morality and all the stuff and I had to scrape and scrape and scrape and look at leaders and interviewed leaders and I came up with five what I consider traits which are morally neutral, which are actually at the core of all leadership.

So we have passion which you mentioned at the beginning and you can't fake that. That has to come from somewhere. I've seen leader after leader after leader who call themselves leader or who are projected leaders who don't have the passion because – and we'll get to the brain a little bit – passion ignites. Passion is going to engage Peter across the table for me. I'm a passionate person. You're a passionate person. So we have passion.

Then we have the ability to turn fear into power. Most people think leaders are fearless. Years ago, I wrote an article called Fearless Leadership and everybody who read it says, "How do I become fear-free?" They were very taken aback because leaders are full of fear. When I was doing this, I was interviewing leaders and the president of Omnicom gave me a quote. I had to kind of pull it out of him because we're talking about leadership and he said, "Leaders don't take foolish chances. However, they are visionaries. They don't take their eyes off the target. They are full of fear, know the odds are against them and still take the first step because there is not a greater sense of accomplishment than overcoming your fear and beating the odds." I started to look at that but you look at the fear that must plague all presidents of organizations, corporations and the government everyday but there's some kind of magical thing that happens in their head that they're able to transform it into power. Now what I teach is that there is primitive fear which is real stuff. It's the fight or flight. It's how we're programmed. It's how the brain is programmed. It's what I call delicious fear which is what I feel when I race cars or jump out of a plane or stand up in front of an audience.

Then there is the one that I talked about and it's called illusory fear and that is when what we see triggers that fight or flight mechanism and we create the illusion of fear, rejection, change, success, failure, commitment. By creating that, we react as if it were real creating it to be real. So that could be that we make a decision based on a false perception of fear of change which is one of the biggest points. Without change, there's no growth. But leaders are able to hold the anchor to all these which is the vision.

So the third leadership trait – we'll get to vision in a second – is empowerment which to me is universal. Gandhi and Martin Luther King were able to go out and trained leaders to be leaders you know and so many people. We could name some of the top corporations that they have not trained leadership to take over. So it's the ability to give people the resources, give people the permission, give people the space. You'd give them what you want. I remember Dennis Hewitt once said to me because he actually hired me to do some business for him, I said, "What do you want?" He said, "Surprise me." So I had to be accountable for that and create something that was powerful enough to move people sitting in an audience.

So the empowerment aspect is giving you my vision, giving you the tools to accomplish it, giving you the freedom, giving you the support and being very careful how I criticize.

The fifth is communicating the vision but the fourth attribute is what is about the neuroscience of leadership. The last three to four years has given so much information about how the brain works and how I affect you and how you affect me and how our energies together create something new that that's what has propelled me to create this program is what is a vision, how do we create it, how do we move people with this.

**Peter:** That's really interesting. Let's unpack some of these a little bit, James. It seems to me one attribute here that certainly most great leaders have is they are risk takers, they are willing to take risks, they are willing to step out of their comfort zone to again achieve that vision that they have.

**James:** I think there's two reasons for that. That's a good point about risk taking. One is that the way the mind works, whatever picture or image we hold of the future – it could also over the past but we're looking at the future vision – is going to guide us to move left, right, up or down, forward or backward because that is based on the primitive brain and we never have to work to make a fear vision. I mean we do that naturally. So the vision of fear, if it is stronger than the vision of possibility, we're not going to take the risks. If the vision of possibility which is the future vision of wherever we're going is stronger and it has to be to take a risk; within the neuroscience of brain, it has to overcome.

There are a couple of questions that I ask people and they're simple questions. I call it the golden questions and that is "what's the worst that can happen and are we willing to have it happen?" which sounds simple but it isn't simple because that forces you to look at what the risk is and most of the time we have invented something that is far beyond reality. What's the worst that can happen? Well, I'm not going to die. I doubt if my company is going to go bankrupt. What's the worst that can happen? Do I look like a fool? Am I willing to have it happen? Often the answer is yes and it propels people to move forward.

**Peter:** To this fourth point of looking at neuroscience as part of this foundation of creating and building a leadership model, can you expand on that?

**James:** Well, I think to understand, the brain gives a little bit of insight and that is the primitive brain is the center of our emotions, is the center of our memories but it doesn't think. It literary doesn't think. Because of the fight or flight thing, it kind of goes forward and backward. You know, let's move forward, let's move backward, let's move left, let's move right, stop, go kind of thing. But there's no reasoning that goes on. But the interesting part of that part of the brain is it's emotionally centered. See the prefrontal cortex, the newest part of our brain if you will, the reasoning center, that little voice in our head that we talk to ourselves with is not about emotion. It's about reason, critical thinking. It easily gets overwhelmed by too many choices so there's pluses and minuses to both and understanding how the brain works gives us the advantage as leaders

to be able to touch other people. So if the primitive part of the brain responds to emotion, you can't have a vision that isn't emotionally charged. You listen to Martin Luther King, you listen to Steve Jobs, you listen to these other wonderful leaders, they move you and that's part of what has to be done.

So when we look at visioning, let's look at making a mental movie.

**Peter:** Okay.

**James:** Right? If you don't go back to when our ancestors were around the fire telling stories which is how we communicated, then people don't understand what moves us. It is storytelling. A vision is a story. I mean how else and why else would anyone follow a leader into unknown territory and take risks and probably scary, really the unknown? It's because that picture becomes embedded as part of us.

When I work with people in the audience, we have to start with values. So I'll do a value exercise with people because values are the compass, they're the guiding force. I have to tell you, most people don't even know what their values are, not really. So what I do is I get people to look at what's called the hierarchy of values so that they understand this from the beginning. Each person lists their five values and then through a series of questions, I have them put them in a hierarchy so if forever you can only keep one of those, what would you keep? So someone may say integrity – I'll make it up – or someone may say love, or someone may say making a difference. Once you get people to understand their highest two values, you can start to help them expand that into their vision because if their vision isn't passionate for themselves, how else are you going to make it passionate for someone else. So that's the individual vision, then you have to look at the team in the organization of course.

The second exercise that I do – and by the way as human beings, we do not like to turn inward – yet if you're going to be a leader, you better do it, you better look to see what makes you tick. So what I do is I do another exercise. I'm not going to explain how it works but it's very dramatic, it's fast, but it gets people to look at their top two or three life priorities.

At the end of this True Leadership workshop, they actually have to create a vision for themselves on paper and the only way you can create a vision is to step into it and pretend it is already there. In other words act as if because if you can't go in and write that down for yourself, you can't do the fifth trait of a leader which is communicating, if you can't communicate to yourself. So I actually get people to write a paragraph as if they were already there, what does it look like. Then I ask what I call the miracle question. If you were to go to bed and during the night a miracle happen, and the vision that you had for your team or your company or yourself happened and you woke up, how specifically would you know it happened? Became most people are vision is vague. They don't even know. You know customer service, what's customer service? How would you know if it happened? Let's be rich. What does that mean? It doesn't mean the same to you as me or wealthy or prosperous. So it has to be value specific, point specific and you have to be able to communicate it as if it were already happening and then you have to back up and you have to say what's the first step, second step. This is like the old goal setting routine but most people don't look at vision that way but as a leader, you better because you can't measure that.

**Peter:** I want to return to something you mentioned which I think is so important in this whole conversation and that is the art and craft of storytelling. Any great leader that I can think of is a storyteller and has the ability to tell a story in a compelling way and engage that audience within that story and have that audience then adopt that story as part of their story.

**James:** Absolutely true. The ability to tell a story means that I got to get my attention off you. I have to become a child-like person to tell a story. One of the stories I tell in the leadership workshop is many, many years ago, a friend of mine created the first fire walking workshop ever given in the United States and I went with 40 other leaders and we had to build a fire. We had to experience the terror of thinking about walking on the fire and then we had to take our shoes off and we had to get at the end of this runway of hot blasted coals and we had to step across it and we had to walk. I mean that's a story. That's vivid. It head fear. It had drama because in order to do this, you have to be able to project in the future of already seeing yourself across the fire. You had to be there.

**Peter:** So that's like Richard Bandler and –

**James:** Neuro-linguistic programming, John Grinder and Richard Bandler which years ago I studied which by the way was taken from the study of hypnosis.

**Peter:** Right.

**James:** The ability to be able to move a person in the direction you want them to hope and hoping even though this isn't one of the traits of True Leadership, let's hope it's for the good.

**Peter:** The other thing about storytelling is it doesn't require PowerPoint.

**James:** You know, I recently put PowerPoint in my presentation because I do a little thing on the neuroscience of the brain but I have to tell you in truth with me I have avoided PowerPoint for almost 30 some years because most people don't know how to use it as an adjunct to storytelling, as a highlight to provide another depth because we're also visual, we're also auditory, we also feel so all those points have to be put into a story in order to make a story work.

**Peter:** Back to the leadership training that you do. So you go in and you do this workshop, what is the outcome and what are you hoping that that audience is going to walk away and be able to accomplish?

**James:** My goal is to embed or to have these five traits stick and the only way to do that and I do something similar – we'll talk about this later in the Imagine That workshop. But I start off with a question right when I walk out and the question is if you have a magic wand and you could waive it and change one thing, what would be the one thing you would change to make yourself a better leader? So the entire workshop is geared to answer that question by examining the imagining, examining fear, examining values, examining what creates passion, examining how you tell a story and then at the very end, they answer the question. They literally write it down and it's mailed to them within a month. So my goal in all my workshops is how do you extend the keynote or the workshop beyond the moment because you



and I both know and maybe you more than me is when people attend a talk where they're being just talked at – because mine are very, very interactive – they will lose most of that information within a day or two days. If they retain 1% of it, they'll be lucky. My goal is to make it stick and you make it stick by interaction, you make it stick by self examination, you make it stick by having them experience creating their own vision that they can then carry into the workforce.

**Peter:** I would say that the one takeaway of this conversation is the importance of really taking the time to create and develop that personal vision for yourself of what you want to accomplish and make sure that it's realistic, it's grounded and it's something that you can articulate.

**James:** I like the realistic thing because so many people create visions that are not achievable so it demotivates instead of motivates. When I do private clients, they're always shock because I work with executives and the first thing we do is start at the beginning. So they have to go and create their own personal vision statement which then becomes their compass to measure their goals against. What most people failed to see is that a goal – I mean you can achieve a goal if I go workout, then I achieve my workout goal but then what? So a vision, it has to be expansive. It has to be something if you stretch a rubber band out and you hold that tension which is all about creativity, you want that to pull people forward towards it and in the pulling forward, they're accomplishing their daily tasks, the mundane stuff but the vision creates the motivation. It gives them not only hope but it creates passion and it has to be achievable and you have to see that you're making progress and it has to be easily communicated.

**Peter:** And you have to be able to measure it.

**James:** And you have to be able to measure it. That is true, very true.

**Peter:** What have we covered in this conversation that you think is important for our audience to take away?

**James:** I think we've covered but if I were to say what's the takeaway – I give assignment.

**Peter:** All right, give us an assignment.

**James:** The assignment would be to take the time to list your five most important values and determine the top 2 if forever you could only keep 2, you have no choice. You have to throw three of them away. You can do that in an instant, right? The second thing would be to look at the style of life that is the most important to you. I'll give you a couple of category. There are a lot of styles of life – social, spiritual, and write that down and then write down your most important relationship in your life and I'll tell you why I have people do this in a second. Then write down one future plan that passionately drives you because on a personal level, if those are incorporated into your compass, then you can measure your day, moment to moment, day by day tasks against the goal. I do this everyday in my life, things come at me, I get offers to do things, I measure them against my vision which I recreate every four to five months, it's not easy, and sometimes I have to say no to that which I want to do in the moment because I want satisfaction as we all do as human beings but – we'll cover this in another talk – a leader is to delay momentary satisfaction to be able to achieve something larger and you can only do that if you're grounded in your own vision which is about your values, about what drives you.

**Peter:** That's really interesting and I think that's a great point to end this particular conversation because I think so many people are living a transactional life and a life that is in the moment and just being reactive to whatever is coming at them at that particular moment without having this vision, without having this larger goal that they are working to achieve.

**James:** And without the support, you see. We'll cover that in another session. There's a Nelson Mandela quote that is taken out of context but I love it because it says it all to me and that is "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure."

**Peter:** Well James, on that note, it's always great to have a change to speak with you and thank you so much.



**James:** Thank you for having me. It's been a pleasure.

**Peter:** We've been speaking with James Mapes. His website is [jamesmapes.com](http://jamesmapes.com).

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