



improving performance through Positive Change®

Linda Feinholz, "Your High Payoff Catalyst" Interview by Jeremy Lurey of Plus Delta Consulting 01/30/2008

Hi everyone –

This is Jeremy Lurey, Principal of Plus Delta Consulting. I'd like to thank you for taking the time to listen to our interview with a true expert today. I have the distinct pleasure of speaking with Linda Feinholz, an Executive Consultant, who has extensive experience in the areas of leadership development, executive coaching, and team effectiveness. Linda is a professional consultant, coach, speaker, author, and publisher, and for the past 20 years she has supported numerous domestic and international clients who have faced complex business challenges. Linda has consulted to the owners and management of various businesses providing them critical knowledge and experience to help them execute their businesses more profitably and productively.

Linda has worked with a few of Plus Delta's clients over the last few years – in fact, we'll be launching a Leadership Assessment project with a new client of ours in San Diego next week – and I have thoroughly enjoyed working with her on each and every engagement. She's a skilled facilitator who brings an MBA-background and keen understanding of business operations together with an intensely intuitive approach to understanding group dynamics and working with teams to help them improve performance. The reason I wanted to speak with Linda today though – and why I'm sure you will all be glad you listened in – is because of her work as "Your High Payoff Catalyst".

JSL: Hi Linda. Welcome and thank you for so much for being with us today. I really appreciate your taking the time to speak with us this afternoon! You and I have known each other and worked together for several years now, and I'm always fascinated by your ability to make a difference so quickly with everyone you touch. Before we get started, can you first share a little bit about your background with our listeners and tell us about the types of people you typically work with? Also, I'm really curious to hear what it means to be a "high payoff catalyst".

Hi Jeremy – thanks for that welcome!
Isn't that a great title?!

My clients are actually the ones who gave me the High Payoff Catalyst title. They've told me for years, actually even since my early employers when I worked with fast growing tech companies and again in consumer products like Avon, in consulting that I did with Ernst and with the management of The Walt Disney Imagineering company, they've told me over and over that I have a gift for quickly cutting through the chaos and confusion and complexity people and businesses are faced with. I get to the core of issues, clear out any distractions and diversions, and get everyone's attention and efforts on the activities that create high payoff results. It's those 3 steps each time over and over again.

Today, I use them to help business owners and key decision makers build and grow their businesses further, faster, and easier. The type of people I typically work with



improving performance through Positive Change®

have a Vision for where they believe the business should be headed, and a sense that it ought to work better, but they don't know how to create the changes in focus, in systems and in actions to get it there.

So I use those same 3 steps in my work with everyone from established organizations needing to change how they're accomplishing business, to early stage companies that want to set up their Vision, and the systems and practices and relationships that streamline building their business from the get go.

JSL: That's great. Thanks Linda. I love the idea of further, faster and easier. And I know that we're going to be talking about that a little more, later this afternoon so I won't pause right now. Let me ask you to take a step back for a minute. I know that consciousness, intention, and beliefs are very important to you. You speak of them all the time. Your intuitive nature. Can you explain to us what you have learned about these concepts, and how that affects your ability to succeed? And especially how it affects your ability to help others.

I'd be pleased to. One of the most challenging elements for each of us as we go about our days is to understand that we experience the results of the actions we take, and we choose those actions based on the choices we believe we have.

Imagine for a moment that you're trying to drive across Los Angeles at rush hour – Some of those listening to this have experienced it first hand! Well, some folks are sitting at 5 miles an hour staring at the break lights in front of them and they are certain it's the only way to get to their destination. Some people choose to expand their options by shifting their hours of travel. Still others, myself for instance, understand that Los Angeles is laid out like a grid. So even at rush hour I have the choice of getting off the freeway and making use of surface streets and side streets and actually traveling as much as 25 miles an hour. Now that means many other things change – I won't be sitting on my phone as I inch along, I'll be paying attention to lots of intersections and so on, and I'll get to my destination in half the time or even more quickly than that.

So there are options and trade offs that come when we broaden our belief in our choices and step into using them.

Our beliefs are usually based on our personal experience, for instance the person sitting on the freeway may have no experience of those streets and those other options. And additionally we get our information from other people. So, in my coaching with my clients, I spend a substantial portion of my time adding new ideas, new options to each person's set of beliefs to broaden their personal menu, you might say.

JSL: And don't you find that so many people get set in their ways? I joke about helping people manage change quite often, and use the joke about old dog and new tricks. So many mid-level managers, I find, who have been stifled or not given the tools or empowerment to make decisions on their own, they just get stuck in their own ways of using the same lane, using the same freeway, using the same surface streets. Because that IS all that they know, or what they feel is all they are allowed to do.

Absolutely. You know, one of the techniques that I use with my clients is what I call a "List of 10." In a list of 10, I'll be sitting with someone who's got management responsibilities, who describes to me some issue that they've run into. And they can only think of 1 thing they could say. And usually, it's something they believe "under no circumstances" should they allow that to come out of their mouth.

So with a List of 10 we start with a blank piece of paper and I ask them to write 10 bullets down, and I have them write down that sentence, that in their gut they wish they could say that. And then I say "Now, let's brainstorm 9 other things you might say. And I'll add in, I'll salt in some additional ideas.

By the time we've done the List of 10, somewhere in there is a very obvious statement that they could use, going back to that situation with the same set of people, and yet be able to create change because they've changed how they're thinking about their own options and the words that they use in order to in turn cut through whatever confusion or complexity might be there and move something forward.

JSL: Linda, I may actually be my worst coach and my worst enemy for all of this. I know that if I were to sit down and come up with a List of 10 like you recommend with your clients, I'm a pretty smart guy and I could probably figure it out. The ridiculous thing, though, is that I spend so much time during the day executing on what would be number 1 on my list, rather than take even 30 seconds to think through what the 10 might be.

Absolutely right. I run into that time and time again with my clients.

JSL: And going back to Intention with my clients, I've learned over the years that when I'm very clear in my intention I can accomplish almost anything. When I'm in a conversation with someone and I decide "I'm going to help them improve performance, that's my intention." I get such different results than when I walk into a conversation thinking "If I could just end this sooner, and get back 5 minutes of my day..." And that clearly comes out in conversations whether intentionally or not. Because that deep underlying intention is there.

You're putting your finger on what I described before, which is having a clear Vision of what you're trying to accomplish, and then identifying the distractions and getting them out of the way.

So for instance, you just described that one of the distractions is getting caught in your entire list. Part of the technique to use then as you know for yourself is to focus on one thing, identify what's distracting you from IT, get those distractions out of the way, and just focus on accomplishing that. of To Do's

JSL: Tell us a little about the vision for "Your High Payoff Catalyst". And how are you going about achieving this vision? I'm guessing that we can all learn quite a bit just by listening to and following your model for achieving your own vision for greatness!



improving performance through Positive Change®

In a nutshell, I believe people can set their Vision for what they want to achieve, set crystal clear goals, and learn how to get their distractions cleared out and design and stay focused on High Payoff Activities.

We all know what it is to have busy work. So those two words are really key. High Payoff. My goal is to systematically teach the simple steps for this to my clients so that they become expert at using them to create the business and life they dream of.

I'm really known for transmitting the Know How into my clients so they become more expert themselves.

For myself that means taking the work I do into the growing arena of working with even more folks than I can work with when I'm doing my organizational consulting. I'm giving more people access to these tools by offering them the opportunity to join my telephone-based MasterMind groups with me and other programs where they learn how to do this for themselves along with other like-minded professionals.

My vision it to keep empowering other people so they become more skilled at it.

So the programs are very structured – 60-90- minutes per call for discussing a specific topic, and other calls that are for Q&A, answering the questions that people have about how to apply the tools to their specific circumstances. And participants can join the calls live or listen to the recordings or read the transcripts later if they cannot make it to a particular call.

I'm sharing my thoughts and tips on many aspects of personal Vision, productivity, leadership, management, delegation and so on through those means as well as in a weekly newsletter.

JSL: I'm not sure how you do it, Linda, but I can definitely attest to the fact that you're truly a Catalyst. And somehow you have figured out how to create transformation in an instant. I know in the work we do with our clients around large scale change it can take many months or years to get to what they would call transformation, because there's so much incremental change. It seems that somehow you cut through all that, empowering others, transmitting the knowledge and tools to them, in literally just moments.

Thanks Jeremy! You and I both know from the work we do that we may know how to teach someone, but it's all about their readiness to take on those new skills and those new processes.

JSL: I know one of the tools you've been generous enough to share is you're the Spark newsletter. I've been receiving your weekly Spark! newsletters every week for the past year now. You have such a keen ability to demonstrate complex lessons with laser-focus imagery. I know everyone learns in different way. I tend to be very verbose and descriptive. But somehow, you create such metaphors and images that tie it all together so vividly. I remember last summer after you took a six-week trip to Europe with your family, you came back sharing a great story about luggage and how our excess baggage can really hold us back. Do me a favor and quickly tell our listeners how they can subscribe to The Spark! newsletter and then tell us a little bit about the luggage that you're still carrying



improving performance through Positive Change®

around with you these days. Also, I'm curious to hear what kinds of excess baggage your clients are carrying around with them and what you've done to help lighten their loads.

I love it. That was one of the articles I had such fun writing! I love, as you say, finding the metaphor and it's great to be able to take daily experiences and say "Ah! Here's a wonderful one I can use!"

The quickest and easiest way to get the Spark is to go to my web site and I will tell you how to get there. It is www.YourHighPayoffCatalyst.com and in the upper right corner of the screen they'll see a couple of boxes to fill in with their name and email address and then click on the button that reads "Catalyze Me!" [\[let me spell that – it's www.YourHighPayoffCatalyst.com\]](#) By the way, as you'll see when you go to the web site, you'll be getting my FREE audio mini-course with 7 specific steps you can take today to accelerate your results = SO you get both the mini course and the weekly newsletter.

With regards to luggage, you know the luggage I find that I'm carrying around with me is that I have a passionate need to keep learning. Very often, where that trips me up is I'll be in the process of working with someone and I'll come across a new book or a new article and it gives me an "even better" idea. Well, there are plenty of ideas out there and one of my learnings is I need to stick with certain tools that are already working just fine, and not keep stirring the pot up just because I myself like having my own pot stirred up.

When I look at my clients and the baggage my clients are carrying around with them, very often it's the same sort of patterns of behavior, learned very early in our childhood, around ages six to eight. And our conversations help identify what are their habitual ways of acting in the world and make it less habit and more obvious to them, so they can make choices about whether that IS the most effective way to be in a meeting, in working with a team, to be operating as a leader or as a manager.

JSL: It's interesting to hear you talk about 'learning' as your baggage, Linda. I know over the years I've heard of you going to all kinds of conferences and workshops, and reading and always being the consummate learner and trying to build your skills. I'm probably the complete opposite. I finished my PhD program probably 10 years ago and it took probably 9 years before I opened up a book again. I don't know if it's ego, arrogance or simply my drive to get things done. But I really have turned off that learning part of my mind for many, many years now. And it's amazing that when I open up even a few minutes of my day, whether it's reading the Spark newsletter or a trade journal, it's amazing how much you can pick up even in just a few minutes.

It's so true. Ironically I have very few subscriptions. I have one to Fortune Magazine, to Inc. and Entrepreneur and I find as I'm flipping through there will be an article with some comment from a leader. Or in fact I read Discover magazine and I'll be reading an interview with a biologist and somewhere they'll have described a process they've used. My brain will go "Ah Ha! That's the perfect metaphor to use with that client who's stuck on some particular business issue."

SO for me, I love the fodder, I love the energy, I love being stirred up that way.

JSL: While we're speaking about luggage Linda, you and I recently worked with a group of partners in a prominent accounting firm in Southern California. They are always wanting to move right to implementation as soon as they heard a good idea. Forget about discussing the idea first or doing any kind of planning. Their model was simply "Go from Idea → to Implement." I remember we talked to them about a new model for getting things done where we helped them determine what their final Destination was first. Really, stop and think about what their vision was, what their direction was, and then go through the other D's of Discussion – Decision – Design – and Delivery before taking any action. Can you tell our listeners a little bit about this experience with the partners and the 5-D approach we recommended?

I'd be pleased to! You and I both observed that while the 4 partners had distinctly different personal and professional styles, one thing they had in common was they went straight from IDEA to ACTION. Now I expect many people listening to this can relate. And also they can relate to how much time gets spent cleaning up the results of operating that way. People have the mistaken notion that they don't have the time to plan – in fact they avoid that word and that activity like the plague – BUT they don't measure the costs of cleaning up the mess on the other side of their actions.

So the model we shared with them was to PAUSE once they had the idea. We coached them through learning to Name the Destination that they were aiming for and then Work Backwards from there. And the steps we took them through were those D's: So, naming Destination first; then using Discussion to sort through what their options were; Reach specific Decisions that they had all agreed upon about the what, when, where, who and how, and then Design all of their actions before they actually took them, and then Deliver it by moving into Action.

For these folks, learning to spend even 2 to 4 hours over a couple of days or weeks using the 5 D's meant they could stop wasting months with people wandering in and out of each other's offices complaining, or inventing and using work arounds and just avoiding dealing with things that were launched but not working well.

And I think that the concept of Destination goes back to what we were saying about Intention before. That if you don't know where you're going... whenever I facilitate Leadership workshops, I talk about that lighthouse, it is the beacon, it is the mile marker on the road that really tells you where you're going. And if you don't have clear intention, if you don't know your Destination, your end goal it's nearly impossible to get there. In fact you'd be lucky if you did.

It's so true. And the reason you and I are invited in to work with organizations over and over, regardless of their size, is because people find themselves stuck up to their knees in quicksand with that sense "It ought to be easier to get all this done." But they don't know how but they don't know how to climb out.

JSL: And the thing we experienced with this group of partners is that having clarity at the group level, having a sense of shared goals and direction versus individual visions. For these 4 folks, as mentioned they were very different, different styles, different personalities, different goals in life, and different stages of their life even, it was amazing how much they



improving performance through Positive Change®

didn't understand about their fellow partners approaches. Once we gave them the chance to open up and share that, how quickly they realize how in alignment they may have been.

You're putting your finger right on the pulse of what happens in organizations where you have a number of peers. In this instance it was partners, in a professional services firm. You and I encounter it when we work with management teams as well.

People give so little thought to what their own vision is, and so little time to actually discussing it in informal conversations let alone in formal discussion. There's something magical about the word "plan" that actually makes people shut down – they think it's a multi-hundred hour chore, and in fact, often it's only a 1-hour conversation. For the lack of having that conversation those 4 partners had spent years working at odds with each other.

As a result of what became a series of brief conversations with me, and then a facilitated conversation among all of them, they actually were able to identify for themselves, the common elements that were important to them, in what they wanted their organization to look like as it went forward, in what they wanted their lives as professionals to look like for years to come.

And that's the starting point – when you can verbalize that vision, you can start to identify where various pieces fit, among the partners; which pieces you might be willing to adapt when you hear an even better idea from someone sitting across the table; and come to setting the intention for the organization that acts as that beacon – that all the other activities, and systems and processes are that you're going to put in place for how everyone in the organization will work together really effectively.

JSL: It's amazing how quickly the time flies when I'm talking with you Linda. Before we wrap up, let's talk a little bit about your 10-step process for achieving high payoff success. I know you can't share everything with us today, so let me ask you to highlight just a couple of quick tips for our listeners. What are the most important things for being successful, and what key steps do you recommend to those just getting started?

I tell you what, let me give people a couple of ideas to focus on today – One of the most important keys for being successful is NOT Time Management, but Attention Management. When you take control over how you use your attention, then blocking off time on your calendar to work uninterrupted, preparing and using agendas for meetings, and bringing each discussion you're in back to the question "What does this mean for the business" become very easy.

A second key is the first steps of the day I teach all my clients: First write down everything rattling around in your mind, so it gets said, it's seen and heard, and is out of your mind for the rest of the day. Some folks take half an hour, some 15-minutes, and some get even faster with it. Then write down 3 and only 3 key results you want to achieve, that depend on you, that are YOUR focus of action for the day. Everything else, you'll calendar for another time OR you'll delegate it to someone else to get done.



improving performance through Positive Change®

I'll let people learn about the 45-minute hours and other steps when they listen to the audio mini course. Those two keys can radically change your experience of your own day, today.

JSL: Linda, I know that trying to get as much done as I possibly can, I'm constantly busy managing To Do lists and figure out what I can push off to another day, another week, another another... there's never enough time to get it all done. I've learned there's never enough time to get it done. We probably only have time for this one last question with you, it may actually be the most important one I've wanted to ask you all day! As "Your High Payoff Catalyst", how do you help your clients get further, faster, easier? That sounds like such a painless and effortless thing but I can't imagine how it's even possible.

Jeremy – I've learned over and over again with my clients that using all our relationships, and tools and systems and processes and ideas successfully actually depends on each of us Owning and Managing our Attention. Going back to the tips I was mentioning before, and what you were talking about with a To Do list that goes on forever, the goal is to shorten that To Do list. Which means 'be realistic'. There are things you 'dream' of doing. Put them on a separate list and get them said and out of the way so you don't have attention on them any longer.

In order to accelerate your results and anyone else's, I teach my clients very simple, specific ways to focus, to get their distractions clearly identified and dealt with rapidly so they're out of the way, and then use High Payoff Actions to move your business and their business to the Vision they're holding.

JSL: Linda, thanks again for sharing all your insights and recommendations with us this afternoon. As always, I find myself inspired by the simplicity of your approach and look forward to focusing my attention on my high payoff tasks in the future. We're starting a new year and this is a fine time to find that focus. I'm completely confident, as I said before, that I can achieve anything I put my mind to this year if I can just reduce the amount of time I allow myself to be distracted each day, the amount of time I spend on low priority work. Your concept of focusing more energy on high payoff tasks can make a real difference. Let me ask you – remind us again how they can sign up for The Spark! newsletter and feel free to share any other resources you would like to recommend to everyone to help them get further, faster, easier in '08.

You can subscribe to the Spark at my web site: www.YourHighPayoffCatalyst.com
In the upper right corner of the screen you'll see a couple of boxes to fill in with your name and email address and then click on the button that reads "Catalyse Me!"

On the web site you'll see navigation links there to the other web pages and I invite you to browse and keep checking the Catalyst Tools and the Resources pages. I'm constantly adding new tips and tools and programs as people request them. And if there is something you're looking for that you'd like to see or hear, feel free to use the Contact Me page to let me know!

I will just remind everyone, that in order to get further, faster and easier this coming year, worry less about Time Management, and more about Attention Management. Time Management will fall into place when you do that.



improving performance through Positive Change®

JSL: That's great! Where my attention goes is sometimes quite scary! I have to remind myself to get back on track. Thanks again for taking the time to listen in to today's interview with an expert. Linda, it's so wonderful to talk with you and I appreciate your sharing everything with our colleagues today. It's been so useful for me and I hope it valuable for everyone else. Thanks everyone. Take care! Have a great day.