



## For Transformation, First Leaders Must Change

Good leaders change their role during growth transformation programmes. They know that if they don't change themselves, transformation won't happen. Great leaders go through a personal transformational journey as their business grows. Mahatma Gandhi's famous edict, "*For things to change, first I must change*" still resonates today.

What is less clear is how precisely the leader's behaviour needs to change throughout the transformation process. Figuring this out can be tricky. Most are involved in just a few transformations over their career.

To understand more how leader's change their roles, we have just completed a review of 20 Growth Transformation Engagements of mid-sized companies. We examined the role of the leader and how it evolved during classical stages like creating the vision, prioritising strategic challenges and executing the plan.

We looked at behaviours, which led to success and those, which flashed warning signs. It was clear that good leaders changed their style, role and questions throughout the transformation. Some clear trends emerged.

1. **FIRE** - In the early days of a transformation, good leaders light a **fire** in their team's bellies. They balance passion, empathy and openness. Good leaders ask - what assumptions do we need to challenge?
2. **EARTH** - As the project becomes real, leaders become more like gardeners, challenging their teams to get to the root cause of issues

buried in the **earth**. Good leaders ask - what should we start or stop doing?

3. **SKY** - As the growth blueprint becomes clearer, leaders create tension between the earth (where the company is today) and the promising **sky** of the future. Good leaders ask – what will drive this transformation?
4. **WATER** - Later as execution comes into play, leaders provide **water** and resources to fuel the transformation. Good leaders ask – what have you done?
5. **WIND** - Finally to realise the growth transformation, leaders become like the **wind** delivering energy through constant communication, encouragement and correction. Good leaders ask - what is really happening versus what was expected?

Each element is important – each feeds and balances the other. If the transformation is all about **fire in the belly** without the other elements, it won't succeed. The graphic below summarises what we found:

## Leadership behaviours at each stage of Growth Transformation

	Shared Vision (Fire)	Growth Challenges (Earth)	Growth Blueprint (Sky)	Execution/ Resource Plan (Water)	Finalise Growth Transformation Program (Wind)
<b>Objective</b>	Secure commitment to agreed vision	Agree priorities & resource allocation	Create tension: today vs shared vision	Instill urgency & encourage delivery	Communicate relentlessly & follow through
<b>Role of Leader</b>	Be open & empathetic - Paint the possibilities	Get to root cause – Be decisive - Make hard calls	Hold space for current & future - Create debate	Inspire – Be tenacious - Manage scope - Secure wins	Communicate - Respect others views – Focus on action/results - Regular reviews.
<b>Warning Signs</b>	Anchoring on one viewpoint - Not listening Not thinking broadly enough	Superficial agreement – Politics - Trying to get consensus	Too much compliance - Lack of clarity & compelling growth story	Missed targets - Lack of accountability	Blame game – No review – Adding resources to failed actions
<b>Questions</b>	What new information do we need? What assumptions should we challenge?	What simple rules can we use to prioritize? What will we stop doing?	What drives this transformation? What keeps you going through tough times, actions & decisions?	What did you promise to do? What have you done? What is holding you back?	What really happened vs expected? Why was it different? What should we change?

### Insight in Brief

Successful growth transformation programmes require a change in the leader's behaviour. To understand how a leader's behaviour evolves during this process, we reviewed 20 Growth Transformation Engagements and discovered that at each stage of Growth Transformation some clear trends emerged.

### Insight in Action

1. **Fire** - Good leaders light a fire in their teams bellies
2. **Earth** - They get to the root cause of issues buried in the earth
3. **Sky** - They create tension between the earth and the promising sky of the future
4. **Water** - They provide the resources or water to fuel the transformation
5. **Wind** - They become like the wind delivering energy to drive the transformation