

Tom's Story

A Case Study of The Alpha Element Language Applied in Self-Coaching

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Alpha Element Institute offers an interactive platform and process shown to be effective to develop interpersonal communication skills and inspire self-leadership through self-coaching.

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Health and well-being are enhanced by the ability to communicate effectively.

When we feel comfortable in a social or professional setting, we feel confident and relaxed. On the other hand, when we experience a lack of confidence, we tend to feel pressure, become tense and more reactive in our behavior – all of which can become barriers to effective communication.

Differences in interactive communication styles between individuals can also become barriers and contribute to misunderstandings and stress. In our experience, generating awareness of distinctions in communication styles can positively influence individuals' relationships as well as their internal dialog and lead to self-leadership. In this paper, we share an example of how Alpha Element Vitality Types facilitate development of a self coaching process that leads to self-leadership.

Words are tools that frame our perceptions and shape our reality. Through a symbolic language of words and visual metaphors, Alpha Element Vitality Types illustrate connections between words, behavior and vitality. This approach is based on a holistic model of engagement and interpersonal communication styles that symbolizes a spectrum of characteristics needed to proactively self-manage.



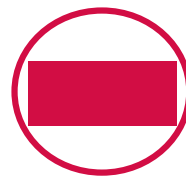
**Catalyst
Discovery**



**Torchbearer
Action**



**Pathfinder
Process**



**Pragmatist
Structure**

Catalyst, Torchbearer, Pathfinder and Pragmatist are metaphors that describe four distinct perspectives and patterns of engagement.

Alpha Element Vitality Types illustrate connections between words, behavior and vitality.

The Alpha Element Vitality Types can be viewed as lenses to four distinct patterns of engagement resulting in different interactive communication styles.

Words have energy and set intention, thus it is important to be mindful that our internal dialog has a powerful impact on our self-esteem, behavior as well as our communication with others. If we think that we are setup to fail, then it can easily become self-prophecy. If we think otherwise and use different words in our internal dialog, our destiny may follow in the direction of the intention set by those words.

 <p>CATALYST Lens: ideas</p> <p>"effervescent"</p> <p>QUICK PLAYFUL UPLIFTING SPONTANEOUS CREATIVE LIVELY FUN</p> <p>This is the way of the Catalyst</p>	 <p>TORCHBEARER Lens: action</p> <p>"urgent"</p> <p>FAST DIRECT DYNAMIC DRAMATIC RESULTS-DRIVEN PASSIONATE BOLD</p> <p>This is the way of the Torchbearer</p>
 <p>PATHFINDER Lens: relationship</p> <p>"connecting"</p> <p>SOFT SUBTLE YIELDING SENSUAL ANALYTICAL INVESTIGATIVE CALMING</p> <p>This is the way of the Pathfinder</p>	 <p>PRAGMATIST Lens: accuracy</p> <p>"steady"</p> <p>SOLID CLEAR FOCUSED PREDICTABLE DISCERNING BALANCED GROUNDED</p> <p>This is the way of the Pragmatist</p>

Figure 1

The Vitality Types offer an opportunity to recognize differences in engagement styles. They do this by providing clear categories and a common language for differentiating between four styles of engagement that impact interpersonal communication. Awareness of these differences helps distinguish between a message and the person delivering it. Hence, the Vitality Types provide tools to support effective communication, resulting in enhanced relationships and collaboration.

The ability to use tools to self-manage and generate detachment is essential to effective communication and self-agency both at home and at work. Everybody can experience bad days. However, when those bad days seem to outnumber the good days, it is probably time to make a change.

For Tom, 35, an accountant, bad days and negativity had become part of an unhealthy cycle.

“I seem calm on the outside, but I’m constantly upset and agitated.”

Tom is single and has never had any long-term relationships; he feels that he always seems to find the women that are wrong for him. He often struggles to get along with others. Tom grew up in a middle class home with a dominating dad who on a regular basis would name-call him and his younger brother. Tom remembers that, growing up, he always tried to avoid any conversation or any action that could lead to his dad’s “blowing up.”

During childhood and adolescent years, until he moved away to college, Tom’s focus was to be as invisible as possible at home to avoid any onsets of conflicts. For the most part, Tom was good at that. In fact, he was so good at it that his conflict aversion strategies have followed him to this day. In college he did what he could to fit in to make sure people liked him. However, he never spoke up when he thought his friends were out of line and he never opened up to any of them out of fear that they would turn on him or disagree with him.

This passive pattern of behavior has followed him after college and into his current career as an accountant. Tom has no problems in his relationships with accounting clients, but he does feel unexpressed anger toward peers if they are telling him what to do or if they interfere with what he is doing. This inability to speak up, be straight-forward and communicate authentically with coworkers has resulted in frustration, stifled emotions and feelings of low self-esteem.

When caught in these patterns of deflecting feelings and avoiding authentic conversations, it is difficult to see the big picture and get the courage to create a shift. If Tom can learn to take a step back and use the Vitality Type categories to reframe, he might discover that there are underlying patterns that fuel his negative outlook which feed into reactive behaviors. Such patterns may gradually creep up on us, or they might emerge as a result of a sudden event. Regardless, negative, self-destructive patterns of thinking and behavior are stressful and unhealthy and it is challenging to find a way out. Gaining access to tools to interrupt and reframe negative patterns can help Tom create a shift from reactive to proactive communication in his internal dialog as well as in his dialogs with others, leading to improved relationships.

Alpha Element Language as a Tool to Clarify Inner Dialog and Stimulate Self-Coaching

The goal of self-coaching is to access tools and strategies to manage challenging interactions proactively. For Tom, the language of the four Vitality Types allowed him to take control of his behavior. As a first step, he completed the Interactive Style Questionnaire (ISQ). The ISQ is a 25 item questionnaire that benchmarks a person's interactive style according to the four Alpha Element Vitality Types. By completing the ISQ, Tom gained a new awareness of his engagement patterns.

The chart below compares Tom's ISQ scores to patterns of approach styles and behaviors associated with each of the four Vitality Types. This chart is an overview of attributes as well as shadow aspects associated with each of the Alpha Element Vitality Types. Attributes describe engagement styles associated with constructive and proactive interactions while shadow aspects represent negative behaviors and attitudes that commonly lead to reactive, less constructive interactions.





Vitality Types	 CATALYST	 TORCHBEARER	 PATHFINDER	 PRAGMATIST
TOM'S ISQ SCORES	3	5	11	6
FOCUS	Discovery	Accomplishment	Development	Completion
APPROACH	Open-minded	Transformative	Process-oriented	Scrutinizing
KEY QUESTION	What if?	What?	Why?	How?
SENSE OF TIME & PACE	Now Hasty	Future Fast	Endless Slow	Past-Present Steady
NEEDS	Variety	Challenge	Connection	Stability
SHADOW ASPECT	Erratic	Restless	Overwhelmed	Judgmental

Figure 2

Upon completing the self-assessment, and reflecting on his feedback report, Tom was able to recognize both positive and negative behavior patterns in himself through the categories of all four Vitality Types. Awareness of the four patterns provided new self-knowledge about how he communicates and the energy he contributes. This recognition resulted in a few revelations. Specifically, he started to see that how he thinks and feels about a situation can impact the outcome.

Tom's ISQ scores point to the engagement and communication style he brings to his interactions with others. His scores indicate that he relies most heavily on Pathfinder Vitality; however, all four patterns symbolize a range of characteristic

interactive styles that he can learn to take advantage of and foster through self-coaching. This information will help Tom achieve his goals as well as improve his relationships.

Analysis of Tom's Engagement, Communication Style and Self-Coach Strategies in Light of the Four Vitality Types



Pathfinder Perspective

The proactive engagement of Pathfinder Vitality is calm, cautious and low key. Potential shadow sides associated with Pathfinder interactive style are co-dependence, emotional fog, denial and feelings of being overwhelmed. This lack of clarity can lead to a sense of isolation and disconnection from others.

Tom recognized that since childhood he had been drawing on Pathfinder characteristics – both attributes and shadow aspects. As a child he was trying to understand why his dad would only get involved in his life when things went wrong and never when things were going well. Instead of rebelling, as a Torchbearer might do, Tom would ponder endlessly and ask himself the question *why?* attempting to make sense of what was going on. He never found the answer because for every 'why' another 'why' question would follow. As a result, Tom grew up feeling lost, invalidated and struggling with low self-esteem. His lack of confidence was reflected in his interactive communication style which was to yield and never speak up; this reluctance to speak-up is associated with a reactive Pathfinder interactive style. Over the years, his inner dialog increasingly became more negative as Tom tried to make sense of his life. In contrast, if Tom's instinct had been to draw on reactive aspects of Torchbearer Vitality, he might have directed his energy, emotions and anger outward and been more confrontational and less afraid of speaking his mind.

Pathfinder tendency is to be inwardly focused. However, if the only way to process information or experiences is through internal dialogs, one can easily lose perspective. Losing perspective creates a one-dimensional outlook where one gets trapped in a set pattern of negative internal messages. This entrapment happens, in part, due to the brain's automatic interpretation of change as being unsafe. Unless we have tools to reframe and intentionally zoom out to get new viewpoints, a person, such as Tom, can easily get lost in meandering about their struggles and as a result experience feeling overwhelmed, low mood and poor confidence.



Torchbearer Perspective

The proactive engagement of Torchbearer Vitality is action-oriented, fearless and decisive. Potential shadow sides associated with Torchbearer interactive style include behavior that can be belligerent, careless and thoughtless. Hence, this interactive style can be overwhelming and intimidating to others.

Tom realized that when he reflected on the words associated with Torchbearer Vitality, he had mainly been drawing on Torchbearer shadow aspects. In describing the undercurrent of his irritability he used words like restlessness and frustration. He would get especially frustrated when people were indecisive. Interestingly, when on the job, Tom reported he seldom felt irritated or upset when interacting with clients - here he led with proactive and positive Pathfinder qualities such as being methodical, connecting and process-oriented. However, he got easily tense in his interactions with peers when he thought they didn't listen to him or respected his experience and knowledge in the field. He now realized that the reason he had felt threatened was because he didn't feel comfortable speaking up.

Through learning to draw on Torchbearer attributes such as being direct and action-oriented, Tom was experiencing how self-coaching led him to become more proactive and speak up. He became able to more calmly express how he sees a situation before getting reactive and emotional about it. As a result of this self-coaching strategy, he started to realize how much his internalized anger had been holding him back.



Pragmatist Perspective

The proactive engagement of Pragmatist Vitality is balanced, focused and tenacious. Potential shadow sides associated with Pragmatist interactive style include rigidity and judgement along with harshness and a hyper-critical demeanor. This can lead to non-constructive dialogs and stagnation in collaboration.

For Tom, the judgements he had built up over the years about himself and others had limited his ability to communicate effectively; he was critical of others, as well as being his own worst critic. Tom struggled with acknowledging when he had done something well. He had a difficult time valuing his professional contributions. By reflecting on the attributes and shadow aspects of Pragmatist Vitality, Tom gained awareness that his internalized anger led to harsh judgement of others and was limiting or even damaging his relationships. This shadow aspect is one Tom might have subconsciously copied from his dad. After learning about the engagement styles of Pragmatist Vitality, he was able to practice self-leadership and create a constructive shift by focusing on patterns in his communication style rather than his dysfunctional relationship with his dad.



Catalyst Perspective

The proactive engagement of Catalyst Vitality is social, lively and upbeat. Potential shadow sides associated with Catalyst interactive style include erratic behavior, self-indulgence as well as unpredictable, impulsive actions that leave others feeling disconnected.

Catalyst Vitality is motivated by discovery. Tom began to intentionally use Catalyst attributes in self-coaching in order to cultivate an open-minded approach to his interactions with others. For example, by reframing and focusing his engagement on listening for ideas and new possibilities, he was able to break his habit of leaping to judgement and criticism. This shift in his self-awareness and interactive communication resulted in a more social and engaged presence. It was initially intimidating for Tom to apply the Catalyst approach and look outside of his comfortable “box” of thinking and listening to others; however, it was ultimately liberating and rewarding.

By integrating Torchbearer attributes and words such as fast, direct, bold and driven into his inner dialog, Tom noticed a shift in his energy, outlook and self-esteem.

Taking advantage of Alpha Element platform tools, Tom consciously started to self-coach and push his own comfort zone by practicing speaking up. This new approach to speaking up and being more authentically engaged empowered him to create a shift away from his passive go-to behavior patterns. As a result his confidence started to grow. With his newfound confidence, Tom was able to curb his reactive behavior pattern and instead take a step back and get a better, more neutral feel for the interactions taking place. He started to get more comfortable in his own skin and began to accept that he cannot control others, but that he can control how he chooses to respond. By integrating Torchbearer attributes and words such as fast, direct, bold and driven into his inner dialog, Tom noticed a shift in his energy, outlook and self-esteem.

Poor communication can become a roadblock to overall health and well-being.

Learning about the attributes and shadow aspects of the four Vitality Types allowed Tom the freedom to recognize that a lack of awareness of his communication patterns had contributed to fuel his pathology.

When there is no outlet, awareness or language for a person to explore what is troublesome or how to break a negative behavior pattern, both internal and external dialogs can escalate out of control. Hence, poor communication becomes a roadblock to overall health and well-being. For Tom, learning the language of the Vitality Types and reflecting on his ISQ scores offered new choices and opportunities to reframe.

Concluding Remarks

The Alpha Element language sparked a new internal conversation for Tom that impacted his outlook and engagement as well as his interpersonal communication style. By applying the four Vitality Types to self-coach, Tom started to change the language of his internal dialog and became aware of what was holding him back. He became less critical of himself. He also became less restless as he started to rethink what he could do to change.

A profound observation for Tom was that he discovered that he could draw on all four Vitality Types in different situations. This new language and approach to self-coaching offered a process for Tom to reorient himself while making the change process less stressful and within reach. As his irritability decreased it became easier - and less intimidating for him - to take advantage of the playfulness that comes with Catalyst Vitality.

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Another article from Alpha Element Institute:

Team Focus: Awareness of Interactive Communication Styles Contributes to Team Vitality and Resilience illustrates applications of Alpha Element Platform tools to strengthen interpersonal communication as well as self-leadership to reduce burn-out, misunderstandings and disconnection among team members.

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