

# How We Lead

Practical Wisdom for Leaders and Coaches

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By Amiel Handelsman

## MY ASSESSMENT, YOUR ASSESSMENT

I'd like to introduce you to one of my favorite games. It's one with a few simple rules and many winners. The best time to play this game is when you find yourself in a conversation with people who see things differently from you. It's particularly useful when you feel triggered by these differences.

The game is called "My Assessment, Your Assessment." It goes like this:

### Rules

- **Name the conversation.** Just as it's useful on a tennis court to know whether you are rallying or playing a match, it's useful in conversation to know it's nature. Are you here purely to argue or to understand each other's perspectives? Assuming it's the latter, kick things off by saying, "I'd like to have a conversation about \_\_\_\_\_. First I'd like to hear your assessment and what's behind it. Then I'd like to tell you mine and how I came to it. Sound good?"
- **Listen for other people's assessments.** When they're talking, think to yourself, "This is their assessment. Hmm...I wonder what is behind it." Note how different this is from interpreting others' words as a "truth" with which you then must agree or disagree. The repeated act of doing this actually helps us differentiate from others, which is a very fine move toward mutual respect.
- **Hear the signal through the noise.** Only a small percentage of people are truly gifted at describing and grounding their assessments crisply and without defensiveness. The rest of us stumble a bit. There is a lot of noise. Listen for the signal, i.e. the assessment. Assume the best in others by interpreting even the most blatant acts of bloviation as assessments worth learning more about.
- **Acknowledge and request clarification about others' assessments.** "I hear your assessment is that \_\_\_\_\_. I imagine you've put a lot of thinking behind this. Could you help me understand it better?" The idea here is to invite others' to ground their assessments. This serves two purposes: (1) You learn what is behind their thinking and (2) They often learn what is behind their thinking.
- **Describe your perspective as my assessment or my take or my side of the story.** "Thanks for explaining that to me. Now I'd like to give you my take and how I came to it." Walk them through your reasoning. Even if it seems obvious to you (and it usually does!) it may be surprising, even revelatory, to others.
- **When in doubt, feel your feet on the ground and take two deep breaths.** This is a good rule for all games.

### The Game Is Over When

- You understand others' assessments
- Others' understand yours

### Rules for Advanced Play

- Once you've reached mutual understanding of each others' assessments, ask yourself: "Is there a perspective on this situation that incorporates both their assessment and mine?" The idea is to literally grown your own understanding by incorporating what you have learned. Yes, this requires advanced skills!
- Invite others to consider what such a larger perspective might be
- Talk about it together
- If no lightbulbs go on, agree to each ponder this challenging question for a day, a week, a month--and then come back together to discuss it.
- Listen for new ideas on walks, in the shower, and when you least expect it. If you've ever read the book Creativity by Mihaly Csikszentmihaly, you know that great creative minds work with extraordinary focus and diligence to define a creative focus, then forget about it for a while until new ideas wonderfully appear.

Ready to play?

Send your comments and questions to the usual place.

Cheers,

Amiel Handelsman  
CuriousLeader Consulting LLC

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email: [amiel@curiousleader.com](mailto:amiel@curiousleader.com)

phone: 503-235-8557

web: <http://www.curiousleader.com>

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