



## INTRODUCTION TO THE INTERVIEW WITH KATE

### LEVEL 4

Kate is a fantastic example of a Level 4 leader. She is an attractive fifty-four-year-old woman, dressed very professionally, fit, but not athletic, and very accommodating during our interview. She is married and has two kids in their early twenties. She and her husband have been happily married for twenty-five years, but this is not to say it has been without challenge. He suffered a job loss about five years before the interview, and they have both dealt with the loss and/or chronic illness of both their parents. Kate volunteers in the community as a member of the school board in her county.

Kate works on the regional CEO's executive team for what was, at the time, one of the three largest banks in the United States. She made a decision about mid-way through her career that she wanted to serve the top executive in whatever organization she was a part, but she did not want to be that top executive. Kate realized that objectively could be perceived by others as a play for power, so she takes intentional steps to let people know that power grabbing is not what she is about. In a funny way, deciding she did not want to pursue the most senior position in whatever division she has been a part of has actually increased her influence as a leader—especially with those above her, but with her peers and direct reports as well.

You will see in her words that she has great self-awareness, often characteristic of Level 4 leaders, but her self-awareness is not just about strengths and weaknesses. It is a complex mix of strengths and weaknesses, but also of values, standards, and motivation. Kate's faith is clearly a big part of her life, but you will see that she owns her faith. It doesn't own her. If I shared this model of development with her, she would likely say that she became Level 4 about five years ago—in fact, she says it in so many words in the excerpt below. What she explains to me is how

several really difficult circumstances caused her to focus on who she wanted to be and what she wanted to be about.

Kate highly values relationships and being influential in the development of others, but like most Level 4 leaders, she is not enmeshed in those relationships. She has relationships, but she is not had by them. This interview took place several years ago, and Kate's boss is one of the CEOs interviewed for the Leader Levels research mentioned in The Map. He, the CEO, has kept up with her, and he says that she is greatly admired for her leadership ability and her leader effectiveness. "She knows who she is and what she is about," he said. In his own way, he describes her as a Level 4 leader. As you read through this interview, think about how much easier and productive it would be to work for someone like Kate—a Level 4 leader who knows who she is and what she should do from the Inside-Out.

## KATE'S INTERVIEW

*[This excerpt starts about fifteen minutes into the interview when I asked her if any of the other cards seemed relevant to our discussion. She chose the Success card.]*

Okay, success. A year ago, our Information Technology VP, a senior level person, resigned. And for sixty days, the President of our division tried to take it on, which was a reasonable approach. You know, you lose your manager, you've got to assume responsibility. But after sixty days, he said, "I can't deal with this." So he said, "You're going to have to go over there and run that department, and figure out what's going on." So that was a year ago February.

My first response was, "You must be kidding. I can hardly turn on my PC." But I went over to IT and stayed there for one year.

In that time, three major things came about. The place was in turmoil. The previous manager had not done a good job at all. Everything was wrong. In that twelve months, we stabilized the department. We stabilized the system. We hired a manager. We restructured the departments. I got approval to hire twenty-one new people. And today things are stable because of what we worked through in that last year. For me, that's success. Because number one, I knew nothing about managing an IT department.

***Tell me what felt most successful about your role in that, to you?***

My ability to go into a world that was completely new to me, to understand it, and then rally the people around so that they began to feel victorious. They began to see they were really a part of this company. They had been working as an island, quite frankly, which was why they weren't able to continue on when their leader left. But they were so separated from the larger company that they didn't know how to interact with it. So for me, their personal growth was the biggest success, but there was success in being able to walk away from them too and say, "You're on your own. You've made it. You've grown up."

***In what ways did that feel successful?***

I felt like I had birthed a baby that was now walking. And I had built a framework around them that they could go on and they'd be all right. I still checked in, and I still played a role with them, but I was beginning to cut that cord and move out.

***Tell me about cutting the cord.***

Let me digress a moment to give you some of my personal background. I have two teenagers. I have learned as I've developed as a parent, that the most important thing I can do for them is to prepare them, so that when they are eighteen, twenty-one, twenty-five; whatever the magic number is, they will be independent; they will be ready to face all the issues of life, the good ones, the tough ones; and be able to not only do it on their own, but to have confidence in themselves that they can do it on their own. And so I very much, in a sense, see that parenting and managing are very similar.

My goal is to get everybody to the point that they function as a whole person, as a whole department on their own and come back in when they need to check in. Because I feel that life is truly a developing process. Everybody's at a different stage. And success is when I figure out where you are in your stage, and I learn to interact with you based on what you need from me as your coach.

***Do you feel like you have someone like that in your life as well?***

I've not had any one person. I've had a life of experiences. That's an intriguing question. How would I pull that together? The President who I worked closely with was very much a leadership example in terms of caring about people and focusing. And yet, he's very much a hands-off manager. He doesn't manage you close, and he's used to spitting something out and somebody catches it, and you run and go with it.

Well, I was the person for him who figured out where to put the things he spit out. So from those experiences, I had to learn how to get along with various kinds of managers. I had to lead when I wasn't empowered to lead. So it was those years of experience from the professional world that taught me.

I also came from a dysfunctional family. There again, I had to learn how to weave in and out, find my place, decide what success was for me personally, and for me, it became compassion and independence. But yet, independence was more of an interdependence. I recognize that I'm a human being and I can't do it alone, so I have learned how to be interdependent, take care of each other, and be successful together. I've tried to model that in my personal life as well as my professional life.

***In the interdependence, do any instances of conflict come to mind?***

Well, we're working through a process right now. There's a process where we bring on new clients that is not good. It's not streamlined. It's just not good. So we started the process of trying to work through that. And in dealing with that, you have a client manager who is very much a sales oriented kind of person. And I profess that I have the liberty to talk about sales people because I married one. They're just like computer people. They think and do differently. That's what makes them good.

But many of our best sales people don't want to deal with details, but then when what they sell hits the organization, we've got to have the details, and we've got to be prepared. So we're finding those points of conflict and trying to work through them. And so what's going to have to happen is that we're going to have to use a process where we sit down and just objectively say, "Does this make sense or does it not?"

So, in fact, I was in a meeting right before you came in. And as the manager came in to report where she was and for us to see what to do next, I looked at her and said, "I think we're still in a quagmire here, what do you think?" And she said, "I agree. We haven't made any progress. We're not ahead of the game." I said, "Okay, then we ought to take ourselves back out of the picture and remind ourselves what the goal is. The goal is to reduce the number of pieces of paper that the salespeople have to fill out." And she said, "Well, I'm finding that everybody in the home office wants to hold on to their piece of paper." I said, "Okay, then let's try this. Let's get all the people who own these pieces of paper together in a room and let's map out the process

and visually look at whether this is reasonable or not. And also ask ourselves at what point in time in the process, if we knew all this information, could we bring it on and streamline it and fix it."

So how does that relate to conflict? I'm trying to take my organization and say, "We're making it hard for this person. So let's make sure our act is reasonable, makes sense, and that we can feel good about it." And then go and say, "Okay, salespeople, here's how we feel about our process. And in order for us to take your client, you've got to come on at this point and give us this information. How can we either do it for you or make it easy for you?" So that's how I'm trying to work through that piece of conflict.

***I want to deepen this a little bit on two levels. One, how do you know, or determine, what is the right thing to do? The other thing is the importance to you of bringing key information holders together and facilitating a meeting that's going to lead to a good answer. Maybe those two are tied together even.***

They are.

***Where did you learn that? Where does that come from?***

I was first introduced to the facilitation process probably five years ago now, when I served on a team for the bank, and we had a facilitator who worked us through the process of thinking through team management. I found it very rewarding because we worked through conflict, we still appreciated each other, and we came out a team.

***A facilitation process?***

I can see the value that was created when you keep a structured process that allows you to express your deepest emotions, but stay controlled and focused. The balance is focus versus allowing you to express what's also in your inner heart. If it's a very emotional subject, it keeps you on track. You establish ground rules about how you're going to behave toward each other, and it's very much a process where you develop buy-in, you develop teamwork, and yet you can solve problems.

***Have you changed the process for yourself in the way you use it in meetings?***

I adapt it to the situation. There are times when you need to start with ground rules that the group builds, and sometimes I'll do that. In this meeting in January, it was a one-time session. I walked in and said, "Here are the ground rules; here's how we're going to work." There are probably two things that I do consistently. Number one, I always proactively say, "Here are the ground rules; here is what we're going to do" so that everybody enters on the same page. The other thing I do is I deliver what I promise.

***That's good. How do you know what and when you're going to adapt?***

I do my homework and evaluate what the issue is. Is this a group that's going to spend a lot of time together? Is it a project whose scope is going to take us six months? Or is it a one-time, short-order thing? And I also look at myself. What do I know about the situation? Because the heat's going to be on me. You know, if we get a bottleneck, I've got to move it forward one way or another.

So am I prepared and know enough both about the obvious, but also the un-obvious? What are the politics? What do I need to understand? I also try to bring myself in very open-minded. In the January meeting I just mentioned, I had my own opinion, but the first thing I had to do was build the trust level by letting them know that I wasn't going to vote. I wasn't going to sway it either way. I was here to help us get through it, and whatever the answer was, I too would have to live with it.

***What's meaningful to you about being open?***

I don't like hidden agendas. But even more importantly, I don't want people to think that I am looking for power. I decided some time ago that I wanted to work for and support the top person in whatever organization I was with—but in doing that, there is a risk that people will think that I really want power.

It is a great success in my mind, that I have built relationships with people and showed that power wasn't important to me—and being open was a part of that . . . for me to be able to say to someone, "I don't really understand this subject." That's a part of what made me successful

in managing the IT department I mentioned earlier in the interview. I would openly say, "Look I'm in preschool here. You guys have got to teach me." In fact, we celebrated the day I went from preschool to elementary school. So for me it's a trust and a credibility thing.

***Building that trust and credibility in that relationship is an important piece of managing to you?***

Yes. And I think that I build it most by letting you know where I'm coming from, and then by being consistent in the way I behave.

***What's important about being up front with who you are, and then behaving consistently with that?***

Nothing would make me happier on my tombstone than for people to say she was a person of integrity and compassion. To me, that's what it's all about. It's important to me that people see me and not somebody else.

***So go back and say what you were saying a second ago about what's important about being consistent.***

Consistency builds . . . helps build trust. But I think that consistency goes beyond the surface. In the conflict with the salespeople and the paperwork, the consistency I was looking for was the methodology through which we made the decision. Did we bring all of the right people together and determine what is the right thing to do? And then if an issue comes up with the same group in a month, we do the same thing again. And people begin to trust that at least they were a part of making the decision and they see that you're doing it at least twice in the same way. And I think that also through bringing all those heads together and using a sane method of making a decision shows that you can also begin to identify and recognize the change that might take place. If, in sitting and talking and working things out together, we are showing that we respect each other in the evolution of life, but we still as a group come to the right decision, we're going to build trust because people can count on us to sit down and use our best thinking processes to come up with the right thing to do. Maybe I've learned to recognize I can't do it all on my own. I need



the people around me to help.

***You hit on something really important—realizing now that you don't have all the answers.***

***How do you choose which answer you're going to go with?***

I do some homework. Based on the subject, I go to those people whom I respect and get their opinions. If it's possible, I do some reading on it. And then I actually just let it settle for a while and think about it. And I'm also a spiritual person who believes in prayer. And I'll pray about it. And somehow it just comes. I used to think that the sign of a leader was one who can make a snap decision. And there are times for that. But I've also learned now that it's deeper and more important to take some time with the decisions that can wait. And make sure you've exposed yourself to everything.

***And once you've exposed yourself to all these different perspectives, what is it that pushes you to go one way or the other?***

It's interesting. I wrote the word *intuition* down. I think my intuition helps me make decisions, but I also feel very led spiritually. I think it's the foundation of my experiences . . . yes, the foundation is my experience. That's the answer. It's not a book. It's not Tom, Dick, or Harry. It's what I have learned through my life's experiences.

***And when you see multiple options, what pushes you in a direction?***

Let's get down to the real core. I think a desire to be compassionate for people is probably the basis of how I begin to make a decision. But being compassionate doesn't imply being weak. I believe a lot in tough love. So I look at compassion. I look at the seed of the problem. Then depending on if I'm in my professional environment, my personal environment, religious or community, I have to pick what's the final blow for each of those. For instance, my utmost responsibility for the business is to not put the business at risk.

The last thing I always ask myself in making a decision is, have I put the company at risk? So if I'm making a decision about a person, and I decide that I've also put the company at risk, then I have to go for the company because I have a responsibility to the stockholders. In fact, I

had to do this just about four months ago. We fired a programmer. And he just didn't understand it, couldn't see through it, and felt we were wrong. I finally ended up looking him in the eye and saying, "I know you can't see it now, but in the long run we have to do this because we are looking at risk for the company. And in the long run, you're going to be better off. Because what you've done thus far has painted you into a corner that you're not going to be able to work your way out of." And my prayer for that guy is that one of these days he'll actually come through to say I was right, when he's over his hurt and has moved on. He had been given some boundaries to live in, but had not lived in them. And he was . . . it was too far along.

***This value system you have that is very respectful of people, and compassionate with them, even in the midst of realizing your responsibility to an organization, can you imagine another value system for yourself?***

No, I can't. My intense value system is probably one that developed to the strength that it is now just over the last five years. And again, it's from experiences. My husband was unemployed for fourteen months and it was tough. It was a downsizing; it was tough. At the same time, I had to assume the responsibility of care for my dad. He was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and several, several other things were wrong. Three years ago I lost my grandmother, who was a sign of unconditional love. So all of those experiences have brought . . . have culminated in my understanding that what was really important through all of those things was the compassion that people showed me. And again, compassion didn't always mean sympathy.

But you have caused me to really focus. I think the foundation of even my value system is my life experiences. It had some seeds that were planted at age two and age twenty and what not. I'm not sure I made a conscientious decision. I think it evolved. And I can certainly tell you that my evolution of gratitude for my value system has evolved.

***Yes, tough times have a way of doing that.***

## REFLECTIONS ON KATE'S INTERVIEW

Kate is a great example of a Level 4 leader that probably has a great chance to move toward Level 5. As was mentioned in the The Map, only about 15 percent of individuals continue growing to Level 5. However, as we see in Kate's interview, she engages in a lot of Level 5 behaviors, even though she is making sense of those behaviors from Level 4. The Level 5 behaviors she engages in are things like serving the growth needs of others by meeting them where they are, not where she is; maintaining humility about her own contributions and recognizing there is a bigger existence that she is a part of; being open to understanding the contributions and perspectives of others; and evaluating her experiences intentionally to see what she may need to loosen her grip on to name a few.

What will characterize Kate's understanding at Level 5, should she continue to develop, is an openness to evaluating not only her "way," but even her values. She will hold both her way and her values with a more open hand. She will do this by serving the growth needs of others through letting go of her perspective in order to meet others where they are. It will be in meeting others where they are that she will gain a more objective view of herself in the world.

While we can list the characteristics of Level 5—things like openness, transparency, enormous respect for others, seeing others as co-sojourners on this developmental journey, etc.—the thing that really characterizes the Level 5 leader is their ability to take as object themselves, their contributions, their values—the very lens that they saw the themselves, others, and the world through from Level 4. Yet, the ability to take this almost third-person view of their previous lens is not done from a place of groundlessness, rather a place of great groundedness that comes from previously being Level 4.

The lens that Kate will be subject to, the lens she won't be able to take a perspective on will be her new Level 5 lens—a lens that will make sense of her experience, as well as all of her previous lenses with a higher-order set of values. These Level 5 values are values like honesty, courage, the continued growth of individuals, organizations and even society. These will be the

values that Kate (if she grows to Level 5) will not be able to take an objective view of. They will be the lens through which she makes sense of all the other values, perspectives, and ways that she encounters.