



## BSR Conference 2008 | Sustainability: Leadership Required Sustainable Business Leadership: What's Required

Breakout Session Summary

Thursday, November 6, 2008 | 2-5 p.m.

### Speakers

- **Tom Cummings**, Founder and Chairman, Executive Learning Partnership

### Highlights

- Ability to build an emotional connection with various individuals and audiences is important to being a leader, and key to establishing that connection is knowing how to tell your story.
- Successful leaders know how to adapt to shifting circumstances, appropriately acknowledge challenges, and maintain commitment to achieving the end goal.

### Memorable Quotes

- “Intention has to follow attention to have presence as a leader.”
- “You’re going to have to think for a minute and try to reframe the conversation from a technical conversation into one of hearts and actions.”

### Overview

As he began his discussion on effective leadership practices and skills, Cummings first emphasized the power of telling a story and understanding how to establish an emotional connection. This interactive session explored the practices that make a great leader and led audience members to learn to tell their own stories and commitments in a more powerful manner.

Cummings presented the “leadership landscapes perspective,” a framework for engaging with people at different levels—the—that is, at the individuals, team, and organizational level, and at the level of industry, customers, and markets. He asked the audience to think about where they spend the majority of their time on the landscape—that is, with whom they most commonly engage with—and to think about how leaders sustain connections with people beyond the landscape they engage with. Cummings emphasized the importance of being able to establish one’s position on sustainability, maintain connections with all landscape levels, and tell powerful stories to help others on their journeys even in the face of a constantly changing external environment—that is, to exemplify leadership in unstable times.





## Business for Social Responsibility

Cummings then led the audience through a vision-creation exercise. He asked the audience to first draw a line that represented their lives on a graph, with the X-axis symbolizing time and the Y-axis renamed as the “why”-axis. The line on the graph symbolizes the purpose and meaning they were pursuing in their daily lives, and this first step prompted participants to first connect with their own feelings about defining and realizing their personal journeys.

Cummings then asked the audience to imagine a sustainability project that they would conduct over the next 90 days, draw the desired outcome for that project, and then work backwards and draw what the current state looks like. Participants then presented their respective project visions to others at their tables and stretched their communication skills to make their case as compelling as possible. Through this exercise, Cummings demonstrated that, as a leader, you need others to follow you on your journey, which means it’s up to you to make the journey relevant and powerful to others—be clear about it and determine how to tell your story in a way that will be accessible to others. The drawings produced by the audience were meant to help participants visualize not only the end goal, but to recognize the stages and challenges they would encounter along the way, and to put into practice the communication skills they would need as leaders to maintain support through these times.

Cummings then moved on to discuss the “equanimity dynamic balance,” which is the balance of specific practices of leaders: enduring commitment, presence, re-framing, eye for possibility, and recovery.

Regarding enduring commitment, it is important to ensure that people understand how you’re connected to your commitments, as well as how they can do the same. Presence can be achieved in two ways: “being” where you are by aligning your intentions with what you give your attention to, and “knowing” your presence—that is, knowing what effect you have on others. Leaders should also reframe their story—be it about their projects, companies, or themselves—so that it connects with all audience landscape levels, and have an “eye for possibility”—the decision to see the cup as half full rather than half empty. Cummings also emphasized the importance of knowing your recovery routines—what you need to do in order to endure the 90 days of your project.

Cummings concluded the session with additional advice on how to take the dialogue to the next level when trying to lead teams through a challenge. He asserted the value in taking on different perspectives at work and asking questions such as, “What does this actually mean at the level of the organization? What does this mean for external stakeholders?” Great leaders, Cummings emphasized, have the capacity to reframe.

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This summary is also available on [www.bsr.org/bsrconferences/2008/session-summaries.cfm](http://www.bsr.org/bsrconferences/2008/session-summaries.cfm).

