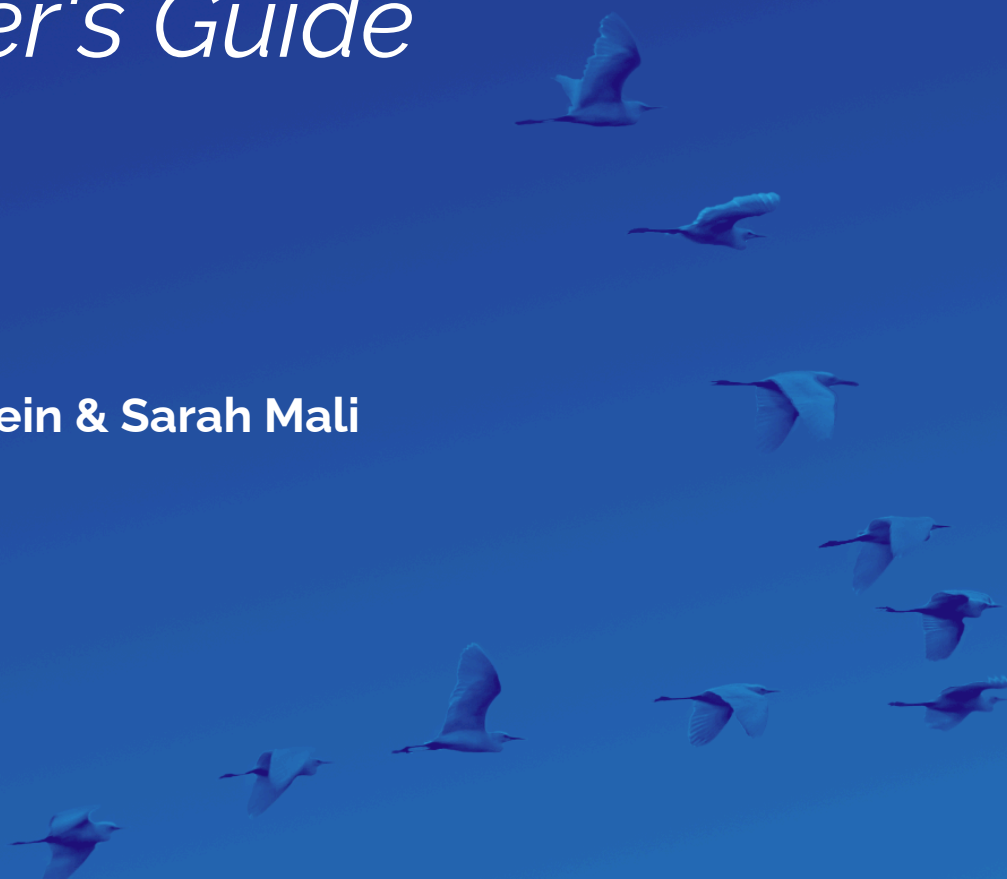


Unit 7

Tools of Provocation & Disruption

Learner's Guide

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SYNOPSIS

Make a Jewish Difference: The Tools of Provocation & Disruption

Leadership often demands that we surface issues others would rather keep under the carpet. The root of the word leadership, "leit," means to "go forth to the edge." This means that we must disrupt the comfortable status quo and be willing to provoke the discomfort of those around us for the sake of some larger purpose. In this unit, we will explore Abraham's use of provocation, and explore its power, dangers, and possibilities. Rabbi Sacks connects the concept of provocation to the idea of demonstrating anger - doing something shocking, unexpected, and emotional:

Sometimes it is necessary for a parent, teacher or leader to demonstrate anger – to look angry even if you aren't. It has a shock effect. When someone in authority displays anger, the person or group it is directed against is in danger, and knows it. It is almost like administering an electric shock, and it is often effective in bringing a person or group to order. It is, though, a very high-risk strategy. There is a danger it will provoke an angry response, making the situation worse not better. It is a weapon to be used only rarely, but sometimes it is the only way.

Rabbi Sacks (Ki Tissa 5778: Anger: Its Uses and Abuses,
Covenant & Conversation 5778)

This unit explores the idea that leadership necessitates that we at times, in pursuit of progress on the issues we care deeply about, need to make a deliberate choice of what to do and say that is in contrast with the norms and in service of our ultimate goals. Often, that involves being unpredictable, challenging people, surprising them, naming what people would rather stay unnamed, and using provocation as a tool for the sake of advancing the work.

EDUCATIONAL GOALS

Learners will emerge from this session with the following enduring understandings:

- Leadership can be defined as the gap between the current status quo and the desired future state
- In order to make progress on bridging that gap, the system, at times, needs to be shaken up
- Leadership work involves provoking and disturbing the system - often the very people who are most connected to the work and who do not want to admit to the problem
- Leadership can be defined as "disappointing your own people at a rate they can tolerate"
- Provocation is a tool - that needs to be learned how to be wielded effectively

INTRODUCTION



Provocation is not an end in itself but a method, with a range of specific tools, designed to create moments that are sufficiently newsworthy for people to pay attention and to give a new possibility and narrative "a half life". At its simplest, to try something or consider it for a while...Leadership acts need to calibrate with the group's tolerance for disturbance. This diagnostic work we call regulating the heat and pacing the work and often is learned by trial and error but also can be learned by sharpening diagnostic skills in the same ways that medical scientists do in drug trials.

Michael Johnstone (Provocation and Disturbance:
Are they necessary for change? Part 2)

If leadership is defined as bridging the gap between the current state and a desired future state, then part of the work of leadership involves pushing people to see that gap, and to understand that the current state might be different from how they're imagining it to be.

54 years ago, legendary "Peanuts" creator Charles M. Schulz made history when he introduced "Franklin," the first black character to appear in his Charlie Brown universe. He was an immediate hit, and his influence is still resonating today.

On July 31, 1968, a young, black man was reading the newspaper when he saw something that he had never seen before. With tears in his eyes, he started running and screaming throughout the house, calling for his mom. He would show his mom, and she would gasp, seeing something she thought she would never see in her lifetime. Throughout the nation, there were similar reactions. Jon S. Randal Peace Page

The opening strip showing Franklin's arrival is simple but poignant. He is seen simply offering his hand to Linus and saying, "Hi ... I'm Franklin," to which Linus replies, "I'm very glad to know you."



Schulz made a provocative intervention in a system that was reeling from the recent assassination of Martin Luther King on July 1st, 1968. He called out the hypocrisy in American society and offered them an alternative. He targeted children in the hope that they would help inform their parents that integration, not segregation, was possible. A provocative act can often emerge from another provocative act: Schulz created Franklin at the urging of a teacher who was persistent in writing him letters asking him to introduce a black character into his strip. Los Angeles based high-school teacher [Harriet Glickman](#) together with her black friend [Ken Kelly](#), a microwave communications engineer from Sherman Oaks, CA, knew that the classroom scene had to change to showcase what was possible - the desired future state - for society. Glickman, who had children of her own, was especially aware of the power of comic strips. "And my feeling at the time was that I realized that black kids and white kids never saw themselves [depicted] together in the classroom," she said.

Provocative leadership often generates serious pushbacks. The pushback is often data that you are on the right track. When one Southern editor said, "I don't mind you having a black character, but please don't show them in school together." Shulz's response was unequivocal: "We talked about it for a long while on the phone, and I finally sighed and said, "Well, Larry, let's put it this way: Either you print it just the way I draw it or I quit. How's that?"

Schulz's response is reminiscent of Soren Kierkegaard's observation:

"To dare is to lose one's footing momentarily. Not to dare is to lose oneself."

Reflection Questions:

1. What is your natural tendency - to be provocative, or to try to be soothing and maintain calm and composure in a group? If you are brave enough, ask a friend in the group what their observations are of you in this regard.
2. Most people are not provocative because they fear, or are uncomfortable with, the reactions they may receive. Have you ever been deliberately provocative? How was it received? What did it feel like? How fearful are you about provoking people you care about?
3. What is the most provocative thing anyone has ever said to you? How did you react?
4. Think about your leadership challenge - then think of the most outrageously provocative thing you can do to bring attention to it, or to surface the gap between what people say and what people do vis a vis that challenge. Share your idea with the group. How does it feel to say it and explore it?
5. What is your equivalent image to Franklin in terms of using provocation to get to an aspired state? Draw it and share it with a friend.

FRAMING

Michael Johnstone and Maxime Fern (Provocation as Leadership:
A Roadmap for Adaptation and Change)

Mild	Medium
Warm	Hot

You appear dangerous to people when you question their values, beliefs, or habits of a lifetime. You place yourself on the line when you tell people what they need to hear rather than what they want to hear. Although you may see with clarity and passion a promising future of progress and gain, people will see with equal passion the losses you are asking them to sustain. [...] The hope of leadership lies in the capacity to deliver disturbing news and raise difficult questions in a way that people can absorb, prodding them to take up the message rather than ignore it or kill the messenger.

Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky (Leadership on the Line:
Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leadership)

Henry Ford is often quoted as saying, "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got." Leadership involves trying to get somewhere different from where we've "always got." To do that, we must be creative. We must do things differently.

People are able to live with themselves because they tell themselves a particular story about their reality. When we exert leadership, we challenge their comfortable perspectives and tell another kind of story. Sometimes this implicates them in ways that are shameful and uncomfortable. People do not appreciate this. Provocation is a kind of Shofar cry to leadership. Maimonides in Hilchot Teshuvah 3 explains that the purpose of blowing the Shofar on Rosh Hashana is to awaken us from our day-to-day living, and challenge us to notice ourselves, the world around us, and the truth of what we see.

It is as if it tells us: Sleepers, arise from your slumber! And those who are dozing, awake from your lethargy! Review your actions, repent your sins, and remember your Creator! ...Look into your souls and improve your ways and your deeds!

Rambam (Laws of Teshuva 3:4)

Michael Johnstone explains it this way:

Provocation on purpose, provides an illustration of the way provocation can be used as a means to jump over the restraints of the current system in order to consider new options and to keep people in a zone of productive disturbance and learning long enough for new ideas to emerge. Somewhere between coaxing, nudging, cajoling, challenging and the outrageous, there is a sweet spot of creative dynamism, though each form, as seen, is dependent on the circumstance, the need, and the group's tolerance for disturbance.

Michael Johnstone (Provocation and Disturbance:
Are they necessary for change? Part 2)

Leadership involves disturbing people. Blowing a Shofar in their ears! Challenging them to look at what they don't really want to see, because it reveals a mess, a gap between the values they claim to espouse and the reality around them. Stepping into leadership means being willing to hold not only yourself accountable for the discrepancies between who you strive to be and who you are, but also those around you. Sometimes they cannot see what you can see, and so your work is to gently, and sometimes less gently, show them the world through your eyes.

Rabbi Sacks explains provocation as showing anger rather than feeling it. He tells the following story:

There was a time when I smoked a pipe. It was the wrong thing to do and I knew it. There is a mitzvah to take care of your health, and smoking harms you badly in multiple ways. Yet there is such a thing as addiction, and it can be very hard to cure even when you are fully aware of how badly you are injuring yourself and others. For years I tried to give it up, and repeatedly failed. Then someone I respected greatly became angry with me. It was a cool anger, but it felt like a slap in the face.

It cured me. The shock was so great that I stopped and never smoked again. The experience of being on the receiving end of someone's anger changed my life. It may even have saved my life.

This was a difficult discovery. When you are a leader, you are often at the receiving end of people's anger. You learn to live with it and not let it depress or deflect you. However, when someone who clearly cares for you, gets angry with you, not because he or she disagrees with you, but simply because they see you doing yourself harm, it can change your life in a way few other things can.

You come to see the point of Maimonides' distinction as well. Therapeutic anger, if we can call it that, is done not out of emotion but out of careful, deliberate judgment that this is what the situation calls for right now. The person who delivers the shock is not so much feeling anger as showing it. That is what makes it all the more shocking.

Rabbi Sacks

(Ki Tissa 5778: Anger: Its Uses and Abuses, Covenant & Conversation 5778)

HEVRUTA LEARNING & REFLECTION

Find a learning partner, a Hevruta.

Spend 15 minutes reading and discussing each text cluster.

Text Cluster I

Genesis 11:28

וַיָּמָת הָרָן עַל פְּנֵי תֶרַח אָבִיו (בראשית יא, כח), רַבִּי חִיָּיא בַר בְּרִיָּה דְרַב אָדָא דִּיפּוּ, תֶּרַח עוֹבֵד צִלְמִים הָיָה, חֵד זְמַן נָפִיק לְאַתָּר, הוֹשִׁיב לְאַבְרָהָם מוֹכֵר תַּחְתָּיו. הָיָה אֲתִי בַר אֵינֶשׁ בְּעֵי דִּיזְבֹּן, וְהָיָה אָמַר לֵיהּ בַר כְּמָה שְׁנִין אַתָּה, וְהָיָה אָמַר לֵיהּ בַר חֲמִשִּׁין אוֹ שְׁתִּין, וְהָיָה אָמַר לֵיהּ וַיִּלֵּיהּ לְהָהוּא גִבְרָא דְהָיָה בַר שְׁתִּין וּבְעֵי לְמִסְגֵּד לְבַר יוֹמִי, וְהָיָה מִתְבַּיֵּשׁ וְהוֹלֵךְ לוֹ. חֵד זְמַן אַתָּא חֵד אַתָּתָא טְעִינָא בִידָהּ חֵדָא פִּינֵךְ דְסֻלָּת, אָמַרְהָ לֵיהּ הָא לָךְ קָרַב קְדַמִּיהוֹן, קָם נָסִיב בּוֹקְלָסָא בִידֵיהּ, וְתַבְרִינוֹן לְכָלְהוֹן פְּסִילָא, וַיְהִיב בּוֹקְלָסָא בִידָא דְרַבָּה דְהָיָה בִּינִיהוֹן. כִּיּוֹן דְאַתָּא אָבוּהָ אָמַר לֵיהּ מָאן עֲבִיד לְהוֹן כְּדִין, אָמַר לֵיהּ מָה נְכַפּוֹר מִינֵךְ אַתָּתָא חֵדָא אַתָּתָא טְעִינָא לֵיהּ חֵדָא פִּינֵךְ דְסֻלָּת, וְאַמְרַת לִי הָא לָךְ קָרַיב קְדַמִּיהוֹן, קָרַיבָתָּ לְקְדַמִּיהוֹן הָיָה דִּין אָמַר אָנָּא אֵיכּוֹל קְדַמָּי, וְדִין אָמַר אָנָּא אֵיכּוֹל קְדַמָּי, קָם הָדִין רַבָּה דְהָיָה בִּינִיהוֹן נָסִיב בּוֹקְלָסָא וְתַבְרִינוֹן. אָמַר לֵיהּ מָה אַתָּה מְפַלָּה בִּי, וַיִּדְעִין אִינוֹן. אָמַר לֵיהּ וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ אֲזַנֵּיךְ מָה שְׁפִיד אֹמַר

"And Haran died in the presence of his father Terach." Rabbi Hiyya said: Terach was a manufacturer of idols. He once went away somewhere and left Abraham to sell them in his place. A man came in and wished to buy one. "How old are you?" Abraham asked the man. "Fifty years old," he said. "Woe to such a man, who is fifty years old and would worship a day old object!" Avraham said. On another occasion a woman came in with a plateful of flour and requested him, "Take this and offer it to them." So he took a stick and broke them, and put the stick in the hand of the largest. When his father returned he demanded, "What have you done to them?" "I cannot conceal it from you. A woman came with a plateful of fine meal and requested me to offer it to them. One claimed, 'I must eat first,' while another claimed, 'I must eat first.' Thereupon, the largest arose, took the stick and broke them." "Why do you make sport of me? Have they any knowledge?" Terach said. "Should not your ears hear what your mouth has said?" Avraham said.

Rabbi Sacks (Lessons in Leadership, p. 14-16)

To be a Jew is to be willing to challenge the prevailing consensus when, as so often happens, nations slip into worshipping the old gods....Judaism is a sustained critique of power. That is the conclusion I have reached after a lifetime of studying our sacred texts. It is about how a nation can be formed on the basis of shared commitment and collective responsibility.

[Abraham] was called ha'ivri, "the Hebrew," because "all the world was on one side [b'ever echad] and he was on the other."...Dead fish go with the flow. Live fish swim against the current. So it is with conscience and courage. So it is with the children of Abraham. They are prepared to challenge the idols of the age.

Rabbi Sacks (A Judaism Engaged with the World, p.21)

Abraham's always was the road less traveled. The sages say that he was called ha-lvri, "the Hebrew," because "he was on one side (ever echad) while the rest of the world was on the other." Judaism is a countercultural faith, and Jews have often been iconoclasts, willing to challenge the idols of the age.

Reflection Questions:

1. What "idol" might need to be destroyed in order for you to make progress on your leadership challenge? What does this idol represent to you, to others?
2. Was Abraham's intervention successful? Why or why not? What was provocative about what he did? Can you map it on our provocation scale?
3. Abraham had different provocative experiments for the different customers, and then yet another provocation for his father. What do you make of that?
4. Have you ever challenged/provoked someone you are close to for the sake of a cause you believe in? What happened? What was it like inside of you? What did you learn?

Text Cluster II

Genesis 18:20-33

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' זַעֲקַת סְדֹם וְעֹמֶרָה כִּי-רָבָה וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי כְבֹדָה מְאֹד:

Then God said, "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave!

אֲרֹדֶה-נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה הֲכַצְעֻקְתָּהּ הִבָּאָה אֵלַי עֲשׂוּ | כָּלָה וְאִם-לֹא אֵדְעָה:

I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me; if not, I will take note."

וַיֵּפְנוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיֵּלְכוּ סְדֹמָה וְאַבְרָהָם עֹדֵנּוּ עֹמֵד לִפְנֵי ה':

The agents went on from there to Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before God.

וַיִּגַּשׁ אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הֲאֵפֶה תִסָּפֶה צְדִיק עִם-רָשָׁע:

Abraham came forward and said, "Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty?"

אוּלֵי יֵשׁ חֲמִשִּׁים צְדִיקִים בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר הֲעִיר תִּסָּפֶה וְלֹא-תִשָּׂא לְמָקוֹם לְמַעַן חֲמִשִּׁים הַצְדִּיקִים אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבָּהּ:

What if there should be fifty innocent within the city; will You then wipe out the place and not forgive it for the sake of the innocent fifty who are in it?

חֲלִלָה לָךְ מַעֲשֵׂת | כַּדְּבַר הַזֶּה לְהַמִּית צְדִיק עִם-רָשָׁע וְהִיָּה כַצְדִּיק כְּרָשָׁע חֲלִלָה לָךְ הַשֹּׁפֵט כָּל-הָאָרֶץ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט:

Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?"

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אִם-אֶמְצָא בְּסֹדֶם חֲמִשִּׁים צְדִיקִים בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר וְנִשְׁאַתִּי לְכָל-הַמָּקוֹם בְּעִבּוּרָם:

And God answered, "If I find within the city of Sodom fifty innocent ones, I will forgive the whole place for their sake."

וַיַּעַן אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה-נָא הוֹאֵלֶתִי לְדַבֵּר אֶל-אֲדֹנָי וְאַנֹכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר:

Abraham spoke up, saying, "Here I venture to speak to my lord, I who am but dust and ashes:

Genesis 18:20-33

אוֹלֵי יִחְסְרוּן חַמְשִׁים הַצְדִּיקִים חַמְשָׁה הַתְּשׁוּחִית בַּחֲמִשָּׁה אֶת־כָּל־הָעִיר וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁחִית אֶם־אֶמְצָא שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים וְחַמְשָׁה:

What if the fifty innocent should lack five? Will You destroy the whole city for want of the five?" "I will not destroy if I find forty-five there."

וַיֹּסֶף עוֹד לְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אוֹלֵי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה בַּעֲבוּר הָאַרְבָּעִים:

But he spoke up again, and said, "What if forty should be found there?" "I will not do it, for the sake of the forty."

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיָּהּ יָחִיד לְאֹדְנִי וְאֹדְבָרָה אוֹלֵי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה אֶם־אֶמְצָא שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים:

And he said, "Let not my lord be angry if I go on: What if thirty should be found there?" "I will not do it if I find thirty there."

וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה־נָא הוֹאֲלֹתִי לְדַבֵּר אֵל־אֹדְנִי אוֹלֵי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם עֶשְׂרִים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁחִית בַּעֲבוּר הָעֶשְׂרִים:

And he said, "I venture again to speak to my lord: What if twenty should be found there?" "I will not destroy, for the sake of the twenty."

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיָּהּ יָחִיד לְאֹדְנִי וְאֹדְבָרָה אֶת־הַפֶּעַם אוֹלֵי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם עֶשְׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁחִית בַּעֲבוּר הָעֶשְׂרָה:

And he said, "Let not my lord be angry if I speak but this last time: What if ten should be found there?" "I will not destroy, for the sake of the ten."

וַיֵּלֶךְ הִי כְּאִשֶּׁר כָּלָה לְדַבֵּר אֶל־אַבְרָהָם וַאֲבָרָהָם שָׁב לְמִקְמוֹ:

Having finished speaking to Abraham, God departed; and Abraham returned to his place.

Rabbi Sacks (Faith Lectures: Judaism, Justice and Tragedy, 6 November 2000)

If God had not spoken out loud – that He was going to destroy the cities, that He had heard of the evil from the cities and it was very grievous, and so on – if He had not spoken it out loud in the presence of Abraham, Abraham would never have known! God invites the dialogue. He says it explicitly. "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I am about to do?" In other words, God knew that Abraham would challenge him. He invited him to challenge Him.

The key words in Abraham's challenge to God are tzedek and mishpat. God has given those to Abraham before Abraham has spoken: Abraham, this is what you are all about! Tzedek umishpat. And Abraham takes the cue and immediately says to God – What about the tzedek? What about the mishpat? God teaches Abraham how to challenge God.

Reflection Questions:

1. What do you make of Abraham's tactic in his argument with God? Try to break down his approach - what do you notice? What is provocative? What is surprising? What is effective?
2. Rabbi Sacks notes that God wants Abraham to be provocative - that God is essentially teaching Abraham how to challenge authority, and stand up for justice and righteousness. Have you ever had the feeling, even when you were doing something risky and outside of your comfort zone and normal way of behaving, that your purpose - your vision, or goal - was worth the discomfort and risk? Or, an experience in which you wished you had stood up for something you believed in? Share a story with your partner.
3. The last verse in Chapter 18 is particularly powerful - Abraham "returns to his place." You can interpret this verse literally, and you can also read it metaphorically - Abraham had taken on a role - for the purpose of trying to save human lives in Sodom. That brash way of being - challenging God to God's face! - was not necessarily Abraham's "place," not necessarily his natural character. And yet, he played a provocateur for the sake of what he cared about. Have you ever had the experience of playing a provocative role? What was it like? How did it feel?
4. What is the "place" you can go back to in order to be yourself? Who and what can you surround yourself with to recharge and gain the energy to continue pursuing your leadership work?

INTEGRATION & PRACTICE

Leadership Exercise: Provocative Experiment Chart

Think about your leadership challenge.

How might you try something provocative - how might you play a slightly different role than you have been playing up until now? What do you want to try? Might you experiment with trying something from each of these four quadrants ?

<i>Mild</i>	<i>Medium</i>
• Tell a story • Ask question • Ask someone to self-reflect • Ask people for more than an interpretation • Ask for specification of • a general comment • Encourage deeper diagnosis • Ask how ripe the issue is • Ask someone to make assumptions explicit	• Ask systemic questions • Use unusual metaphor • Use psychodrama to illustrate • Request trial behavior • Use analogy e.g. medical trials • Act as a non-verbal mirror of people's non-verbals • Restrain change • Direct people to go slow • Prescribe symptom
Warm	Hot
• Name default roles • Remove clarity and structure • Reorder agreed priorities • Make strong interpretations • Identify difference between values & behavior • Give hard news and don't protect people • Describe 'elephant in the room' • Invite people to consider their actions as evidence of their intentions • Make conflictual interpretations	• Use paradox • Make purposeful mistakes • Be deliberately inattentive • Refuse to answer a question • Utilize resistance • Call people's attention to irresponsible behavior • Use powerful image/metaphor to illustrate e.g. 'virus'

Michael Johnstone and Maxime Fern (Provocation as Leadership:
 A Roadmap for Adaptation and Change)

Closing Circle

How are you feeling about the idea of leadership involving purposeful, intentional provocation? What is most frightening about it?

TAKE-AWAY EXERCISE

As you continue to try to make progress on your leadership challenge, commit to experimenting with provocative interventions. Who do you think could best tolerate it in the system? Who are you most nervous about provoking? Who can you partner with in your provocative intervention, so that you are more likely to succeed? Keep a "provocation journal" related to your leadership challenge. Think about filling out this chart each time you make a provocative intervention:

WHAT <i>is your purpose?</i> <i>Why do you need to generate provocation?</i>	WHO: <i>Who are you trying to move on an issue?</i>	PROVOCATION: <i>What did you try?</i> <i>How much of a stretch is it for you?</i> <i>How risky is it for you visavis the other person?</i>	EFFECT: <i>What was the effect of your provocation?</i> <i>What happened?</i>

UNIT LESSON SUMMARY:

Leadership requires provocation. By definition, it asks us to stand up to the status quo, to rock the boat, to shake things up, in order to make progress and change.

Being Jewish is about being an Ivri - a Hebrew - who has the courage to take a contrarian stance (lit. on the other side) for the sake of purpose.