

Brett Thomas Interview Notes

Brett Thomas is co-founder of Stagen Leadership Institute, served as Managing Director at Integral Institute's Business and Leadership Center, and is currently writing a book on integral leadership with Russ Volkmann.

- *I have a calling to be involved with integral leadership. I'm excited about the book, and about our work at Stagen—we're getting such great results with our clients as they graduate from our year-long training program and move into our alumni community where they continue to learn.*
- *Leadership affects whatever humans are trying to do, in every sphere of life (businesses, charities, family, community, etc.). If you have effective leadership your results will be more sustainable.*
- *Integral leadership is a container big enough to account for all the styles of leadership that came before it. It balances task and relationship; it takes into account the different worldviews, energies, and motivations people have.*

- *Based on the results we've been getting, it's apparently quite teachable. This is what gives us incredible leverage.*
- *Provocative Idea #1: Integral leadership is Archimedes Lever. (Paraphrased as, "If I had a lever long enough I could move the world.")*
- *For the past 11 years at Stagen, we've been teaching people who aren't necessarily at the latest stages of development (integral). In terms of Bill Torbert's Action Logics stages we teach mostly Achievers, Experts, and Diplomats. If we can teach our style of leadership to leaders at these stages (those not yet "self-authoring" or even "self-transformative"—ref. Robert Kegan), we're looking at one of the highest leverage tools ever invented.*

That sounds like an invitation for people, wherever they are, to step into their leadership—to bring full functionality to whatever their capability is. Integral leadership is accessible to everyone in that way. That's what I hear when you talk about a lever.

- *I'm also excited to see integral leadership emerging in our own integral community. I'm moved by the initiative*

and entrepreneurship I see as our beloved theory is set aside, and we use what we've learned to ask :

1. What's really happening here?
 2. What's most important in this situation (and what's truly needed)?
 3. What's the most helpful action I can take?
- You don't have to be a CEO to be a leader. One view a mentor of mine taught me was "The leader is the one who takes responsibility."
 - Integrally-informed leadership (integral leadership for short) is doing leadership or supporting leaders from an integral perspective—no matter if you're studying, considering/engaging, or fully embodying it.

You have a gift for really translating this idea of integral leadership into a number of core practices. How did these practices come about, and which of them are most critical?

- We have these theories about it, but leadership is application--it's "real world". It arises in doing things, in engagement.

- *Leader Development: You can't learn the complex art of leadership in a 5-day seminar (how most leadership training is done). Rand Stagen and I founded Stagen on the commitment to doing leader development in a way that actually develops leaders.*
- *Development (learning/growth): 2 kinds*
 - 1) *Horizontal ("acquired learning")—adding information and skills to one's existing meaning-making system*
 - 2) *Vertical ("adaptive learning")—growing such that one's meaning-making system becomes more complex.*
- *For vertical development to occur there must be a subject-object move--disidentification from one's previous way of making meaning.*
- *In our experience it's helpful to translate ideas for the modern (orange in Spiral Dynamics terminology) business world, because that's where the power and influence is.*
- *In the Integral Leadership Academy, we use a practice-based approach to teaching leadership. Small groups spend 52 weeks as a practice community learning (through quarterly workshops, teleclasses, individual coaching, and online/email interactions) the 21 main*

practices that have the subject-object move "baked in". The program is designed to have students thinking about these practices every day. (Stats show 80% of what is learned in non-practice-based seminars is lost after 8 weeks.) I see these practices as "Trojan Horses".

- *The best practices are the ones people will USE. Even someone at a beginner level will get immediately better results from doing these practices vs. using conventional approaches.*
- *Example: When we teach the Ladder of Inference, we call it "telling ourselves stories." The key is to learn to discern fact vs. perception/interpretation; even just using the phrase "The story I'm telling myself is..." conveys that one's thinking is not necessarily the absolute "truth".*
- *All these practices have built-in developmental transformative qualities, so long-term these new ways of thinking, communicating, and behaving become internalized and tend to advance development (vertically).*

What are you hoping to share with the conference attendees?

- *Provocative Idea#2: What if there was a "Rosetta Stone of leadership" – an unlocking key for what was previously impossible to decipher?*
- *All previous (non-integral) books on leadership theory were written by people subject to their own worldview. Folks subject to a traditional, modern, or postmodern worldview rarely take into account that not everybody shares that worldview. A person's style, life circumstances, education, age, development, etc. will determine what style of leadership they will respond to. A Rosetta Stone of Leadership would help decipher which style to use when.*
- *4 universal styles of leadership:*
 - 1) *Red – Autocratic leadership (the person with the most power leads by command and control)*
 - 2) *Blue – Authoritarian leadership (the person with the most power leads via chain of command)*

- 3) Orange – Strategic leadership (the person with the most expertise leads with strategic planning and tangible incentives)
- 4) Green – Collaborative (consensus-based, self-managed teams lead themselves)
- If you as an integral leader can discern the predominant sensibilities (worldviews/mindsets) in your followers and you have the versatility to use different leadership styles in different circumstances, the results are astonishing.
 - We teach people these different worldviews as lenses-- literally different colored contact lenses. We teach them how to take off their own natural "home base" (native) contact lenses and see the world through the other colors of lenses. (At Stagen this practice is called Understanding People.) Their exclusive identification with their narrow worldview breaks apart through constantly trying on these different lenses. Practitioners come to know and truly appreciate why those with other worldviews value what they do.
 - The "Trojan Horse" function: People take on these practices in order to motivate people, but they are actually integrating/expanding their own worldview.

One other element of this is that you're actively helping them re-integrate potentially non-integrated previous memes, creating much healthier functioning wherever they are.

- To be integral means to integrate the best of the worldviews and perspectives that you can. If all the positives of each worldview are integrated together, that's a really skillful leader. The message is that you can do integral leadership from wherever you are—just be as integral as possible. And it seems to be working.*

Brett Thomas

Brett Thomas is the co-founder of Stagen, a Texas-based organizational consulting firm that specializes in Integral Leadership. He is the author and architect of the Stagen Leadership Academy's 52-week intensive *Integral Leadership Program* (now in its 10th year). Brett is a 20-year veteran in the field of human performance and organizational development having designed and facilitated hundreds of workshops and corporate training programs. Brett has logged over 10,000 hours coaching CEOs. He has published hundreds of pages of applied integral theory and has co-designed and co-delivered numerous international conferences and seminars on applied integral theory. Brett served many years as the Managing Director of the Integral Institute *Business and Leadership Center* and on the Editorial Board for the *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice*. Brett currently serves on the boards of both *Integral Leadership Review* and *Integral Publishers*. He is writing a book with Russ Volckmann on the subject of Integral Leadership.

Michael McElhenie

Michael McElhenie, Ph.D., has led major humanitarian projects, many for the United Nations, in regions around the globe: Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and the Caribbean. Michael's key area of expertise is helping executives assess the organization's culture, discover optimal mission-alignment and bridge the gap through intentional, integral leadership. He has designed and implemented major leadership, executive coaching, change and learning projects for global and national clients, including American Airlines, Anadarko Petroleum, Berlex Pharmaceuticals, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Exelon Energy, H&R Block, Intel, Johnson & Johnson, Merck, Motorola, Nortel Networks, Progressive Insurance, Sabre, Texas Children's Hospital, Texas Instruments, Unicredito Banca, Unilever, United Nations, Victoria Order of Nurses (Canada), Wal-Mart, World Bank and YMCA. Michael has over twenty years of leadership and consulting experience, and he currently runs Metatropia Institute, a leader development and change management firm out of Dallas, Texas. He is a faculty member for Duke Corporate Education's Global Learning Resource Network, a faculty-coach for Southern Methodist University's Advanced Leadership Program and a member of the Business & Leadership Center for Integral Institute. He is also a Senior Associate for Teleos Leadership Institute and has worked with Teleos since its founding in 2002.