Your Catalyst Starting Point

Catalyst Leadership | John Coné

YOUR CATALYST STARTING POINT

The argument of this book ends with a practical decision: where will you begin? There is a great deal you could do, but you do not need to attempt it all at once.

You could become better at seeing the systems producing today's results. You could search more deliberately for leverage. You could change conditions that inhibit discovery. You could become more intentional about when to Direct, Empower, or Catalyze. You could make learning travel and recombine. You could find and develop more Catalysts.

Catalyst Leadership does not begin with implementing Catalyst Leadership. It begins with the work. So before deciding what to do, you might want to identify where greater catalytic attention would make the greatest difference in your work now.

Where Should You Start?

Consider the six statements below. Don't spend much time debating your answers. Rate each from 1 to 5, where:

1 = Rarely true in my organization or area of responsibility
3 = Sometimes true
5 = Consistently true

1. See the System

When an important problem persists or recurs, we look beyond the immediate event or performer to understand the system producing it.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5

2. Find the Leverage

When confronting a consequential problem or opportunity, we look for places where a focused intervention could produce a disproportionate improvement in both the immediate result and our future capability.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5

3. Change the Conditions

People can access information, cross necessary boundaries, mobilize expertise, exercise appropriate judgment, and experiment within reasonable limits without unnecessary organizational friction.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5

4. Exercise Catalyst Judgment

We deliberately distinguish where to Direct, where to Empower, and where to Catalyze rather than defaulting to the leadership approach most familiar or comfortable to us.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5

5. Make Capability Generative

What we learn from solving important problems travels beyond the people who learned it, combines with knowledge and experience elsewhere, and contributes to new capability.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5

6. Multiply the Catalysts

We recognize and develop people who help others and the system become more capable—and increasingly give them opportunities to catalyze consequential work.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5

Please Don't Add the Scores

This is not a test of whether you are a good Catalyst Leader. There is no single Catalyst Leadership score. The purpose of this brief assessment is to identify where additional attention might have the greatest value.

Your lowest rating deserves attention, but it is not necessarily where you should begin. Ask a second question: Where do I have both a meaningful need and a real opportunity to act now? That intersection—need plus opportunity—is your Catalyst Starting Point. Then begin.

If Your Starting Point Is SEE THE SYSTEM

Monday morning:

1. Pick one recurring problem.
Choose something your organization has supposedly solved before but that keeps returning.

2. Map what is producing it.
Look beyond the people involved. Examine the situation, performers, requirements, consequences, and feedback surrounding the result.

3. Ask the generative question.

What in this system would help us respond if the next version of this problem were one we had never seen before? Do not try to redesign the whole system. See it more clearly first.

If Your Starting Point Is FIND THE LEVERAGE

Monday morning:

1. Choose one consequential problem or opportunity already demanding attention.

2. Ask where a relatively small change could alter what becomes possible.
Look particularly at connections, information flows, decision rights, assumptions, incentives, access, and opportunities to experiment.

3. Ask the second leverage question.

Where could solving this problem also make us more capable of solving unfamiliar problems in the future? You are looking for an ignition point, not another action item.

If Your Starting Point Is CHANGE THE CONDITIONS

Monday morning:

1. Identify one important piece of work where people are struggling to make progress.

2. Ask what prevents intelligent action.
Is the constraint information? Authority? Access? Connection? Permission to experiment? Fear of failure? An inability to make learning travel?

3. Remove one unnecessary constraint.
Don't begin by reorganizing. Change one condition and watch what the system does differently.

If Your Starting Point Is EXERCISE CATALYST JUDGMENT

Monday morning:

1. Pick one decision or problem currently on your agenda.

2. Ask why you are leading it the way you are.
Are you Directing because direction is genuinely required—or because you know the answer? Are you Empowering because the destination is known but others should own the execution? Is there discovery that should remain open?

3. Reconstruct the leadership response.

Where must I Direct? Where should I Empower? Where can I preserve room to Catalyze? Do not choose a leadership style. Construct the leadership response the situation requires.

If Your Starting Point Is MAKE CAPABILITY GENERATIVE

Monday morning:

1. Identify something important a team has learned recently.

Not merely what it accomplished. What did it learn?

2. Ask where else that learning might matter.

Look beyond the obvious recipients.

3. Put that learning into contact with a different problem, experience, discipline, technology, person, or team.
Do not ask them simply to copy what worked. Ask: What becomes possible when what this team learned encounters what another team knows? Help one piece of learning travel, then observe what becomes possible when it recombines.

If Your Starting Point Is MULTIPLY THE CATALYSTS

Monday morning:

1. Think about an unfamiliar problem your organization recently faced.

2. Ask who helped the organization make progress when the answer wasn't obvious.

Not necessarily who solved it. Who connected people? Reframed the issue? Found the leverage? Created an experiment? Made learning travel? Made others more capable?

3. Give one of those people another opportunity to catalyze.

And this time, make your development intention explicit. “I don’t want you simply to solve this. I want you to help the people involved become more capable of solving it—and the next problem we haven’t seen yet.” Then resist the temptation to take over.

Start With One Real Problem

© 2026 John Coné. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to individuals and organizations to download, reproduce, distribute internally, and adapt this resource for their own professional development and internal organizational use, provided that attribution to John Coné and CatalystLeadershipTools.com

CatalystLeadershipTools.com is retained. Commercial resale, commercial redistribution, and incorporation into products or services offered for sale require prior written permission from the copyright holder.