

## How Experienced Leaders Detect and Transcend Their Upper Limits



In this article you will learn how experienced leaders detect and transcend their upper limits.

This perspective is based on experience with thousands of leadership problems and on research from multiple fields including neuroscience, the science of expertise, organizational development, adult development, psychology, improvement science, and more...

An Upper Limit, as described by Gay Hendricks in his book *The Big Leap*, is a ceiling we hit that holds us back from fulfilling our highest potential and helping our teams fulfill theirs. Every leader, including myself, *regularly* runs up against an Upper Limit.

The most common and important Upper Limits are not about Big Things we want to do with strategy, innovation, culture, or finance. They appear in headaches about relational and team cultural issues arising in day-to-day work such as difficulties with problem solving, conflict, feedback, accountability, collaboration, and making decisions.

When we want to detect and transcend our Upper Limits, it is common to look for big headaches or problems to work with but relational and cultural difficulties that are seemingly quite small in scope can actually provide better opportunities for learning and transformation.

Relational and cultural difficulties often seem like frustrating detours from Big Things we want to do,. But, these issues determine how well and how fast we achieve Big Things. How leaders respond to these difficulties in the midst of work is a powerful determinant of levels of psychological safety, motivation, and empowerment---three factors that significantly impact learning, innovation, and performance.

Once we begin to see Upper Limits, we transcend them by first transforming our ways of thinking. Relational and cultural problems are powerful in provoking counterproductive, hard-wired mental habits. By finding the courage to question our own thinking and feelings, we free ourselves to create new habits of mind aligned with our True North, our vision or purpose for the type of relationships and culture we want to create.

Then, with the help of conceptual awareness of a few key principles, leaders can align actions with their True North through taking a series of small steps in a short time frame.

Detecting and transcending our Upper Limits is not an easy practice and, as Gay Hendricks has noted, it is a constant endeavor because “the better we get, the better we want to be.” (1)

*In the endeavor to transcend upper limits, at times, it helps to have someone walk with us for awhile. Clicking on the link below will take you to information about a method I am offering I call Leadership Practice Sprints to take your practice to the next level through four one hour video webinar meetings.*

**[Leadership Practice Sprints](#)**

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## **About Neil Baker M.D.**

Neil Baker M.D. helps strengthen and enhance the impact of individual leaders, leadership teams, and consultants (e.g. quality consultants and improvement advisors) in the midst of work in order to create environments which foster learning, motivation, well-being, and performance.

He is adept at assisting leaders in using any work situation, even the most complex and difficult, as an opportunity to achieve immediate impact on quality of work relationships and on progress toward results. This approach can be applied to any current work but is especially effective in the midst of quality or innovation initiatives.

He has developed these approaches through more than 30 years as an organizational leader, speaker, consultant, and coach. His clients have included the Peterson Center on Healthcare, Health Quality Partners, and the Harvard Medical School Center for Primary Care. He has served as faculty and improvement advisor over 15 years for multiple initiatives for the Institute for Healthcare Improvement in Boston, Massachusetts and was previously Medical Director of Clinical Improvement at Group Health Cooperative (now part of the Kaiser system) in Seattle, Washington.

You can learn more on his website at [neilbakerconsulting.com](http://neilbakerconsulting.com).