



The Crucible in Leadership

CASE STUDY: BART LORANG

CEO of FullContact

In early 2013, Bart Lorang was adapting to being a new husband and the leader of FullContact, a three-year-old contact software startup.

At work, the company leadership was fragmented and reduced to loud arguments.

At home things were unusually tense for Bart.



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Reboot defines these times of concentrated adversity as “crucibles.” They are events that challenge leaders to their core. Leaders going through crucibles will either be consumed by them or, if handled correctly, emerge rejuvenated and refocused because of them.

During the crucible, all it takes is one small event to trigger a desire to change as a leader. For Bart, that event occurred during a snowstorm.

On the morning of the snowstorm, a neighbor and fellow CEO offered to shovel the snow in the Lorang’s driveway. That led to a tiff between Bart and his wife. Bart’s wife Sarah was peeved by the fact that the neighbor demonstrated more concern about the snow accumulating in their driveway than did Bart. The comparison was not lost on Bart though. He too was concerned that “the neighbor is a CEO and has time to shovel the snow, why don’t I have time to do it?”

Later that day, while speaking to Brad Feld, mentor and lead investor in FullContact, Bart confided: “I just don’t think I am nailing this whole CEO and husband thing.” That triggered an inflection point for Bart. He decided he had to become a better leader and family man. Brad suggested he contact Reboot.



“As a CEO, you face new things every day, every week, it’s always different.”

In April 2013 Bart connected with Jerry Colonna, one of the founders of Reboot. At that point FullContact had degenerated into something akin to a soccer team of six-year-olds. Everyone was running around chasing the ball without clearly defined roles or goals. The problem with the six-year-old soccer team model is that it doesn’t use the team’s skills efficiently, nor does it scale well.

In the midst of these challenges within the company, Bart began his one-on-one coaching sessions with Jerry. Initially he found it difficult to be vulnerable or even accessible. His whole identity was tied to the company. For Bart there was no clear line of demarcation between the personal and professional. Even after his initial willingness to start radical self-inquiry and growth within a leadership role, he still found himself stuck in the discomfort of sharing his true struggles.

After one particularly difficult day, Bart finally dropped the bullshit and insincere conversation and vented his true frustration. He cites it as a crucial step in his relationship with Jerry, and with himself. Thanks to the opening that Bart’s sincerity provided, he and Jerry finally had an honest platform to discuss everything from emotional dynamics within the team to tactical issues. Bart remembers the moment when his interaction with Jerry became startlingly real. “One day after a few months I really went deep with (Jerry),” he recalled. “He said something like ‘thank you for finally being real’ or something like that.”

These one-on-one sessions provided “whatever was needed in that moment because as a CEO, you face new things every day, every week, it’s always different,” Bart said.

After 18 months of coaching, Bart expanded his work with Reboot to include the CEO bootcamp, a four day deep dive into the complexity and vulnerability of being a leader, with other entrepreneurs. The bootcamp would turn out to be the cap on his crucible. It offered a reprieve from the non-stop pressure at the company and at home. The strain, brought on by product and funding challenges along with his CEO responsibilities and his new role as father, seemed far less acute.

“It was four days of intense vulnerability. It was a lot of tears, a lot of self-reflection, a lot of realization that I was not alone in the struggle,” he said. He found an entire community open to him through his peers at the bootcamp. They were fellow leaders who experienced the same struggles and who could relate on a level that only leaders can.

Before the bootcamp, “it was everything I could do to keep coming together through all the stuff personally and professionally,” he said. “I came out the other side realizing what kind of leader I needed to be and what kind of company I needed to run.”



Bart realized that his passion was not just helping people make contact, but about deeper human connections

It was here that Bart also discovered his “why” behind FullContact, the startup he founded. He identified what drove him to create a company that develops software that connects people. That “why” was more personal than he had ever imagined.

Growing up as a self-professed computer nerd in Montana, Bart had trouble finding his tribe...his fellow travellers. A strained relationship with his mother forced him to seek connections outside the home. He found some connections, among them his grandmother, a people person.

This desire for connection, Bart realized, carried through to the woman he married. Like his grandmother, Sarah also happened to be excellent at connecting with people. At the CEO bootcamp, Bart realized that his passion was not just about helping people make contact, it was more about deeper human connections. That’s the “why” that drives FullContact, he said. After the bootcamp FullContact adopted “be awesome with people,” as the company motto.



Offsites have had a tremendous impact on the whole leadership team.

Bart acknowledged the need for everyone in the organization to appreciate the groundwork he was laying with radical self-inquiry. The leadership team needed to be involved as well. This is why FullContact's work with Reboot now extends to group coaching, Reboot Circles, and offsites.

In fact, the offsites had a tremendous impact on the whole leadership team, Bart said. Jerry's ability to suss out long-standing underlying tensions, surface them, and teach the team skills to work with such tensions quieted the conflicts that had dominated previous executive meetings. "We found out more about each other in one day with Jerry than probably six months of working side by side," Bart said.

Team members now feel comfortable expressing vulnerability. The company that has "be awesome with people" as a core value put that doctrine into practice with its own people. In a staff or leadership meeting today, the first item on the agenda is a check in. Each employee categorizes where they are on a color scale (red, yellow, green). They identify where their body is, where their soul is, and with this simple exercise they're all reminded how human they are. "We are all just a big bag of chemicals that come to work every day," Bart said. "The operating system that we use has helped us connect as a team, and frankly, helped select people out of the culture that didn't belong."

Removing all the "bullshit" that people normally encounter in day-to-day work relationships has helped immensely with productivity and teamwork. Today, FullContact has more than 250 employees in three countries. It is growing at an incredible pace, more than doubling its revenue every year.



Bart puts some healthy distance between himself and the company's progress or challenges.

The Reboot work generated a huge professional transformation in Bart. "Work is no longer a source of anxiety for me at all," he said. He's been able to uncouple his sense of self from the success of the company. The outcome of the company no longer defines who he is as a human. He's been so effective at detaching himself from company outcomes that his leadership team sometimes questions how seriously he takes its challenges.

Bart's no longer the sort of person to get worked up about the company challenges. He focuses instead on being the calm presence in the room. He turns his attention to painting the fence, building the organization, and, if anything breaks, he takes it as it comes without compromising his sense of self.

Bart's detachment from the company's challenges has touched his life at home in a dramatic and positive way. He's no longer bringing work stress home with him, which leaves more clean energy to devote to Sarah and his son Greyson.

He practices mindfulness each day and evangelizes this methodology at speaking events and in his writing. "I imagine myself broke and homeless (yet) content, and realize I actually have nothing to lose, which allows me to take bigger risks than most entrepreneurs, because I don't really fear failure."

Whether FullContact hits its numbers or not is not a source of anxiety. Bart puts some healthy distance between himself and the company's progress or challenges. The distance plays a critical role in him being an impartial observer in employee issues. He is able to resolve conflicts and understand why people's survival instincts get triggered. From this place of consistency born of this practiced detachment, he can also be a coach for other leaders in the organization.

Meditation has been key to Bart's focus on his people. It allows him to show up as the best leader for his team by remaining a stable presence in the room. "You don't get too high. You don't get too low," he said. Thanks to the meditation practice, he allows emotions, feelings and thoughts to interact, rest, and play out without becoming too involved with them.



Thanks to his own internal work, Bart is able to support team members by asking the right questions.

Reboot's goal is to enable clients to grow to the point where they no longer need the company's services. The aim is to promote a kind of self-coaching so that a longstanding operating system is in place to support employees.

Thanks to his own internal work, Bart is able to support team members by asking the right questions to get to the root of professional issues. Frequently, when we're upset, it's for different reasons than we believe. Bart can now coach employees to help identify the root causes of aggression or fear. Simply naming these emotions can go a long way in helping to address them. In fact, team members are surprised that they can be more vulnerable at work than they can be at home. Imagine a workplace that doesn't export tension to the home, but instead teaches employees about vulnerability. That's a skill that can be key to alleviating problems anywhere.

Bart "graduated" from Reboot last December. He persevered through the crucible and came out the other side to join the "elders." He's incredibly proud.



His goal is to become the most resilient and supportive leader possible for his team.

Bart is in a place where he feels comfortable being his own coach and supporting his executive team as their coach as well, both as an organization builder and as a promoter of vulnerability. What's next? He aims to grow the organization globally based on the core values he discovered through the Reboot CEO bootcamp. Values such as being awesome with people, fully connecting and being an empathetic organization, are now critical to FullContact.

With acquired companies and offices spread across various locations, it can be difficult to keep one cohesive culture, especially one that relies so heavily on human connection. "It's hard," Bart admitted. "A lot of people have to go through a couple of crucibles in their life before they can get there. It's hard to teach without some trigger event. That's why authentic leadership is such a struggle, because you have to go through these crucibles of leadership."

Bart's work moving forward is to promote the skills he has acquired thanks to self-inquiry and help from the Reboot team. His goal is to become the most resilient and supportive leader possible for his team.

