



The Human Dimension

THE LEADER WITHIN

December 2005

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"We help both people and productivity flourish by developing a positive culture of shared leadership."

We find improved performance is the reward for your investing in people.

The emphasis in THE LEADER WITHIN is on the changes and growth we make within ourselves, as leadership is basically a personal growth experience over time.

'For things to change first I must change.'

Your job is not to solve problems

In making a shift from problem solver to collaborator, there are some key distinctions as a manager.

First of all, when a manager operates from the level of solving problems, the focus is on the symptoms of a situation or problem, not the source.

For example, say you have a team member that dreams up a really big goal to create a strategic alliance with a key stakeholder which will help the team achieve an important goal . However the team member charged now with the responsibility to make it happen always seems to find a reason why he can't make that phone call to initiate the alliance. When you discuss this with him, he states that he's been too busy, that there's just "not enough time in the day", that he's disorganized, and on and on.

As manager you might latch on to the person's disorganization and procrastination and assign a time study to solve the problem. After all, that's an obvious place to focus!

And yet even after these efforts the team member still procrastinates, and the goal is still far from attainable. This is because the lack of organization is a symptom, not a cause. In this case the cause, or source, turns out to be the individuals' deeply rooted fear of showing up-having to actually step up and 'be the person' that such an alliance would require.

Problem solving is often more about the managers' need to prove themselves and their value, than it is about serving the individuals in the team.

The desire to package the situation into a nice little box and check it off as done, serves the managers need for completion but often doesn't leave the team member with a real solution. This creates a performance burden for the manager and it removes the true responsibility from the person where it belongs.

Tips and strategies from the concerned manager act as a band-aid. It becomes less and less about the other person, which in turn requires a tremendous amount of energy. Most importantly, it's a huge burden to try so hard which usually means we have fallen into rescuing mode!

We must become the change we want to see in the world. - Mahatma Gandhi

If problem solving is such a burden and collaborating is so powerful, why don't we do it?

Adopting a coaching approach can really help. The big question: "What is REALLY going on here?" becomes a daily challenge for the effective manager.

Why don't people do what they know they need or want to do? Why are the most obvious action steps so hard to take?

Coaching can get to the 'cause' which provide solutions

My experience has been that most people play "just small enough" in life to avoid a hidden truth. They settle into a life that is sheltered and a bit too comfortable. It's like having a covered walkway to your car: sure you never have to worry about getting wet, but you miss the exhilaration of occasionally having to run through the rain.

Here are a few real world examples of what I mean by causing problems:

- The client is inspired to take on a project that would bring about incredible growth and potential financial rewards but it would call forth more creativity from her than she has ever been willing to express
- Not making progress on a project--there is something much more profound that the client wants to do. However, this hidden project comes from a long-held and deep-seated desire buried by a lifetime of disappointment.
- Seeing and facing a blatant but uncomfortable truth about a relationship - the client loves this person, yet knows that staying with him means denying a part of herself or her purpose in life.
- Seeing and facing the truth about a job - The client is comfortable and the money is good enough to pay the bills, but he know that he's only using a small fraction of his talents and gifts

This "causes" a big problem. The focus of coaching becomes all about getting the stuck client out of the familiar pattern of settling for anything less than the full abundance of what life has to offer.

Ultimately, Blind Spots are the Reason Coaching Exists

All the situations above have some common threads. First, there is some truth that is being overlooked, ignored or denied. It has become a blind spot.

Secondly, the situations reveal a fundamental truth about life itself: you can not effectively watch yourself do something.

From a practical point of view, the best way to improve your performance at anything (like playing tennis or running a business) is to have a skilled person watch you, tell you what they see, and then help you improve. If the person is experienced at watching and sharing, they are called a coach.

In our desire to live a fully expressed life, having a coach is very useful because we have blind spots in our perception of ourselves. Most often, we are blind to our own truths and inner conflicts (and our talents and possibilities, too). One of my favourite realizations about being a coach is this: it is a LOT EASIER to see another person's truths, inner conflicts, and talents than it is to see your own!

'Working Around the Truth' Versus 'Handling the Truth'

I often think about that scene from "A Few Good Men" when Jack Nicholson is on the stand in a military courtroom being cross examined by Tom Cruise. Jack is getting angry about the line of questioning and asks intensely, "What do you want from me?" Tom shouts, "I want the truth!" and Jack shouts back, "You can't handle the truth!" It is a powerful moment in film and speaks to our conditioned resistance to seeing and facing the truth about things in our lives.

Why is it so difficult to "handle the truth" for the client and the coach? I love this quote from Author Peter Senge (from the introduction to the book "Synchronicity" by Joe Jaworski):

"Most of us aren't very good at perceiving reality as it is. Most of what we "see" is shaped by our impressions, our history, our baggage, our preconceptions. We can't see people as they really are because we're too busy reacting to our own internal experiences of what they evoke in us, so we rarely actually relate to reality. We mostly relate to internal remembrances of our own history, stimulated and evoked by whatever is externally before us . . .

If we could only see reality more as it is, it would become obvious what we need to do. We wouldn't be acting out of our own histories, or our own needs, or our own purely reactive interpretations. We would see what is needed in the moment. We would do exactly what's required of us, right now, right here. This is . . . living one's life by "participating in the unfolding". You can't do that unless you can actually see what is right before you."

Call to Action:

There can be any number of big problems that show up. With the right perspective and an environment of openness, it is possible to pinpoint exactly what the problem is. As a coach our ability to help the client handle the truth is only limited by our own ability to face the truths of our own life.

The big question is: when you find the truth, what do you do with it? Good question. Just let it sit there for a while and see what the basic awareness will create.

However, if you want to work on the truth, examining a person's conditioning is a powerful access point. The pervasive tendency to avoid seeing reality and the limited ability to respond to the moment is caused by conditioning from the past. Conditioning leads to limiting beliefs and restrictive patterns of thought. *Thomas Leonard called these patterns of thought "the core dynamics of common problems".

While traditional coaching practice includes sticking to the present and the future, our coaching approach involves exploring conditioning and its effects.

While traditional coaching dealt with action plans and accountability structures to try to work around the truth, our approach ensures the results are more sustainable and the responsibility is where it ought to be - with the client.

*Some of these ideas in this newsletter are taken from an article written by Thomas Leonard - a pioneer in the coaching movement.

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