

## INTRODUCTION TO MASTERFUL COACHING

By Robert Hargrove

“Coaching is hot!” I wrote to start off the first edition of *Masterful Coaching* in 1995. It still is. Companies such as GE, Ford, ConocoPhillips and others are exploring it. Decision makers in the US, Europe, and Asia are creating powerful partnerships with executive coaches so as to become extraordinary leaders who create an extraordinary future for their organizations. Leaders at every level are recognizing that they can leverage their personal success in accomplishment by coaching others to be successful at accomplishment.

There is a Coaching University, flight schools and boot camps are popping up and there are least a dozen books on the subject. Yet for all this interest, there is no commonly held answer to the question, “What is coaching?” No coaching “method” that is widely accepted and applied by leaders and managers. No real professional standards for practitioners. The Website of a coaching collaborative I visited offered the same coaches for executives as they did for marriage counseling.

The intent of my company, Masterful Coaching Inc., is to provide what’s missing that will make a difference in this exploding field. This book is written with the practitioner in mind (whereas the *Masterful Coaching Fieldbook* that I wrote a few years ago is written from the leader’s and manager’s point of view). Yet the guiding ideas, methods, and tools found in here can apply to any individual who is committed to causing other people’s success. I therefore encourage you,

whatever your vantage point, to read the book extrapolatively, to look for the golden nugget, and run with it.

One thing is certain, Masterful Coaching, as I will write about it here, is a powerful, profound, new domain and it needs to be distinct. It is different from abstract training programs, which provide lots of information but have little impact on people's leadership ability. It is different from traditional "consulting," which provides reports and recommendations—most of which never get implemented. And it is distinct from the "coaching" and "counseling" done in companies on a remedial basis, which as often as not leave people feeling diminished.

## **WELCOME TO THE REVOLUTION!**

This book is a call to arms. It is an invitation to the future. It is a cause. Join in, and welcome!

I would like to begin with a declaration: *Masterful Coaching is an idea whose time has come*. In the coming decades, decision makers will recognize that, if you are a leader, you are first and foremost a coach and teacher. Furthermore, coaching will displace traditional consulting and training.

In addition to this declaration, I would like to make four assertions.

- I assert that Masterful Coaching is based on inspiring people to realize an Impossible Future they can passionately engage in, it is not a remedial activity.
- I assert that Masterful Coaching involves personal and organizational reinvention. It is transformational as opposed to transactional.

- I assert that Masterful Coaching, the Method™ that you will find in this book provides a powerful, repeatable technology for producing breakthroughs for people and breakthrough results.
- Finally, a Masterful Coach is an extraordinary human being who combines wisdom, compassion, and a sense of humor with a proven track record of accomplishment.

## **MASTERFUL COACHING IS THE FUTURE OF COACHING**

My purpose in writing *Masterful Coaching* and revising and expanding its second edition is to sound the tone — to say, “This is the future of coaching.” The new paradigm of coaching that we will introduce here rests on the notion that coaching is about expanding people’s capacity to create an extraordinary future, that it involves personal and organizational reinvention, and that it takes place in the domain of accomplishment, not psychology.

I say that this is the future of coaching because the new paradigm I intend to establish through Masterful Coaching is such world apart from the prevailing paradigm of coaching today—based on performance appraisals, remedial counseling, and therapy, all of which occur behind a locked door—that it is almost unrecognizable.

A Masterful Coach is “a listening” for people’s *greatness*, for bringing out the best in people, rather than being a listening for people’s pettiness. A Masterful Coach is grounded in expanding people’s capacity to achieve what

they need to achieve, not therapy. A Masterful Coach's legacy is not only *breakthrough results*, but also *breakthroughs for people*.

Victor Hugo said that there is nothing as powerful as an idea whose time has come. When you sound the tone for an idea whose time has come, three things happen. Some people come to the tone and become proponents, others are indifferent to the tone and become bystanders, and others are detractors who are often eventually crushed by the tone. It is often my experience when I speak to people about coaching in organizations that, while they respond positively to the idea, they often try to reinterpret what I am saying by falling back into the prevailing paradigm.

I have found that there was an old conversation about coaching — or a “negative listening” — that makes it difficult for people to hear the tone I am sounding. People would listen to my message intently, while a background conversation was going on in their heads consistent with the old conversation or paradigm. “Boy, maybe this is a cure for the CEO's or VP's attitude problem,” or “The last time I got what my boss called coaching, I walked out of the room devastated,” or “ I don't have the time to coach.”

These and other background conversations are based on a network of beliefs and assumptions I was to eventually label “The Four Myths of Coaching.” I saw that these Four Myths were directly responsible for the fact that, in most organizations, there is little or no cultural clearing for coaching to show up at all. In fact, eighty-five percent of the 5000 managers I surveyed said they received “little” or “no coaching,” and when they did, it was “a negative experience.”

## **EXPLODING THE MYTHS**

It seemed that the first step in creating a cultural clearing that allowed for and pulled for coaching in organizations was to inaugurate a new conversation about coaching and break the grip of the old conversation. What was needed was a new conversation about coaching that would stimulate new ideas, fresh views, and perspectives. I undertook this work in writing the *Masterful Coaching Fieldbook*.

I was generously afforded the opportunity to carry the work of creating a new conversation about coaching forward with companies like Philips Electronics, Motorola, and especially with Conoco, an innovative energy company in Houston, Texas. This work involved bringing the old background conversations to the foreground, so people could acknowledge them and move beyond them. Generating a new conversation about coaching involved teaching managers to begin to recognize and disperse the Four Myths.

### **MYTH 1. Coaching is a last gasp effort for washouts.**

I was giving a seminar on Masterful Coaching in which after the first day, one of the VP's came up to me and said, "I have been sitting here all day wondering why I resist coaching so much." This was both coaching from his boss and the Masterful Coaches that were working in his organization. He continued,

“I now realize that I am not going for an impossible future, but rather a predictable future, and for that I don’t need a coach.” Then he continued, “Coaching has always been suggested to me as a kind of punishment or disciplinary action because I don’t listen very well. I now want to create an inspiring impossible future and for that I will need coaching.”

**REALITY: Coaching is for winners who seek an edge or advantage.**

After every Masterful Coaching seminar, I offer a free coaching session to every participant. Interestingly enough, I am usually only approached by the “winners,” people with top positions (or top potential) and the highest personal and organizational aspirations. These are also people with very strong wills, who, at the same time, have a basic attitude of humility, curiosity, and learning. My observation is that these people seek an edge or advantage in reaching their goals and sense that coaching can give it to them.

**MYTH 2. Coaching is about identifying and filling GAPS.**

Like dissecting a frog to find out the secret of life, most leadership and management development programs tend to dissect leaders to find out the secret of their art. First the corporate university comes up with a list of ten leadership characteristics (with five dimensions for each trait). Next comes the obligatory round of computerized 360-degree feedback, followed by a list of strengths and

gaps. Finally comes the “push” approach to coaching and training which is designed to fill these gaps. This psychological, mechanistic approach is based on a fundamental misconception of how leaders actually develop.

**REALITY: Coaching is about creating futures, not just filling gaps.**

One of the most powerful realizations I have made with Masterful Coaching Inc. is that, when leaders declare an ambitious aspiration for themselves and their organization, it creates the pull for coaching. It does this all the more so when the ambitious aspiration is coupled to a desire for accomplishment and a basic attitude of curiosity, humility, and learning. Thus, all of our coaching starts with asking the question, “What is an inspiring Impossible Future you can passionately engage in?” Next we ask, “Who do you need to be in the matter?” In other words, “Where is the gap?” It is my experience that *winner*s love living in the gaps, whereas *loser*s love to pretend they don’t exist.

**MYTH 3. Coaching is about development for individuals.**

In most companies, performance and development are seen as entirely separate domains. It is usually the manager’s job to deal with performance, HR’s or the corporate university’s job to deal with development. As a result, most managers tend to do a totally inadequate job of developing their direct reports. Worse, they also tend to do a totally inadequate job of managing performance. This

is because they tend to manage by objectives and to see coaching as interfering. The motto is: “Here’s the goal, come back and see me at the end of the year when you have the results” Finally, when coaching does occur, it is seen as focused on the individual, not the team.

**REALITY: Coaching integrates performance and development with people in groups.**

Years ago, as CEO of an entrepreneurial organization, I had to develop leaders rapidly to head up far-flung new business centers. First, I tried the prevailing paradigm of “Transactional Learning”—enrolling leadership candidates in leadership training, 101 tips and techniques. This had little impact on people’s actual leadership ability. I then tried “Transformational Learning.” The leaders were given a stretch assignment in a new center—an extraordinary result they needed to produce in 90 days, along with a Masterful Coach. To get the results, people would have to fundamentally shift attitudes and behaviors. Bam! It worked.

**MYTH 4. Coaching is an isolated “event” that happens at the yearly performance appraisal.**

Richard Severance, a Conoco leader, told me that until he participated in the Masterful Coaching course, he always considered coaching as something

with a “little c.” In other words, coaching and feedback was a kind of isolated event that happened one to two times a year during the annual goal setting and performance appraisal. What he realized after taking the course was that coaching was actually a “big C” word. If you are a leader, you are a coach and teacher. I have discovered through research that the best leaders in the world spend 40 to 50 percent of their time coaching and teaching people in groups to produce personal and business breakthroughs.

**REALITY: Coaching is a continuous, but not continual process.**

We have discovered in providing Masterful Coaching for executives that it takes a year or more to impact an individual or to bring about fundamental change in an organization. Coaching on this basis is not an obligatory appraisal, but a powerful partnership in which the coach empowers people to accomplish what they need to accomplish. This does not just involve an isolated conversation, but rather a network of conversations in which the coach and coachee are constantly engaging in such questions as, “What happened? What’s missing? What’s next?”

**MASTERFUL COACHING, THE METHOD™**

After writing the first edition of *Masterful Coaching* in 1995, I began doing Masterful Coaching seminars in Global 1000 type corporations, a three day

program designed to shift the mindset about what coaching is and to build coaching skills and attitudes. I would introduce people to the “Four Myths of Coaching” as a way to create a new cultural clearing that would support coaching. This led to many executive coaching assignments for Masterful Coaching Inc, which in turn significantly contributed to my stock of knowledge regarding the “what” and “how” of individual and team coaching. Some of this was captured in the *Masterful Coaching Fieldbook*, and it evolved into what I call Masterful Coaching--*the Method*<sup>tm</sup>.

Following the publication of the *Fieldbook*, I began receiving many requests from both top executives/managers and coaching practitioners who were committed to becoming Masterful Coaches and wanted more specifics than the first two books offered in terms of guiding ideas, methods, and techniques for catalyzing breakthroughs for people and breakthroughs in results. The intent of this new edition of *Masterful Coaching* then is to take a quantum leap forward in terms of *Masterful Coaching, the Method*<sup>TM</sup>.

### **Mental Models for Being a Coach**

*Masterful coaches make sure the model is the servant, not the master.*

This book will make it clear that the starting point for Masterful Coaching is a powerful partnership with the person or group being coached, which is based on an emotional commitment to who people are and what they are up to in life. Commitment unlocks the wisdom, intuition, and natural knowing needed to coach

people effectively in any situation. Without commitment, what one is left with is a bottomless quagmire of technique. At the same time, it is helpful to have a mental map or coaching model. As with any model, the model should be the servant, not the master.

The coaching model most frequently used is the “doctor/expert” model. This model is useful when people need a quick fix. For example, when they are upset or want a remedy for an attitude or behavior problem or need an answer to an immediate issue or problem. There are certain problems with this model. The doctor/expert model often does not do enough to get the patient involved in the learning process necessary to eliminate the problem or create a remedy. For example, a “patient” might not accept the “doctor’s” diagnoses. Also, the expert may bring solutions that the patient doesn’t or can’t apply.

The “guru/catalyst model” is useful when people are seeking to create a powerful new future that requires personal and organizational reinvention. The coach as guru or catalyst must have a strong intention to get inside the person through inspiration, a teachable point of view, and provocation so as to initiate the desire to learn and change. We have discovered in our research a three-step process for promoting transformation.

- *Step 1. Unfreeze.* The “heat” of the guru or catalyst can help the “initiate” surface and call into question underlying thinking patterns or practices that get him or her into trouble.

- *Step 2. Change.* The coach (guru/catalyst) provides guiding ideas with the intent of helping people make a fundamental shift in their thinking and practices.
- *Step 3. Refreeze.* This involves making the new ways of thinking or practices smooth and automatic through practice and study.

Teaching, coaching, and training all too often translate to transferring knowledge from one person's head to another's. Fred Kofman of MIT suggests that a "learning enzyme" is a more appropriate metaphor, especially where reaching high-performance goals requires creating new knowledge or building new skills. The coach and coachee co-mingle and generate a new learning system between them that allows both to learn in the context of getting the job done.

The coach is asking, "How can I help?" The coachee is asking, "How do I get unstuck?" Instead of giving people the answers or directly instigating change, the learning enzyme usually provides ideas, tools, and methods of inquiry with the intent of helping people expand their own capacity to learn. The drawback of this approach is that it can lack the heat of the guru or be too coolly intellectual to cause people to make a shift.

Whether it is the doctor/expert, the guru/catalyst, or the learning enzyme, a Masterful Coach has the flexibility and insight to take on the model that will be most useful to the coachee and the situation at hand.

## **Masterful Coaching in Three Parts**

The book will have three parts:

- I. Transforming Individuals
- II. Transforming Groups, and
- III. The Secrets of Masterful Coaches

The first part deals with declaring an Impossible Future, and stepping into the reinvention paradigm, starting with who you are as a leader.

Part II deals with Reinventing the Organization. It takes you beyond creating a plain vanilla vision statement and shows you how to coach people to create a powerful context that becomes the vision, climate, spirit of the company.

Part III deals with key secrets of masterful coaches and gives you the inside scoop on what Masterful Coaches do to impact people and the way they think and work together.

### **In Coaching Individuals or Groups in Organizations, You Eventually Reach a Crossroads**

Masterful Coaching involves unleashing the human spirit into action, setting ambitious goals and aspirations, and then acting as your coachees' thinking partner to create new openings for possibility and action that were previously unknown to them. I want to emphasize that this work is about

significant accomplishment, and is not remedial. It is transformational, not transactional, in nature.

Once you step into this context, you enter the zone of Masterful Coaching. From then on the journey to Masterful Coaching is a matter of practice and study. This involves taking the guiding ideas, tools, and methods you learn and applying them to coaching real people in real situations. It is also a matter of finding a Masterful Coach yourself who has the necessary wherewithal to accelerate your progress on the journey.

#### **IN CLOSING...**

I very much enjoy hearing from people who have read my books, and I promise to respond to you. I would not only appreciate your comments on the book but learning about how you applied it on your own journey to Masterful Coaching. My email address is **Robert.Hargrove@MasterfulCoaching.com**.