

At Work

STORIES OF TOMORROW'S WORKPLACE

Linking Organizational Goals to People's Passions

Robert Hargrove

Today organizations must reach breakthrough goals, collaborate across traditional organizational boundaries, and learn faster than the competition. This requires managers who can help people learn powerful lessons in personal change as well as dramatically improve the way they think and interact together. Many companies are beginning to recognize this need for coaching. This shows up in the basic vocabulary they use. At AT&T, for example, the word "manager" is being replaced by the word "coach." The same is true in parts of IBM, GTE, and Fidelity Investments. At the same time, many functional roles are being reframed in terms of coaching.

The Gift of Your Presence

To be effective, a coach must draw his or her identity from being a steward. This means moving beyond a "command and control" model of management and the use of extrinsic motivators to an "internal commitment" model based on intrinsic motivators. The coach must link company goals to what people passionately care about.

A coach defines tasks in collaborative ways and manages relationships. Unlike coaching in sports, which fo-

cuses on physical activities, coaching in business focuses on cognitive skills such as breakthrough thinking, the capacity to foster real dialogue, and having an appreciation for the systemic consequences of people's actions.

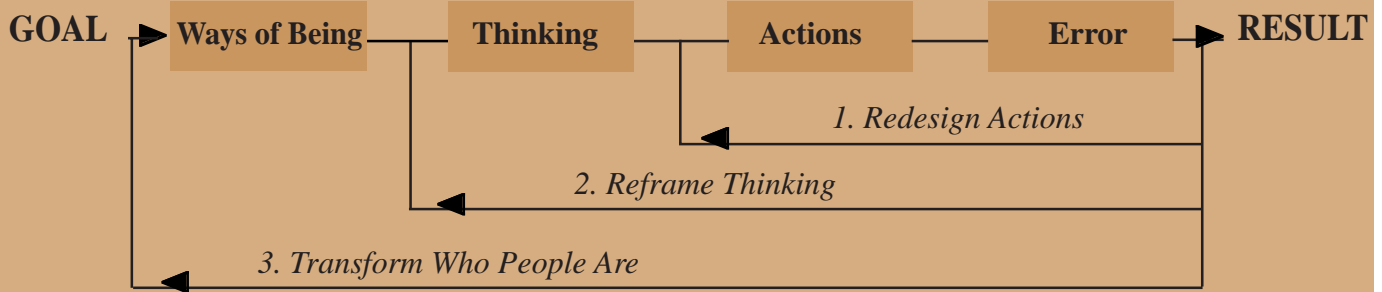
In day-in, day-out terms, coaching starts with giving people the gift of your presence. It means challenging and supporting people in ways that expand their capacities to produce the results they truly desire. This means helping people notice where there is a mismatch between their intended goals and their thinking and behavior, which, if uncorrected, might lead to unanticipated results. Often it's necessary to break the grip of deep-seated beliefs and assumptions of which people are unaware. Learning occurs

when people eliminate the mismatch and produce the results they intend.

Learning Strategies

There are basically three learning strategies a coach can employ [see figure on next page]. The first, triple-loop learning, involves personal transformation: people alter the paradigmatic images from which they draw their identity—for example, from boss to enabler, knower to

Coaching has helped individuals and groups at Adidas and a drug development firm to look in the mirror, alter their behavior, and achieve dramatic business breakthroughs.



Single-Loop, Double-Loop, and Triple-Loop Learning

learner, individual performer to team player.

Double-loop learning occurs when people alter their mental models and standard practices. A business coach in a high-tech company, for instance, might help a design team see a way to connect home computers, faxes, and printers without a tangle of messy wires. In single-loop learning people learn how to perform the same task better.

Breakthroughs in Individual Effectiveness

Organizational transformation is not possible in the absence of personal transformation. I have found the following simple model of transformative coaching a way to help individuals—senior executives, project leaders, high-potential employees—to look in the mirror and seek to alter their behavior:

1. Show people where business goals are not being achieved, and unintended results are being produced.
2. Connect the unintended results to people's thinking and behavior to induce an atmosphere of reflection and learning.
3. Push people to expose and question the old "frames" that shape their thinking and behavior.
4. Provide new frames of reference and practices that allow people to alter their thinking and behavior.
5. Generate a conversation for action.

A Company Chairman

In 1993 I was called by Rene Jaeggi, the youthful chairman of Adidas: "I need to shift this corporate culture and produce breakthrough results in some key areas." At this time Adidas was getting demolished by Nike and Reebok. Though a brilliant strategic thinker and charismatic executive, Jaeggi had a tendency to get upset and blame others when things went wrong.

I told him that the first step in turning an organization around usually involves the leader taking responsibility for seeing how he or she is contributing to the organization's problems. In coaching Jaeggi, I discovered he was aware of the unintended results being produced—but completely unaware of how his way of being, thinking, and behavior contributed to them. The next step involved gathering feedback about the complexity of the situation the company was facing.

Interestingly enough, the issue most on people's minds was their relationship to the chairman. He had the power to sweep people up and, in the words of one manager, "pull me across the table with his enthusiasm." Once Jaeggi got people on his side, he then tended to act in ways that made them feel ignored or abandoned: not return phone calls, shuffle through papers during presentations, arbitrarily withdraw backing for key projects. This was leading to organizational malaise, lack of follow-through, and unintended results.

I presented feedback from Jaeggi's team to him, using specific examples. I then asked him to reflect on the beliefs and assumptions that caused him to act in ways that made people feel abandoned. He began to look in the mirror and, in his own words, "saw something ugly." He said, "I want everyone to like me, so I can be very charming, even to people I don't like. I also sometimes sign off on my managers' ideas and proposals because I don't want to get in big fights with them. Then, later, I have second thoughts. This cold splash of water tells me I can be very self centered and kind of drop people once they are out of my presence. I realize that for our organization to succeed, I not only need to build relationships with people for a day but also over months and years."

Once Jaeggi had the impetus to change, caused by his soul searching, he participated over the next year or

so in weekly coaching sessions—conversations on the phone or in person that used the issues of the day, week, or month as fodder for his growth and development. Soon he was able to balance his charismatic qualities with follow-through and building collaborative relationships with key staffers. People in the organization began commenting, “Rene has really changed. He’s not the same man. I don’t know what you did to him, but could you do it to my boss?”

The Executive Vice Presidents & Division Managers

Jaeggi asked me to help the executive committee of Adidas get aligned around shared goals—which at the time involved achieving breakthroughs in brand awareness, new product development and sales, and delivery times of footwear and textiles. The executive vice presidents (EVPs) who formed this committee then asked me to coach them on how to coach their division managers in order to help them realize these goals.

Because top executives tend to be very diplomatic, I spent a lot of time emphasizing that coaching requires authentic communication. The breakthrough for the executives came when they saw that people develop a much stronger capacity for self reflection when they set goals based on creating what they passionately care about. Authentic feedback under such circumstances will not demotivate individuals.

The executives met with each of their division managers for their yearly review. The purpose of the session was less to appraise past performance and attitudes than to move the company forward in a dramatic way. Each EVP was to act as a conversation partner in a dialogue that would enhance results and learning, and bring into the conversation topics not ordinarily discussed:

Who do you aspire to be as a person?

What issues in your personal or professional life do you care about passionately?

What really matters to you in this organization?

Many learned that people felt schizophrenic—that their goals were based on external motivation (what the boss told them) and fulfilled through various carrots and sticks. They also found that it was hard for people to bring the things they cared about in their personal lives to the office.

The purpose of these dialogue sessions was to help people set company goals that were in alignment with their personal goals and aspirations, and thus allow them to bring their whole selves to work. Gary, an ex-Olympic

athlete, for example, said his #1 goal in life was to achieve the impossible and be on a winning team where there were meaningful relationships. “How can you find that at Adidas?” his boss asked. Gary responded with “We have to get our delivery times down, and we have to start acting more like a real team, or a community, to do that.”

To facilitate the coaching process I asked each EVP to pose the following questions in their sessions with division managers:

What breakthrough goal at Adidas could you be passionately engaged in?

How do you have to be different in order to realize that goal?

What is your thinking now with respect to realizing this goal? How does your thinking need to change? What do you need to learn?

What are some fundamentally different things you need to do in order to realize the goal?

Following the initial coaching sessions, each EVP spoke with their division manager on a weekly basis, asking the following questions:

What has happened since our last conversation with respect to goals, plans, key actions? When people go for a breakthrough goal, breakdowns are likely to happen. These can take the form of objectives being missed, fouls-ups, people getting discouraged.

What is missing that could make a difference? Instead of focusing on what has gone wrong, the aim is to help people define their reality in a way that is more accurate, insightful, and empowering, as well help them come up with new ideas.

What’s next? This question can generate bold promises or requests or specific action plans.

By the end of the next year, Adidas had achieved some extraordinary breakthrough goals: a new brand-position strategy, called “Adidas Equipment” (highly successful), a 30 percent increase of on-time deliveries of both footwear and textiles, and turnaround of the U.S. division of the company, which had been losing money.

Breakthroughs in Group Collaboration

In today’s organizations, the ability to coach people to collaborate and communicate more effectively in groups is increasingly important. Despite all of the work that has been done in getting people out of their functional silos to work on teams, the real barriers to successful teamwork—the barriers in people’s heads—of-

ten remain.

A group learns through its individual members, but individuals often behave in ways that prevent learning. For example, people may say that they embrace the shared goals of the group, yet in actual practice pursue their own hidden agenda. Or individuals may unilaterally advocate their points of view without listening to each other, resulting in a team that suffers from blocked mental models. Or people may suppress disagreement, conceal emotions, or even cover-up mistakes in order to avoid embarrassment or threat. Group members may be aware of these defensive behavior patterns but protect themselves and others by remaining silent.

Coaching is a way to generate conversations that expand the capacity of people to think and work together. There are three key elements to this work: First, ask if people have a shared “understood” goal that says what they want to create together. If they do, then ask for the purpose of the conversation. Second, show that honestly expressing disagreements is actually a leverage point for generating dialogue that leads to a shared mental model. Third, transform defensiveness into learning by asking people in the group to discuss the way each personally contributes to organizational defensive routines.

Biotech Drug Development

Genetics Laboratories was in the process of developing several new drugs and needed to get to market before the competition. Biotech drug development projects usually require a breakthrough, not only in science but also in collaboration and teamwork. The typical project is highly complex and involves more than 10 teams that must work together under stressful conditions caused by competitive pressures, FDA regulations, and family responsibilities.

BMG, an executive team, led the development process. Its members shared a common vision but were not in alignment about how to reach it. Bill Jones, in charge of research, wanted to spend more time coming up with “more, better, different” applications for the drugs being developed. Ed Civitch, world class molecular biologist in charge of drug development, wanted to get the drugs to market as fast as possible and was willing to find his way around certain bureaucratic procedures dictated by the FDA in order to do so. Ron Harley, in charge of quality assurance and manufacturing, tended to be very rule bound and did not agree with Civitch’s approach.

I brought the group together for an alignment ses-

sion and first engaged people in some community building exercises to reestablish an atmosphere of cooperation, communication, and trust. When we turned to the issue of getting to market fast versus adhering to FDA guidelines, it was clear that people were reluctant to say to one another—either personally or in a public forum—how strongly they were in disagreement. They tended to smooth everything over, easing into tough discussions with syrupy politeness and sending mixed messages that made every thing seem okay, though it was not. “We were terribly afraid of a blow-up,” one of the participants remarked later.

In the spirit of clearing the air and creating real alignment, people began to say things that otherwise would have been difficult to say.

They all said much the same thing concerning what the group had to do: they needed to construct a shared mental model of how to achieve these goals. I shared my experience that lack of alignment was often the result of people not agreeing on what important words mean, and devoted the first phase of the next session to reaching a shared understanding of words such as leadership, speed, quality, teamwork. This discussion raised a lot of practical issues: Who’s in charge? How many tests should we do on a new drug? What does the FDA really require?

The second phase of Session Two was devoted to trying to expose some of the undiscussable issues. This involved doing the “left-hand column exercise”: People were asked to take a piece of paper and fold it in half. On the right side, they were to put all the things they were willing to say at the meeting so far. On the left side they were to write all the things they were thinking but not saying.

After discussing how expressing disagreement is needed for authentic dialogue as well as shared understanding, I encouraged participants to say what they could say from their left hand column in a way that would not be damaging to their relationships. At first, comments were cool, measured, and reasonable. But soon the pot began to boil over. In the spirit of clearing the air and creating real alignment, people began to say things that otherwise would have been difficult to say: “Your approach will never work, just take it from me.” “I don’t

think you care about quality at all.” “I think you are completely rule bound.” Whenever judgments were made, I asked for concrete examples. This helped people to see how arbitrary their judgments really were. The results were positive: people developed a stronger sense of their shared goals and also a shared approach to reaching them.

The executive team then asked me to work with the Coordinating Group, which coordinated the activities of the different drug development projects and their various task forces. This group was a link between BMG and 35 or so teams. I held another session of “collaborative conversations,” this time with a different twist. After spending a day and a half on specific issues the group was facing, I spent another day and a half coaching the members of the Coordinating Group on how to facilitate collaborative conversations among the various task forces.

Over the next six months or so, they facilitated hundreds of meetings using the following principles:

1. Establish the purpose of the collaborative conversation.
2. Gather divergent views and perspectives, asking people to give up the need to be in agreement.
3. Suspend opinions and assumptions in order to build shared understanding.
4. Play with the different views and perspectives in order to create something that never existed before.
5. Generate a conversation for action.

The results were dramatic: the drugs moved to market faster, quality standards and FDA regulations were met, and people were able to discuss controversial issues without the fear of a blow-up or of seriously damaging their relationships.

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