

The State of Executive Coaching

Where is your business going in the 21st century? If you aren't identifying "new problems," then you might be in trouble. New problems are *good*, because it usually means you are growing (and if you are not growing, you may be blind to new growth *opportunities*).

Inspirational capitalist Howard Bloom is persuasive in his arguments that we are all participating in an "evolutionary search engine," where businesses are constantly seeking novelty and the creation of "scaffolds of habit" to overcome these new problems. Such "scaffolding" is how things evolve in the universe (and in your business). Is it possible that we are all on such a grand, universal journey, a human expedition of creativity and progress? Maybe. But no matter the context, we get frustrated when we cannot meet and overcome these new problems. In fact, identifying the *correct* problem when dealing with an issue is, according to Einstein, the single most important task we all face. This paper is intended to help you think about such "good problems" in new ways.

We live in interesting times. "Change" once meant "instability," but now we are told it means "success." Business leaders are told that to succeed, they must be *transformational leaders*, and they must lead a *learning organization*. Managers are to become *change managers*, no longer merely maintaining steady growth. Furthermore, they must remain open to implementing the leader's often-competing strategies for change. Front-line employees are told to be *self-starting, self-motivating, and self-directing knowledge-workers*. Welcome to the 21st century economy.

How Much Money Are You Losing?

\$49 billion. That's how much U.S. companies spent in 2010 to keep up with the demands for change in the information economy. It represents an average of 4,538 training hours for large companies; it includes a trainer payroll of over \$27 billion. The goal of all this spending is to effectively lead change. Sadly, an *optimistic* estimate is that 15% of this knowledge will transfer to the job at hand. Inefficiencies in training & development result in a lack of "stickiness" that might be costing your organization money. But there are ways to overcome this problem. (O'Leonard, 2011; Bunch, 2007)

Embedded within this training budget is the budget for "professional development." We have grown accustomed to "Training & Development" as a term. In fact, we now treat these two things as if they were the same. However, training and development are fundamentally different. Both are important for leading change efforts and remaining competitive in the 21st century; but "development" is less understood *and more important* for maintaining change.

Development, particularly when it comes to succession planning, has been "measured" by consensus, and achieved through leadership advocacy. It has become like Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart's infamous test for pornography – we may not be able to define how someone possesses qualities for succession, but "we know it when we see it." This lack of actual *measurement*, following Peter Drucker's maxim, makes executive development nearly impossible to *manage*. Therefore, "training & development" have been fused together in our hearts and minds – because training *can* be measured (with tests of memory). But the same measures for success with "training" can never tell us if "development" has occurred. Only developmentally based learning programs can **link professional development goals to organizational change efforts, making them "sticky."**

We Teach *Technical* Information but Expect *Adaptive* Change

Too many organizations are caught in a double-bind of their own creation, because they have confused "Training & Development." These are two distinct processes. You cannot "train" and then expect "development." This is how many otherwise good coaching

programs end up offering only temporary victories. Like much of corporate training, they are not *sticky*. If you want development you must develop, not train.

Development is a qualitative increase in one's capacities for work, relationships, and self-appraisal. I follow Drucker when noting that for something to be managed, it must be measurable. "Professional Development" has been accepted as something that is both necessary *and* unmanageable. How do we measure when someone starts to listen more, can begin to multi-task, or becomes a fearless decision maker? Can you describe how a colleague found their voice, became their own best advocate, or expressed themselves with greater self-esteem? The process of achieving these common goals was once thought of as unknowable, and yet such changes are so significant that we also never fail to take notice – in deep approval – when a colleague behaves with more quality.

Does it all come down to behavior? Sort of – behavior is the first and last marker of change. Most people know, however, that thoughts and feelings are the source of all behavior. Yet most executive coaching methods tend to focus on *either* thoughts *or* feelings as the main source of behavior. Such linear approaches to coaching should remain in the 20th century (even "holistic" versions that claim balance often place thoughts secondary to feelings). Only an integrated approach, one that does not privilege thoughts or feelings, can fulfill the call to elicit and sustain positive change.

And when those new behaviors manifest, when the new thoughts and feelings have been integrated, they do so from a new *Mindset*. Every new *Mindset* brings with it a wealth of capacities that are not available beforehand. Professional development is something that happens when we go beyond training. It happens when someone helps us grow *despite* our attachments to long-held beliefs. This is also why change is so difficult. So strong are these beliefs that even when our very lives are on the line, most of us will continue to hold fast to our biases. This is not hyperbole; researchers repeatedly find that patients will disobey their doctor's orders and not follow life-extending advice! (Kegan & Lahey, 2009)

Executive Coaching for Professional Development

The cutting edge of executive coaching is *mindfulness-based transformation*, where “transformation” is defined by the growth to one’s emerging (and empirically verifiable) *Mindset*. But let’s look briefly at where we’ve been. For decades, executive coaching has focused on three main trends: Type, Behavior, and Emotions. Personality *type* approaches sort us into a communication-style grid or puzzle where we “fit” together; *cognitive-behavioral* approaches focus almost exclusively on changing behavior to change thinking; and *emotional-intelligence* approaches advocate flat social-systems of self- and corporate-governance. Each of these approaches has something valuable to offer; yet each tends to be quite limited.

For example, *personality type* coaching programs often help us communicate better; but they can also be used to avoid co-workers (“We are on the opposite side of the ‘type chart,’ so I don’t even talk to him/her anymore!”). *Cognitive-behavioral* coaching helps us to clearly understand our goals and behaviors but usually lacks empathy while fundamentally side-stepping the deep feelings that truly motivates us. Finally, *emotional-intelligence* based coaching can help us understand our motivations and give us a way to connect with others, but lacks a clear path from motivation to behavioral change. The changes that issue forth from these common approaches do not take adult learning and developmental *Mindsets* into account, and therefore usually do not last beyond a few months.

Coaching to *Mindsets* helps employees sustain change beyond this three-month period. But so what? What can *Mindsets* do for you that typology, cognitive-behavioral, and emotionally-intelligent methods cannot?

The two most common ways that organizations decide if they need executive coaching is by identifying *superstars* and “*they could be great if only they* [insert desired change here].” Superstars need to tap the motivations beyond making money, and identify and overcome cognitive biases. Think of an achiever in your organization, someone being groomed as an executive leader. Anyone who has made this transition will tell you that it is more of a

transformation than a transition. The skills required to perform at the next level are different, and almost always require a new *Mindset*. Below, I reveal how opportunities to adapt to your next *Mindset* can show up as both *deficiencies* to overcome and *proficiencies* for which you must reach. When it comes to professional development, you must address these simultaneously.

Getting You to the Next Level: Your Next Mindset

The claim I make herein is that coaching methods that are evidence-based in adult development research help you achieve your professional goals *and* give you measurable growth towards your next *Mindset*. Research shows that business effectiveness correlates significantly with *Mindset*. (See references below for research supporting this claim.) We have spent over a decade creating executive coaching programs that elicit opportunities for lasting transformation for both individuals and teams.

The opposite is also true and well supported by research. That is, the less complex or developed we are in our *Mindset*, the more difficult we will find our work. Or, as Harvard chair of adult learning and professional development Robert Kegan says, we will be *in over our heads*. Kegan is not only an advocate for adult development, he also created the coaching methods that we use at *Zeitler Executive Dynamix* with his longtime colleague Lisa Lahey at Harvard. If you are in over your head, the demands of your role may prove to be too much for you to handle without harmful stress. The irony is that these demands often prove *just a bit too much*, which is why we the terrible and often true *Peter Principle*, “one gets promoted to one’s level of incompetence.” Many people simply need a little bit of good, mindfulness-based coaching to achieve gains in their new role. You may be wondering what the signs might be for such a shift? The following table, gleaned from decades of empirical data across several different research teams provides an overview of adult *Mindsets* and achievement. It also displays some limitations of capacity or information processing when someone is limited in their *Mindset*. Finally, it aligns specific opportunities for transformational coaching that can target people who are ready to get to their next level.

Table 1: Strengths & Limits of *Mindsets* and Coaching Opportunities for Transformation

MINDSET [...or, Δ emerging mindset]	Will Self-Generate...	May Not Self-Generate...	Coaching Opportunities...
(5) Self-Transforming	Lead ind./org. transformation Integrate ideologies Handle <i>and use</i> paradoxes	Reflect on paradox-creation Lead “spiritual” transformation Generate world-change	Exercise Polarity Based <i>“Being–Learning”</i> <i>aka “Doing Not-Doing”/ “Wu-Wei”</i>
[Δ Self-Transforming]	Multi-Perspectival comm’s Unique, creative opportunities Encourage consensus	Weave competing interests Lead with vulnerability Integrate mutual exclusions	<i>Be Comfortable w/Paradox</i> Learn Dialectical Deciding Exercise More Judgment
(4) Self-Authoring	Welcome difference Weave strategy & tactics Construct & lead projects	Reflect on systems Lead ideological shifts Handle paradox	<i>Exercise Openness</i> <i>Become Agenda Initiating</i> Learn to Listen
The Bottom Line – Above are People Who Can Already “Own” Their Work Fully People Just Below ↓ are Likely to Grow Above this Line with a <u>solid blend</u> of Support & Challenge			
[Δ Self-Authoring]	Master a single domain Seek logical solutions Contribute to projects	Reflect on values Drive team position Weave ind./org./team goals	<i>Exercise Relationships</i> <i>Become Self-Directing</i> Learn to Delegate
(3) Socialized	Orient to relationships Empathize & avoid conflict Be loyal & supportive	Reflect on criticism Mediate multiple conflicts Welcome difference	<i>Exercise Self-Esteem</i> <i>Be on Solo Projects</i> Learn to Organize
[Δ Socialized]	Win any way possible. Often be manipulative. Be good in emergencies.	Reason in the abstract Empathize Predict long-term	<i>Exercise Sharing</i> <i>Become More Trustworthy</i> Learn to Empathize

(Adapted from Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Helsing & Lahey, 2010; and Starr & Torbert 2005)

The conclusion from decades of research is clear: **there are many benefits when leading from later *Mindsets*, and many drawbacks when attempting to lead from early *Mindsets*.** With each new *Mindset*, we gain abilities to see the bigger picture; to control our formerly automatic (unsophisticated) responses; to plan with greater foresight; and to make decisions from deeper insights. When employees fail to meet the demands of their role, their employment is eventually downgraded or terminated. This is sometimes unavoidable; but what if a small investment in coaching helped curb the high cost of turnover? This would make something as difficult as downsizing much more palatable for all parties, as employees would be given the “scaffolds of habit” they need to develop their next *Mindset*.

Executive leaders making such investments in their people would do well to consider larger trends in the free market. And I am not merely talking about the increasing costs of training and developing new hires. I refer to the evolutionary pressures of globalization. Specifically, to the calls for constant change that seems to be *required* in order to retain any hard-won competitive edge. Change is everywhere, change is not easy, and failing to change is ever more expensive.

Coaching on the Edge of Evolution: Leading Indicators for Change

We are all told that to become more flexible, we must generate linkages across the departmental silos of our organizations. We must be self-directing; we must *all* become leaders. And we are not merely leading! We must lead organizations that are constantly “learning.” Every level of the “learning-organization” must be capable of “action-learning” for maintaining flexibility. **Each and every one of these calls for 21st century leadership, 21st century management, and 21st century front-line employee capacities reflects the current leading-edge of the evolution of *Mindsets* for multiple stakeholders.** We are in the midst of a push-pull dynamic – we are being pushed to grow but pulled by our strong desire to maintain stability. The table below lists these paradoxical expectations for *Mindsets* in the 20th and 21st century business organization.

Table 2: New Century, More Pressure

20 th Century		→	21 st Century	
It was enough to be...	Expected Mindset:		New demands to be...	Expected Mindset:
A Visionary Leader	[Δ Self-Transforming]	→	A Transformative Leader	Self-Transforming
A “Growth”-Minded Manager	Self-Authoring	→	A “Change”-Minded Manager	[Δ Self-Transforming]
A Team Player	Socialized	→	A Self-Directing Knowledge Worker	Self-Authoring

(Where Δ = *emerging* mindset)

These pressures to grow and change will only increase in the next decade. The keys to the future of business leadership are no longer in the bright light of steady growth; they are in a new area, where only the development to your next *Mindset* can take you. Trust me – your next *Mindset* can take you places you never thought possible.

I will conclude by writing to you from the heart: I am passionate about building trusting relationships with good people who are decision makers in their organizations. The role I occupy is beyond “coach” – that is just the latest name we have given this role. Trusted counsel is a worthy expense. When you add the technology of measurable *Mindsets* for leadership transformation, the combination is potent. Our core values are to always tell you the truth; to help you achieve your business goals; and to help you transform while achieving your professional development goals. Our mission is to be agents of evolution, for evolution never stops.

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