Jazz Music & Coaching – The Art of Improvisation
By Malcolm Nicholson (UK)

The Art of Coaching for Personal Transformation
by Dr. Keith Merron (UK)

5 Ways to Start Planning Your Corporate Exit
by Sofia Pacifico Reis (UK)

Leading Through Change: The Alpha Group Approach To Change Management
by Iulia Sorescu (Romania)

Gamification — The Secret That is Revolutionising The Future of Leadership
by Brenda Jacobson (Canada)
Welcome to yet another exciting edition of the International Coaching News (iCN) online magazine! For our 28th edition, our theme is Corporate Coaching. This edition is loaded with content on a variety of relevant topics on the issues that come with the latest trends of corporate coaching, latest coaching models, resources, tips, techniques to help coaches & entrepreneurs to achieve business goals & potential.

The iCN is proud to have collaborated with several renowned international columnists, expert coaches and best-selling authors to provide insights on corporate coaching. Look out for the feature article ‘5 Ways to Start Planning Your Corporate Exit’ by Sofia Pacifco Reis from United Kingdom. Sofia shares her strategies in transitioning from the corporate world to being an entrepreneur. Another noteworthy article ‘Jazz Music & Coaching – The Art of Improvisation’ by Malcolm Nicholson, explains that there is not one way of dealing with coaching in the complex business environment, nor one way of coaching in leadership roles. In our Quarterly Column by Dr. Keith Merron ‘The Art of Coaching for Personal Transformation’, Dr. Keith discusses coaching third-order problems or three different ways of understanding a problem & how to help potential pattern. ‘Gamification—The Secret That is Revolutionising The Future of Leadership’ by Brenda Jacobson, is an interesting read where Brenda shares how by integrating the latest in neuroscience with game dynamics to train the brain to develop emotional intelligence as a HABIT, helps develop new skills and accelerates soft-skill acquisition by combining information with a positive experience.

Each of our columnists, too numerous to mention individually, has taken some really interesting perspectives, and I would encourage a thorough read-through of this edition.

Just like all our other editions, this is not just an interesting read, but it provides you with helpful personal development ideas and professional development techniques to grow your business and improve your lifestyle. I hope you enjoy this issue and do let us know if there are any topics you’d like to see covered in the future.

MESSAGE FROM THE DIVISION HEAD

Leeann C. Naidoo
Division Head, iCN Magazine

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Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this magazine are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the International Coaching News Magazine, or Noble Manhattan Coaching Ltd.
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Jazz Music & Coaching – The Art of Improvisation
by Malcolm Nicholson (UK)

However, a deeper dive shows that there are indeed many, many similarities between the two respective arts (or professions?)

Let’s have a look at some of the similarities. Both require individuals to have:
- Technical mastery
- Curiosity
- A growth mindset
- A focus on the here and now
- Ability to react to what has just been heard
- Lifelong learning
- Awareness of the impact of their communication
- A vocabulary
- Outcome focussed & clarity of vision
- Bring the best out in those around them

They also require their output to have:
- Improvisation; working up possibilities from an initial statement
- Tempo
- A structure; a beginning, middle & end
- A pitch
- Use of silence
- A context that can be simple, complicated, complex or chaotic
- Creative dialogue
- Collective intelligence
- Relevance

For a jazz musician these change from number to number. For coaches, each coaching intervention. (Though both of course can have sub-division of the units). As with mastery of any field of human endeavour, the approach is based on sound technique - or ‘nailing’ the hard skills; experiential learning – ‘woodshedding’ or supervised coaching - and reflective learning. In other words, finding out how to do it, doing it and reviewing how well you did. Getting to this stage is a variation on the old adage ‘I charged you $100, of which $10 was hitting the pipe. The other $90 was for knowing WHERE to hit the pipe!!’

However, the real transformation from journeying protagonist to consummate performer comes when exponents have mastered those hard skills so well that they can lock them up, to produce ‘music of the moment’. For example, I saw a jazz group when a member was making an introduction.

At first sight, jazz music and executive coaching may seem to be rather strange bedfellows – and not words you often see in the same sentence!
The piano player was ‘noodling’ (as Frank Zappa called jazz improvisation) in the background. The announcer said ‘That was nice – do it again!’ After a couple of attempts the pianist gave up and said – ‘I can’t. It is gone. Music of the moment.’

Equally, a recent coaching conversation was around a person’s self-talk and subsequent lack of confidence; however, when he presented (even in front of large audiences) he was ‘in-flow’, with his subconscious taking ascendency, his self-talk marginalised and he presented with ease and competence. (Music of the moment!)

So what we see with any great proponent is not that complex situations can be shaped into the structure of one dimensional tools – metronomes, scales, 4 box matrices or questionnaires – rather, it is intuitively using these as a basis for an improvised output, in combination with flexibility and deep, creative thinking that is crucial to navigating the challenging situations either set of proponents face.

‘To become more agile and adept, coaches may need to consider different approaches to their work. The traditional approach, with its emphasis on competence, may not always suffice. The coach may usefully explore the dialogic approach in service of ultimately being able to work systemically. Working systemically means noticing patterns of relationships, and emergence of new meanings from those relationships, even relationships that to us as coaches, may be invisible.’ (Lawrence & Moore)

Gary Burton, jazz vibrapharist and educator said:

"As I start to play a song, in those first few moments of playing I step back from the process mentally, and the playing starts going on its own. I start watching it as if I am an observer. The unconscious mind is now doing it. It is very natural for me now, after doing it for years. It was not so natural in my early days when I was much more conscious about my playing. But you learn to trust your unconscious mind."

(Fast Company)

Why is this important in coaching?

Anyone coaching in organisations today knows that the level of complexity faced by people is beyond that which we are designed to handle. Indeed, we are currently experiencing a morphing of reality at a geopolitical level referred to as ‘Information Chaos’ (Carole Cadwalladwr). Robert Kegan – a psychologist and expert on adult learning, wrote a book called ‘In over our Heads – the mental demands of modern life’.

Equally, if coaches are not aware of and capable of understanding and being one step ahead with such circumstances, it is unlikely they will be maximising the impact their coaching could be having... Music is often described as expressing the emotions we cannot put into words. And as with good jazz musicians, coaches have to interpret the silence, the unsaid and to facilitate the listener’s internal interpretation of the other person’s communication.

The complexity of this current environment means that coaches will often be required to coach in the intersection of various disciplines. Clear cut is no more...

How does ‘music of the moment’ play out in coaching?

Choosing an approach from the playbook is part art, part science. It is intriguing to be in a different place to some business leaders who are nearer the command and control end of the scale when working with new teams. You know, ‘what is the agenda?’ ‘What approaches will you be using?’ ‘How will we measure this?’ etc. Sometimes I’ll work with an organisation on the desired outcomes I will be aiming to help the team get to. The agenda - that is, the tools, (scales, rhythms, tempo etc) - can often depend on co-creation with the group. Music in the moment.

An Example:

I had a kick-off session with a multi-national (and intercultural) team. The agenda had 1 hour to itemise existing issues. 5.5 hours later, they were still going!! This was a classic example of ‘music of the moment.’ I knew that if we stuck to the agenda and papered over the cracks these issues were causing, it would have meant that the rest of the day would be meaningless. It may have been long at the time (‘The tyranny of the now’) but it in the history of the company and the period of time since, it was nothing. It surfaced trust issues and enabled the exec to change the level of conversation they were having with each other, based on a more profound understanding of each other’s perspectives.
Getting in the zone.

Many years ago, a young saxophonist sat in with a group of jazz professionals in a nightclub. He lost the tune, then the rhythm. Next thing, the drummer threw a cymbal at his feet, landing with a loud crash, followed by jeers and laughter from the audience. Whilst the saxophonist - a 16-year-old named Charlie Parker – went on to become a jazz and cultural legend, at that stage in his career he had not mastered the tools of the trade.

Today, there are extremely large numbers of coaches with 2 years or less experience. Now, some may go on to become Coaching Legends, however in a commercial environment there is a decision to be made for the less experienced coach around what to tackle, revenue flow, reputational damage and a self-awareness of their own capabilities.

My premise is that there is not one way of dealing with coaching in the complex business environment, nor one way of coaching in leadership roles. By taking a leaf from the jazz musician’s approach, experienced coaches can develop some ways of thinking and dealing with complex international business situations that might make your existing approaches even more effective and impactful.

My premise is that there is not one way of dealing with coaching in the complex business environment, nor one way of coaching in leadership roles. By taking a leaf from the jazz musician’s approach, experienced coaches can develop some ways of thinking and dealing with complex international business situations that might make your existing approaches even more effective and impactful.

ABOUT MALCOLM NICHOLSON

Malcolm Nicholson is the owner and Coaching Director for Aspecture, and has worked successfully with a wide range of senior business people for 20 years, enabling them to improve business results through transformational changes. To find out how he can help your organisation contact him at malcolmnicholson@aspecture.com or on +44 1932 267597.

Many of the executives that I have coached, typically possess differences of opinion regarding their role in group debates. These debates are usually taking place in a group setting such as a staff meeting. As a coach, I ask these executives questions regarding how to handle certain conflictive situations, with debates being a common issue for executives to handle. What I have concluded is that many executives engage in one of three strategies regarding conflict during debates: 1. They clamp down on the debate immediately, or 2. They let it go until heated arguments erupt, or 3. They do nothing and walk away from the uncomfortable environment. Most agree with #1. My first question might go something like this: “As it relates to debates in employee meetings, do you find your role of clamping down, or closing debates is the best way to get the meeting back on task?”

Most say yes. Clamping down, or closing the debates are the best for achieving harmony within the group. The sooner, the better. I respond with: There are two ways to look at this situation – one, if the debates reach a most effective solution, then I would disagree with the idea of ‘clamping down on the debates and try to achieve harmony.’ On the other hand, secondly, if these debates were to go on too long and continue to end in no solution in the immediate future, then I would consider stepping in and acknowledging that it is unhealthy; thus, no accomplishments are being made towards the goals of the meeting. I go on to add that, most importantly, the executive should really look at conflicts, such as this, as an opportunity to transform and move from assuming negative outcomes to expecting positive ones. Thus, creating possibilities for learning, growing, and improving relationships within the group, at the same time, coming away with better, more effective solutions, ideas, and processes.

The key here is that these groups take their work very seriously and want to improve the groups' operations. Further, it appears as though most members want to participate in these debates, but not all members feel listened to.

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So, they sit quietly and do not participate. Many debates are really just disagreements. For this issue, empathic listening from the executive is necessary and requires focus upon the awareness of not just merely on the words being used, but on what the group may be thinking or feeling without words. Observing non-verbal’s is vital.

The point is to keep awareness that when group members bicker, everyone suffers. Minor disputes over process or tactics can cause major distractions in the workplace. Work gets interrupted and an unpleasant tension hangs in the air. As a leader, they may be tempted to step in right away. Before doing so, I suggest to them to consider these factors:

The key is – can the group work it out themselves? Workplace relationships often mirror family relationships: people argue and disagree, sometimes heatedly, but they usually figure it out themselves with the relationship intact. This may be the case at work too. To ensure the conflict can be worked out, means to be completely open with one another. I would suggest ensuring group members are completely open.

Reference:

(2) https://www.fastcompany.com/27628/gary-burton-trio
(3) Carol Cadwalladwr Twitter 14th December 2019

Getting in the zone.

image provided by author
If the openness remains positive, they tend to work it out themselves—and the executive should encourage them to do so. It is when group members hide behind masks or send distorted, double messages to others, it can damage relationships. On the other hand, if the behaviour is difficult, it may be a problem. I also suggest to the executive to hold on to their sense of humour, irony, and play. This of course to keep the group environment positive.

Can the executive remain neutral?
The only way to allow the group to work it out for themselves is to remain neutral. The executive’s role here is to then try to learn the facts surrounding any disagreements. Speaking with the employees on both sides of the disagreements and ask them to think about the situation and how they can resolve it. Then making themselves available if the group wishes to share their proposed resolution. But most importantly, the executive should remain neutral to let them work it out themselves.

Can the executive restore the sense of teamwork?
I suggest that their role as a leader includes responsibility for maintaining a positive environment in which teamwork can thrive. Throughout the debate resolution process, ensure other group members are seeking the input of others. Then, if they decide to intervene, their decision is always focused on the greater good of the team.

Next, I ask: ‘How can conflict or disagreement contribute to effective teamwork?’

It is my own experience that conflict can be healthy at its best; conflict fosters creative thinking and opportunities to improve. Healthy conflict is evident by the ability to disagree on one issue while working collaboratively with others. But I also know, as a good leader, when to step in and understanding that the longer an issue or problem goes unattended; the greater the chance it will escalate into a major issue. The key is to keep the group focused and to ensure the work group is making good progress, open communication, and demonstrating positive attitudes, and that they are moving in the right direction.

If the work group continues moving in the right direction, then it sounds as though this group manages its own conflicts and disagreements and uses brainstorming to identify solutions. In other words, looking for win-win opportunities; negotiating if necessary. What I refer to the work group then is a self-managed team. Self-managed teams work best with decision-making authority for their team.

Then finally, I ask: ‘How can a group keep healthy disagreements from becoming harmful?’
To keep healthy disagreements from becoming harmful; some guides or expectations need to be in place. Here are some possible guidelines that the executive should consider:

► Ask those who disagree in the debate to paraphrase or restate one another’s comments. This may help the group learn if they really understand each other.

► Work out a compromise. Have the group agree upon the underlying source of conflict, then engage in give-and-take and, finally, agree upon a possible solution.

► Ask each group member to list what the other side should do. (If the group is separated by at least two sides to an issue). Exchange lists, select a compromise all group members are willing to accept and test it out to see if it fits together with the expected goals of the group.

► Convince group members they sometimes may have to admit they are wrong. Help them save face by convincing them that changing a position shows strength and not weakness.

► Respect the experts in the group. Give their opinions more weight when the conflict involves their expertise, but do not rule out conflicting opinions.

Once these guidelines are agreed upon, then the executive should communicate to them to ensure complete understanding of all members of the group.

I then summarise with the executive with the overall approach to debates:

It is truly just understanding regarding separating the positions from interests. That position is what you want, while interests are indicators of why you want it (needs, desires, and feelings). When groups are engaged in debates, the executive should see their role as a leader that includes responsibility for maintaining a positive environment in which teamwork can thrive. Throughout the resolution process, the executive should ensure other team members are seeking the input of others. Then again, if they decide to intervene, their decision is always focused on the greater good of the team. In separating the positions from interests, this is possible.

It is my own experience that debates, like any kind of conflict can be healthy at its best; conflict fosters creative thinking and opportunities to improve. Healthy conflict is evident by the ability to disagree on one issue while working collaboratively with others.

Sometimes it is best to convince team members they sometimes may have to admit they are wrong. Again, help them save face by convincing them that changing a position shows strength and not weakness.

As I have stated, it is best to create self-managed teams that can create their own guidelines to promote positive and productive conflict.

Self-managed teams work best with decision-making authority for their team. With this kind of decision-making authority, it can force group members to better articulate views and positions which usually results in a greater clarification and understanding. In addition; with the well-balanced contributions from all members, it creates a synergy within the team. Self-managed teams work together, creating a positive environment that promotes trust, respect, and a
4 Tips to Communicate Effectively with Clients

by Anne Bachrach (USA)

While many business owners believe they communicate effectively with clients, the reality is that few professionals know how to communicate effectively with clients to get the desired results.

Effective communication with clients may seem like the least of your worries when you are running your own business, but it is much more important than it appears on the surface. How you conduct your communication with clients can create raving fans or scarce patrons, and ultimately determine whether or not you get the results you are looking for.

While there is no secret formula to practicing effective communication with clients, there are some tips to help you convey professionalism, integrity, and confidence. Just working on consistently enhancing communication is going above and beyond what most do, and therefore, will have a positive outcome. These four tips below will help you become a guru in client communication.

1 Be Confident

You cannot communicate effectively with clients if you are insecure. Find a way to stand in your confidence before you begin communicating. Decide on a price for a product or service and stick to it. Never lowball an offer for your services since that will only show the client what you believe your services are actually worth. However, that does not mean you cannot offer any creative incentives. For example, let’s say you typically charge $1,500 for your services and the client tries to talk you down to $800. You can respond by offering more than one option. Here is an example of what you could present, ‘I respect your need to remain within your budget and if a $1500 upfront payment is not realistic at the moment, there are some options available to you. Perhaps you would like a few weeks to pull resources together to come up with the $1500 upfront payment. Or, I can offer a payment plan to break the payments into smaller chunks. You could pay of three payments of $525, for a total payment of $1575. Provide an initial payment of $1500. Play it safe and communicate effectively

2 Be Professional

Never sacrifice professionalism when communicating with clients. During the first few communications, it is best to keep it on a professional level. If you cozy up to clients too quickly they might take advantage of you by trying to get you to lower your rates or worse, they may think that you are trying to build an inappropriate friendship.

3 Be Personable

Clients are not friends - at least initially - and rarely become friends. Remember, you are a professional being paid to provide results. Treat your clients as you would like to be treated; be punctual, respectful and courteous. Do not show the least of your worries when you are running your own business, but it is much more important than it appears on the surface. How you conduct your communication with clients can create raving fans or scarce patrons, and ultimately determine whether or not you get the results you are looking for.

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3 Be Personable

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Avoid using technology you are unfamiliar with - at least initially - when communicating with clients. For argument’s sake, it could avoid the frustration of the learning curve that will inevitably show it to your client in your message. This is also how misspellings, misuse and unintended messages can be avoided. For initial communication with your clients, stick to the technology you know and regularly use.

Choose a method of communication you are comfortable with and that matches the level of your client. Avoid being unreachable during normal business hours. It is important that clients are able to connect with you, on some level, even while maintaining a professional appearance. It is when they can connect with you that you will gain loyal clients and raving fans.

While it is an advantage to be reachable after hours and on weekends, it is best to establish clear hours of operation. This will help avoid clients calling at 10pm at night and expecting an immediate return call. Whatever time you want to be available for your clients, be sure to clearly convey that information to avoid any communication missteps.

**Action Step #3**

It is possible to remain professional yet present yourself in a personable manner. Before you have in-person or telephone conferences with clients, take five minutes to clear your head and focus on the results your client is looking for you to deliver. The conversation is not about you – it is about them and how you can help them get the results they need to be more successful. Set clear boundaries from the beginning, by providing set hours of operation (unless of course your service happens to be on-call).

When meeting clients in-person, give yourself plenty of time to prep your appearance so you look well-rested, well-dressed and on time.

When you are starting a new client assignment, it is easy to get excited and jump headfirst into the project, but do not let your excitement or enthusiasm get too far ahead. Remember, your first priority is to remain conscious of effective communication and be sure that you and your client are on the same page. Effective communication will allow you to jot down the necessary details before the project begins and save you embarrassment down the line with clients. When you skip effective communication and jump the gun, you could find yourself in a situation that makes you or your business appear unprofessional and inexperienced or get wrangled into doing work you do not get paid for.

If you are unsure about any detail of an assignment or fear your client may not have a full understanding, you must be willing to ask questions. Fixing misunderstandings are easiest at the beginning of an assignment, but not so easy after work has already begun. Take the time to be sure you and your client are communicating effectively with each other.

As the business owner, it is your responsibility to think ahead and head-off any potential snags. It is important to make the process of working with you and your business as simple as possible. Remember, your client is paying for results, not complications so be sure to always take steps to communicate effectively with your clients.

**Action Step #4:**

Be very clear from the beginning in service agreements and contracts. Set clear boundaries and detail specifically what is being provided at the set price, as well as, optional or extended services that will require additional funds. Go over the details of the contract in-person or over the phone whenever possible. Head off potential problems during the project early. If you see something that throws a red flag, discuss it with the client early on to avoid big blow-ups.

Being a business owner goes far beyond the books and sales. You must be a forward-thinking problem solver who is continually evolving into a better business owner and person. Essentially, you become a leader the moment you start your own business and can never relinquish the title for as long as you own your business. Throughout the life of your business, it will be a continual refinement of processes and communication; adapting your approach to suit the needs of your clients.

To obtain more high-value information to help your communication be even more client-centric so you can get even better results, check out the complimentary webinar on this subject at [http://www.accountabilitycoach.com/free-webinars/](http://www.accountabilitycoach.com/free-webinars/).

**ABOUT ANNE BACHRACH**

Anne Bachrach is known as The Accountability Coach™. She has over 23 years of experience training and coaching. Business owners and entrepreneurs who utilise Anne’s proven systems and processes work less, make more money, and have a more balanced and successful life. Anne is the author of the books, Excuses Don’t Count; Results Rule! and Live Life with No Regrets; How the Choices We Make Impact Our Lives, and The Work Life Balance Emergency Kit.

Go to [http://www.accountabilitycoach.com/Achieve-Your-Goals-Free-Gifts-Now/](http://www.accountabilitycoach.com/Achieve-Your-Goals-Free-Gifts-Now/) and get 3 FREE gifts including a special report on 10 Power Tips for Getting Focused, Organised, and Achieving Your Goals Now. Join the FREE Silver Inner Circle Membership today and receive 10% off on all products and services, in addition to having access to assessments and resources to help you achieve your goals so you can experience a more balanced and successful life. [https://www.accountabilitycoach.com/coaching-store/inner-circle-store/].
Most of my work is in the corporate sector, working with CEOs and Senior Executives. My goal is to help my clients transform. Often, when clients bring their problems to me, they focus on the symptoms. It is my job to help the get to the deeper causes. Transformation, by its nature, shifts the fundamental paradigms that underlie the causes. To help clients go deeper, I often talk about the difference between 1st, 2nd, and 3rd order problems. Let me illustrate.

Patricia, the CEO of a growing company she founded, loved to fix problems. She was really good at it. Wherever she went, she fixed them. And there were an endless number of problems available to her. So, she stepped in, gave advice, and often told people what to do. That she liked to fix things is not necessarily a problem. It became a problem because, while her organisation was at one time growing, it had plateaued, in part, because all key decisions continue to go through Patricia. They always had and that is the way a big part of her liked it. She was the hub of a spoke and wheel team and had her hands in everything.

When the organisation was small, Patricia being a master puppeteer was not a problem. In fact, her brilliance helped launch the organisation and it was considered for a while as an exemplar in the field. But, as the organisation grew, her pattern of stepping in and solving everything posed difficulties. It slowed decisions down and it created a pattern of dependence on her. She hired people who were good at implementing decisions, but who were not so good at making them. She became a leader who, unfortunately, did not know how to inspire leadership in others. She could only inspire followership.

When Patricia came to me, she knew she needed some kind of change, but she did not know how. She believed the problem was who she hired, or that others were not as bright as she is, or that they were a bit lazy. She could not see herself as the source of the problem. Like so many people, her paradigm was invisible to her while the paradigms of others have been ever so obvious.
It became clear to me early on that I needed to help Patricia see her problem. After exploring a number of situations, I had the sense I was able to connect the dots on her pattern and I ‘suggested’ to her that she seemed to have a particular tendency as it related to problems. ‘I think that you often take change quickly, but that you may have difficulty supporting others when they do the same.’

Now, in my mind, although the pattern appeared clear, I used the word ‘suggested’ because I also know that I am not all-knowing. Moreover, I know that showing an insight down the throat of someone almost always causes a gag reflex. So, due to my awareness of my fallibility as a human being, and that none of us can always see clearly, and my sensitivity to how paradigms are hard to see and how quickly the ego wants to defend, I almost always offer my observations lightly—as hypotheses, worthy of consideration. I use words like, ‘I sense,’ or ‘it appears,’ or ‘I might suggest.’ And I mean it. This is not a game of being certain and using fudge words to lighten the impact. Instead, I hold the point of view that this is the journey of the person being coached and I only see portions of what their inner and outer worlds are like. Instead of seeing clearly, I am reading tea leaves, in a sense, and cannot know for certain what they mean. By offering something lightly, I am also engaging the other person in a spirit of inquiry and inviting them to hypothesis with me. This spirit more easily bypasses the ego and allows for greater spaciousness. More on this later.

When she heard my observation, Patricia nodded her head in agreement and asked me to say more. In order to help her see her potential pattern, I explained that there are three different ways of understanding a problem and I call them first, second, or third-order problems. A first-order problem is the presenting problem. For example, a first-order problem might be that there are too many ants in the kitchen. For a leader of an organisation, it might be that they can’t get their team to work hard enough or perhaps that they believe the team doesn’t take enough initiative. In Patricia’s case, it was any one of a myriad number of issues that she described to me about working hard, etc.

A second-order problem is the cause or causes of the problem. For example, if a lot of crumbs are left around the house, and there are many holes in the structure of the house, ants can easily get in. In the case of a leader, a second-order problem might be that the people hired are unmotivated, in general, or that they have become unmotivated over time. Perhaps they feel discouraged in some way. In Patricia’s case, the second-order problems were many and each situation had its causes.

A third-order problem is a pattern that keeps the second-order problem of being faced. In many ways, it is indeed the paradigm that needs to shift so that the second-order problems are solved in an enduring way. In the case of ants, a third-order problem might be that there are habits that are not clean, or that there are other priorities that don’t make this problem very important, or that no one seems to really care that there are ants that come in. In the case of a leader, perhaps it is that the leader has an unexamined or disowned need to be in control and that control tendency causes them to hire people who are followers. In Patricia’s case, the third-order problem was her tendency to love to solve problems, her inability to trust others, and her high desire to control.

Most people shy away from the deeper, more penetrating examination of themselves that are required to simply begin to affect their paradigms, and most coaches join them, failing to challenge the deeper condition. Either they don’t see it or they sense that the client is unwilling and, therefore, they shy away from going deeper.

In our instant, quick-fix, change-in-3–easy-steps world, we often avoid the very thing necessary to effect sustainable change. That, in essence, is the goal of this phase of the transformation process—to search and find the third-order problem.

When I offered the first, second, and third-order way of looking at problems, Patricia instantly understood. She tackled first-order problems all the time. In fact, she loved to do that—it gave her satisfaction. Every now and then, she tried to tackle a second-order problem, but she could not see how she created the second-order problems. Being at the centre of it all was likely a third-order problem, but it was so part and parcel of who she was, and had always been, that it was hard to see. She was the proverbial fish swimming in water that cannot see the water.

To help Patricia, I asked her what her definition of a good leader is. Her reply was, ‘To get people to accomplish things.’ I suggested that this was a very useful definition and that it was classic. Many, if not most others, see leadership similarly and she seemed to do that well. I then said, ‘What if there is more to leadership? What if great leadership has something to do with creating conditions where people solve problems themselves—that they are motivated to take things on themselves—motivated to take initiative?’

Patricia was intrigued by this definition, and we began to explore a world where this might occur, and we then explored what it would take from her and from others to live in that kind of world. It was by offering an alternative goal that her eyes were opened to another way of seeing and being. Paradigm change is often like that. It involves, to some extent, the exploration of the conditions that create second-order problems, those conditions that are our paradigms.
After team members went through a horrible redundancy, I spent the next few months feeling miserable.

Finally, one day, after another boring corporate meeting I took the decision that I could not do it anymore. ‘Enough is enough’, I said to myself. I went back to my desk and wrote my resignation letter. You might think I was crazy, insane after all I had a family to provide for, bills to pay. The truth is, it had to be done. It was either staying there and continuing to be treated like a ‘number’, undervalued and second class or do something about it and do not lose my marbles. Besides, I had been planning my exit for a while so now it was time to take action.

I sat in my office desk and wrote my resignation letter, filled with so many emotions and not that many words actually!! I was straight to the point, there was not much to say. I had reached my limit so now it was time to take action. I went back to my desk and wrote my resignation letter. You might think I was crazy, insane after all I had a family to provide for, bills to pay. The truth is, it had to be done. It was either staying there and continuing to be treated like a ‘number’, undervalued and second class or do something about it and do not lose my marbles. Besides, I had been planning my exit for a while so now it was time to take action.

Firstly, LEARN and then learn some more but do not overdo it because often enough is not what you do and then ask her, ‘Can you now tell me what I do?’. If you do this exercise a few times with the same person, you will be surprised how much clear your mission will become.

I went back into my boss’s ‘enclosure’ with the letter in my hand and I fired him. There and then, I took the biggest decision of my life. Mixed emotions, excitement and dread because now I would be thrown amongst the Entrepreneurial lion ‘enclosure’. I did not have a clue to be honest, what I would find...the good the bad and the ugly. Even though I have built my online foundations, there were still many Entrepreneurial challenges to face.

One thing I have found since I started this journey I have made, the mindset shifts I have had and the enormous knowledge I have learned by failing. I do not want you to quit your 9 to 5 and start your own business without having a plan, a strategy and an action road map. I want to reassure you that you do not need to figure all this out on your own. You are doing the right thing by staying where you are and preparing your exit. That is what I did well before leaving. How did it? I planned my way out while I was still earning an income and I believe you can too with these following 5 strategies you can start planning your exit so that one day you too can fire your boss and be in charge of your life and business.

When you put yourself out there, people start to know you and trust you and opportunities start to take shape. Learning how to LISTEN and pay attention to those opportunities is the difference between having clients and your business just a hobby. In the beginning, nobody knew what I did, but after time showing up, perfecting what I do, it started to become clear to others and soon I had other connections referring business to me because they knew exactly what I do and who for. To help you with this, I encourage you to sit down with a friend and tell her exactly what you do and then ask her, ‘Can you now tell me what I do?’. If you do this exercise a few times with the same person, you will be surprised how much clear your mission will become.

One thing that I also needed to do is to be very clear, on whom I was targeting. You need to take time to KNOW your ideal audience to the minutest detail. Who do you love to work with? What does she really want?

Learning is not enough, you need to CONNECT with other Entrepreneurs, increasing your visibility and understanding how it feels to run a business on your own. I went to local networking groups early in the morning or meetups in the evening so that I could meet and know others in the same journey. I would ask loads of questions about their journey. This really helped me to have a feeling for what was to come. I loved networking so much that after I left corporate, I become a leader of a local women’s business networking club, which I built from the ground up.

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One thing that I also needed to do is to be very clear, on whom I was targeting. You need to take time to KNOW your ideal audience to the minutest detail. Who do you love to work with? What does she really want?

Knowing her challenges gives you the marketing advantage to design an irresistible OFFER that is going to solve her problem. An offer does not have to be anything complex. I started with a social media management training course that I used to deliver in the evenings; afterwards it grew into online programs that I run through my member’s area. Simple is always best as long as you know what they want and need. When you find this, you have found your ‘secret sauce’.

These are all strategies that you can start doing while you are still earning. I understand is not easy to take the Leap but remember that all is possible when you want it hard enough. By starting to get the foundations in place, you are one-step ahead for when you are ready to launch your business.
The book entitled, ‘Leading Change- A Practical Guide for Change Agents’, by Dr. Peggie W. Koon, is one of the best reads in my professional career.

This book offers detailed professional life stories from Dr. Peggie Koon and others, which are relatable and understandable. In reading this book, I saw myself as an agent of change and now understand from a practical standpoint how I can positively lead change in any organisation. You will too! You will see the normalcy that change is constant in the workplace, industry, and technology. After reading ‘Leading Change - A Practical Guide for Change Agents’, you will find yourself to be armed with the tools to lead teams through change to success, as I did.

I was struck particularly with personal stories that Dr. Koon offered with which I strongly identified. On page 380 Dr. Koon spoke of the affirming actions of others and how they influence change and help structure a person’s clear vision. The book spoke about how major influences in our lives such as family, educators, mentors, etc., can influence positive in change and structure our own vision. I identified strongly with this because mentors and being a mentor are extremely important to me personally.

There are a few pages that speak to the power of helping others. This helped me understand the need to stop focusing on what I can achieve on my own and turn my attention to what I can achieve with others. I see now that working with others as a change agent to create change is helping others and is quite fulfilling.

After this read, I better understand the process of change, how to effectively lead change, and more importantly, what is required as a change agent to lead change successfully. This book helped me as the reader understand the definition of change and how many of us react to it. I saw in this book, for example, the differences between change by choice, change by force as well as the benefits of embracing change willingly to stay remain competitive and relevant.

The book for me was understandable, free from clichés, jargon and provided a clear explanation of key change factors how their effort an organisations success or failure.

After reading this book, you will identify with many of the professional challenges that Dr. Koon describes and discover ways to overcome the resistance to change you face in your professional and personal struggles. There were many epiphanies for me. You will find new strength to confront perceived giants who do things ‘the same old way’ because it works. You will be equipped to diplomatically communicate with teams and provide the mentoring and guidance to encourage teams to welcome change.

In conclusion, I would strongly encourage this read. Read this book and you will find yourself using it often as a desktop reference before meetings, in the team and organisational meetings, civic and religious meetings and more as a tool to help you be a change agent. I have personally and professionally grown far more after this read. I would recommend this book 100 times over.
Gamification — The Secret That is Revolutionising The Future of Leadership
by Brenda Jacobson (Canada)

The future is here. It blew in like a storm and has completely changed the business environment. I spent two decades as a financial executive and business strategist and I saw the world change—A LOT. It is not just that the world is changing—everyone expected that. It is the speed and intensity with which it is happening that has leaders reeling.

This is an environment unlike anything I have seen before. Organisations today are facing new challenges that leaders of the past did not have to contend with. This means there is no blueprint—traditional wisdom cannot be handed down to provide any context that holds ideal solutions.

What is so different about the world of business today?

Here are the key challenges leaders face today.

1. The world is now entrenched in the 4th industrial revolution — a world of robotics, artificial intelligence, augmented reality, virtual reality and outsourcing. Technology is evolving at an exponential pace, faster than ever before and it is changing the way business is conducted. Job descriptions are shifting, new skills are required—skills that many leaders do not have and do not know how to acquire. This also means they do not have the ability to foster these skills amongst their team members, creating a skillset deficit. These skills are vital, not only to survive—but more importantly, to THRIVE in today’s world.

2. For the first time in history, there are 5 generations active in the workforce — each with a very different set of beliefs, behaviours, values and attitudes. Attempts to engage and motivate a generationally diverse workforce is proving to be an uphill battle for many leaders. Onboarding new leaders is a struggle due to vastly different views on life and leadership. This is creating communication challenges between existing and new leaders, resulting in a lack of mentorship for young candidates. Because of this, detrimental feelings of loneliness and isolation are on the rise for this next generation, while existing leaders are left feeling a sense of disrespect and even animosity towards the incoming leaders.

3. Loneliness have hit epidemic levels. Social science researchers define loneliness as the emotional state created when people have fewer social contacts and meaningful relationships than they would like or want — relationships that make them feel known and understood. An environment of online connections, remote workforces and communication challenges intensifies feelings of isolation, leading to loneliness and depression. This is impacting physical and mental health and ultimately performance and productivity.

4. Stress, anxiety and overwhelm have reached unprecedented levels — penetrating every realm of organisations. This is largely due to the speed and intensity of the changes we see in the workplace. From the C-suite to the mailroom, people are dealing with mental health issues, which again negatively impact performance and productivity.

Mental Health issues are taking an economic toll on individuals, families, organisations and society as a whole—AND THEY ARE GETTING WORSE!

I know the term ‘Mental Health’ still has a stigma to it and when I mention supporting mental health many people get a bit squirrely.

According to the World Health Organisation, mental health is...

‘... a state of well-being in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.’

Is not this what everyone wants out of life? Does not this describe the type of people leaders want filling the ranks of their companies?

And yet, society is moving in the opposite direction.

1. What will it take to disrupt this trend and change direction?

The world of business has changed and continues to change, which means the way we lead must also change. It has to change because the people we lead are changing. Strategies that once worked are no longer effective.

2. It is time for a new playbook

Coaching is no longer considered an executive perk—it is becoming mandatory at every level of organisations. This requires leaders to assume an additional role as ‘coach’—which is often far outside their skillset. ‘Leader-as-coach’ is a new concept many are ill-equipped to manage.

3. How do we prepare leaders to take on this new role—as ‘coach’?

Future-ready leaders are emotionally intelligent and able to coach others to develop their own EQ skills.

According to TalentSmart, 90% of top performers have high EQ and EQ is responsible for 58% of job performance.

According to the World Economic Forum—Future of Job Report—emotional intelligence is a growing skillset necessary for the future. In their report they listed the top 10 skills leaders will be looking for by 2022. Of these 10 skills 8 of them require a foundation of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence has become a ‘meta-skill’ upon which all other skills are enhanced.
Daniel Goleman, an American psychologist helped to popularise emotional intelligence. He identified the five key elements of emotional intelligence as: Self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills.

Although this powerful model has been used for a couple decades, helping many people understand the concept of emotional intelligence, the time has come to go deeper by adding to the understanding of how emotional intelligence supports mental health and performance.

Let’s break it down by looking at the four quadrants of the ‘Performance EQ model’ presented by YouEQ and understand how leaders can draw on this model to impact performance.

**Emotional Intelligence** – the ‘What’. What am I feeling and what do I do about it? It is simply being intelligent about emotions—using IQ & EQ together. When a leader can intelligently recognise what they are feeling, they can choose how best to impact those they lead. To do this, a leader must have an integrated sense of self-concept, allow for self-compassion and maintain a balanced self-esteem. All of these are accelerated through self-awareness—with EQ is the key foundation.

**Emotional Agility** – the ‘When’. When am I feeling an emotion and when should I respond? Leaders with EQ ask, ‘How can we create an environment where our people motivate themselves?’

Research has proven that intrinsic motivation yields more sustainable results than extrinsic rewards-based systems. EQ leaders begin creating this by first taking emotional responsibility for how they make others feel. This is the foundation of psychological safety where other individuals feel free and motivated to take risks, learn and grow. Leaders, using their influence, can then challenge others to take their own emotional responsibility and ownership of their results.

**Emotional Responsibility** – the ‘Who’. This is the end game of emotional intelligence. Just getting smart about your emotions does not help unless you hone your emotional agility and take emotional responsibility—creating emotional maturity. You can then answer the questions ‘Who am I?’, ‘Who do I want to be?’, and ‘Who do I want to be with?’. This is vital knowledge for leader if they hope to have influence and inspire others.

**Emotional Maturity** – the ‘Why’. This is the final step of emotional intelligence. The ability to accurately assess an issue helps the leaders respond appropriately at the right time.

The most common missing element in leadership today is empathy.

Empathy is now recognised as a foundational value in the workplace. Younger generations—accounting for well over 50% of the workforce—are demanding empathetic leaders. Recruitment, retention, and engagement rates are tied directly to empathy.

BusinessSolver, in their 2019 report on the State of Workplace Empathy, states...

“The discussion of empathy in the workplace goes far beyond a “soft skill” or any type of management fad. We’ve seen repeatedly how empathy leads to tangible business outcomes, most notably employee retention and engagement. With 93 percent of employees reporting they’re likely to stay with an empathetic employer—a number that has risen steadily for four years—this is a value that cannot be underestimated by American employers.

82% of employees would consider leaving their job for a more empathetic organisation.

78% of employees would work longer hours for a more empathetic employer.

72% of CEOs say the state of empathy needs to evolve.

56% of CEO’s believe it is hard to demonstrate empathy.

Despite identifying Empathy as a ‘Competitive Advantage’ many leaders don’t understand what it is or how to embody it. In fact, many will resist any effort towards offering empathy. What they fail to realise is when groups experience authentic empathy, they give the leader the right of influence.

Leaders with empathy have more social influence. That Influence is earned—not taken.

Future-ready leaders are open to adopting new and innovative strategies—strategies that fit this rapidly changing world.

Experience coupled with personal interaction is the new world strategy. And when that experience is fun and results can be seen quickly, retention often jumps to over 80%. This is what gamification brings to us.

Gamification is simply applying game dynamics and game principles to non-game contexts. In other words, enhancing mundane activities by adding game elements such as points, badges, prizes, levelling-up or leaderboards. It is the process of leveraging the natural human desire for socialising, learning, mastery, competition and achievement, into beneficial learning outcomes.
Games have the inherent ability to fully engage learners, vastly improving knowledge and retention rates.

Gamification is important because games have been a part of every society since the beginning of time—people love games. Therefore, games can be a unifying strategy when working with groups involving people from multiple generations or various cultural backgrounds. Gamification is exciting because it promises to make the hard stuff in life—FUN.

Neuro-Gamification is the secret that is revolutionising the future of leadership.

Remote work is growing. With benefits ranging from the enhanced flexibility, to reducing carbon footprints, to providing support for caretaker activities, remote work is becoming more commonplace in organisations.

With this in mind, coaches will want to consider how to provide support for virtual leaders and team members, remote groups, and entire remote teams. Coaches in the remote space may leverage many different coaching modalities— from coaching the individual remote worker, to supporting groups of remote members from across an organisation on issues of common interest, to coaching an entire team.

This article explores three areas. First, what is unique about support for coaching those who operate in part, or whole, in the remote space. Second, what are some of the more common coaching areas for coaching groups of remote workers versus remote teams. The third part of this article explores techniques for ‘avoiding the death by conference call’ and creating interactive virtual conversations.

Areas you may find yourself exploring when coaching those who work remote:

**With groups:**
In group coaching, we usually bring together groups of individuals from across an organisation, an industry or even geographical boundaries.

**What areas are remote coaching conversations moving into**

What is unique about support for coaching remote workers

Like most contexts today, remote work is being buffeted by change. One of the greatest needs for remote workers is a yearning for connection. This is where coaching many – group or team coaching - in the remote space may provide a great benefit. Peers may help to level-set that ‘feeling isolated’ is a part of remote work but does not need to be a definer.

Many of the challenges we face in the in-person realm get heightened in the remote space given our distance and differences. From the magnification of unclear communication, lack of boundaries, unclear focus, or conflict which is not being addressed. It is metaphorically easy to ‘Sweep issues under the rug’, leading to distrust, lack of connection, and organisational and team erosion.
It is important for the group to have enough of a common focus to find traction for the collaborative conversations. If there is not enough trust, the conversations may stay on the surface, rather than going into the deeper coaching waters of mindset, values, habits etc.

It is likely that your coaching groups will connect group members around common issues facing them around remote work. It may take you into conversations around boundaries, vision, motivation, staying organised, renewal, self-awareness or identity.

What might coaching groups of remote professionals look like for you?

**With teams:**

With remote teams key coaching focus areas can range from exploring:

- **What is our vision?** – Working with a remote team around vision is often a starting point in the coaching conversation. It is what creates the alignment when people are working from different locations. The team’s vision becomes an anchor and frame to help team members prioritise in the same way.

- **Shared commitment** – Exploring the realm of shared commitment explores questions such as: What are we all committed to, no matter what? How do we have each other’s backs? How do we ask for help in the remote space? How do we provide support in the remote space?

- **Role clarity** – Clarifying roles and responsibilities is essential for remote teams, particularly when matrix relationships are involved. What am I responsible for? How does my work connect into others? If I do not do x, how will it impact others?

- **Navigating conflict and/or difficult conversations** – Similar to the in-person real of team coaching, one of the more common doorways into the coaching conversation may be a conflict and the inability for a team to have a difficult conversation. What is taboo on this team?

- **Helping team members understand ‘What is beyond the screen’** – What is important about the context of each team member? Teams will want to explore both formal and informal touchpoints, given that ‘Water cooler’ conversations are not as common. Strong remote teams have solid relationships as well as clear results.

- **Avoid the Death by Conference Call** - Another shift in coaching in the remote space is the need to leverage technology and platforms for the conversation. This can be a growth edge for some coaches. It is important to avoid the ‘death by conference call’ characterised by ‘Being talked at’ such that group members engage in frenetic multitasking on their end. In order to create an engaging virtual coaching conversation:

  - using polls to take the pulse of the group OR
  - having people indicates the areas they want coaching for that week using annotation OR
  - using virtual breakout rooms so people can connect and be in dialogue with one or two others in the call.

**Create clear agreements** – Trust and safety are essential for any coaching to take place. Be sure to co-create with your groups or teams shared agreements. These may be framed as a Ways of working or terms of engagement. How does the group or team want to operate together during your calls? What is acceptable? What is not? What assumptions need to be made explicit?

**Make it interactive** - Coaching is a dialogue. It is important that you use tools and processes that are participatory and allow people to bring their own voices in. This might include:

- using virtual breakout rooms so people can connect and be in dialogue with one or two others in the call.

**Less is more** – Everything may take more time – from asking a question and hearing from everyone, to moving people into breakout rooms. What do you want to remove from what you have planned? 20% whittling down what is planned may create more space.

**Get comfortable with silence** – Many coaches describe the silence on the other side of the phone or computer as a ‘black hole’. One of the greatest values we create as a coach is around creating the ‘pause’ for a conversation. Get comfortable with silence. Know that this may be one of the only times during the day people do have the opportunity to pause, reflect and process. It may be useful to set a timer for a fixed amount of time. That allows both you, and group members, to ease into the silence.

Expanding the coaching conversation with remote professionals in a group or a team coaching context can lead to hours of conversations that have a ripple effect globally. What do you want to incorporate into your next conversation?

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**ABOUT JENNIFER BRITTON**

Jennifer Britton is the author of five books including the Coaching Business Builder Workbook and Planner (2018), Effective Group Coaching and From One To Many: Best Practices for Team and Group Coaching (2010). Her books are being used by multiple coach training schools globally. Jennifer provides a wide range of supports for coaches and other professionals who are working with teams and groups, including ICF-CCE approved programming via her company, Potentials Realised. She is committed to helping coaches create engaging and impactful work with the teams and groups they support, while creating a thriving business.
Leading Through Change: The Alpha Group Approach To Change Management
by Iulia Sorescu (Romania)

One of the most valued skills for the future is the adaptability to change. Stability and predictability, as prerequisites for business functionality are long gone. And how can individuals and businesses alike aim for stability and predictability in times of Black Swans?1

The Impact of Highly Improbable in the business environment often come under the umbrella of disruptive change. A change that is no longer localised, but spread across the entire system, from one individual to local communities, entire cities and the society as a whole. Thus, the responsibility of leading through change comes as a difficult leadership burden – especially when leadership depicts one person.

In the context of such complexity, however, the answer to change lies in the power of co-creation. If our prediction skills are not fine-tuned for Black Swans, we can at least connect leaders, organisations, different stakeholders to put the puzzle pieces together for an enlarged perspective. Together we are better prepared for the unpredictable and able to create individual and organisational success through a ‘culture that keeps moving all the time’. (Harvard Business School Professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter)

As a life coach, I saw the power of togetherness in the process of personal transformation and I am an advocate of holistic and systemic approaches, such as Design Thinking and U-lab theory.

However, this article focuses on the co-creative approach of organisational change as seen from my position of Business Developer for The Alpha Group – a peer-to-peer executive board which folds perfectly on addressing change by bringing together business leaders in a process of creating a collaborative leadership mindset and framing challenges into opportunities.

It takes people to change a business. From this perspective, change management ‘is the discipline that guides how we prepare, equip and support individuals to successfully adopt change in order to drive organisational success and outcomes’. And this exactly what the Alpha Group does! The Alpha Group helps business leaders to achieve their company’s full potential for growth and success by inspiring and motivating them to make transformational changes within their business.

In this article, I will present the Alpha Group approach to change, as seen from a group member’s perspective.

Collective transformation
Conventional models of organisational change are hierarchical. This means that one person, the leader, comes with the change initiative and enforces them into every layer of hierarchy. This may have been a successful approach in the past. However, today’s context of constant pressure to change make this approach inadequate. We cannot longer impose change unless we coach people to take on new mindsets and demonstrate new behaviours.

In contrast with the traditional view that successful decisions start at the top and cascade down, a collaborative approach see change as the collective result of individual change. The more people are involved in the process, the closer a business gets to its desired outcomes. And most importantly, engaging everyone in the process can lead to results beyond expectations.

The Alpha Group is coaching their members to transpose their own personal transformation within their companies. In a highly cost and time efficient way, the Alpha Group creates the premises of individual change and supports its members to take action within their companies in order to drive results.

Collaboration over competition
In an era when the available information is doubling every day, we can correctly assume that only through collaboration can we understand more, get rid of personal biases and get a grasp of where stand (as individuals or as a business) within the system.

‘It does not matter whether I have a Pakistani, a Chinese person, a Brit or a Turk, man or woman, sitting in the same room, or whether I have people from sales or something else, so long as I have people with different experiences – because the chance for new ideas is much greater when you have people with different backgrounds’

(Bart Becht, CEO)

The Alpha Group creates such an environment on purpose and facilitates the collaboration between SMEs owners from different sectors. With a pragmatic purpose of doubling the value of the participating businesses, it actually facilitates collaboration. As Malcolm Gladwell would say, The Alpha Group is a connector. Moreover, it is a connector focused on working out solutions to real business challenges.

Ideally speaking, a leader bridges the gap and encourages this kind of environment where people feel safe to express themselves, to share their challenges and trust the good-will of others suggestions. In reality, though, business politics, competition, the self-centred mindsets make the collaboration difficult. The Alpha Group overcomes these impediments and creates the safe space for exploration and co-creation. The admission prerequisites – 1 million sales, SMEs and just one representative from each industry – are aimed to build trust and equity among members.
Imagine the power of ideas in a room with 12 to 20 business owners with different backgrounds in climate of openness.

Instilling change with outside perspectives

Disruptive changes should be met with disruptive responses. And one of the biggest mistakes of common approaches is to rely solely on the company leadership and its employees. As a Harvard Business Review research pointed out: ‘they (the employees) are grounded in work processes and decision-making patterns that may be dysfunctional in the new environment [...] the greater a manager’s experience away from the core organisation, the less likely that motivation remains focused on the threat to the core organisation.’

But you do not necessarily need an outsider to tackle this issue. You can bring outside perspectives to the current leadership, by involving them in a solution-focused process, where they could enlarge their perspectives.

The Alpha Group is instilling change inside SMEs through a series of 52 FastGrowth Workbooks and masterminds, where the participants are working together on a current business challenge. The mastermind process is aimed at helping the business owner whose problem is discussed to see it from different angles, to observe it from on outsider’s perspective and to find out-of-the-box solutions.

Multiple minds are greater than one. And the result of such a process is insightful:

\[\text{The insights I have gained are a game-changer, ‘This is life changing’} \]

(an Alpha Group member).

Having coaching at the core of its processes, the Alpha Group work starts by reframing the challenges as opportunities. Instead of being stuck in a problem, the Alpha Group member is supported and encouraged to focus on solutions. This is a mindset shift with long-lasting application in own business.

From a coaching perspective, we know that we often block our own progress with limiting beliefs. Thus, a successful business owner, capable of transforming their business, doubling its value and dominating their target market (The Alpha Group main objectives), is definitely one who runs on empowering belief system – for themselves and for their businesses.

To think differently, as seen by the Alpha Group, is to use coaching techniques to dig deeper for the limiting beliefs and replace them with ones that are aligned with successful objectives.

The power of togetherness in the change process. If we talk about change management, we instantly think of large organisations which need to adapt to the changes within a society. However, change management applies to smaller companies, SMEs, entrepreneurships and individuals. We all need to address the current events and adapt to constantly new requirements. In a way, today’s world requires us all to become a change manager.

As the change management definition implies, this transformation is done at three levels: emotional, cognitive and behavioural. We need to report to change differently, to see it from a different perspective and then to act out of the box with unconventional approaches, innovative action plans.

However, we cannot do this alone! Resistance to change is a psychological fact which can only be overcome together.

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While the Alpha Group is addressing all the three areas of change, it starts by helping its members feel differently. And this is meant in the most pragmatic way possible. Being a business owner in this context of disruptive changes, can be a very solitary journey. Feeling alone in the process can also be translated into overwhelm, anxiety, fear and even resistance to change. The Alpha Group is creating a climate of cooperation and collaboration which replaces the feeling of loneliness with support, the overwhelm with courage and the anxiety and fear with boldness.

The second pillar of the Alpha Group is to build a successful business mindset. The groups are supporting its members to think differently, in a manner that is efficient and productive for the development of a business.

The insights I have gained are a game-changer, ‘This is life changing’

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According to the change management theory, the essence of management in the context of change is about creating the strategies that will help people (1) adopt and do things differently, (2) think differently, (3) feel differently. A veritable change manager co-creates the change process and helps others make the change stick.

Instill change with outside perspectives

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Supporting the Lone Ranger
by Graham Borley (UK)

The nature of work has changed for many people and increasing numbers are now at least part time home or remote workers. Growing numbers are taking advantage of changes in employer attitudes and technological advances that are facilitating disparate workforces with more options for home and remote working.

In the most recent American Time Use Survey by the Bureau of Labour Statistics, 57% of workers in 2018 had a flexible schedule.

While working from home sounds great in theory, it provides ultimate flexibility and the commute is great, it is important to understand that there are some cons to working alone. A fact reflected in the Robert Half survey where 81% of workers admit there are downsides to work-from-home jobs.

One negative point is that it is easy to feel out of the loop. You are likely to miss out on the casual conversations that help people to get an understanding of acceptable and best practices as well as understanding influences within the business. It is often underestimated just how powerful this type informal learning can be.

Another downside for remote workers is that they miss the opportunity to bounce ideas and share experiences with colleagues. Talking through decisions before taking action with like-minded individuals is essential for building confidence and avoiding pitfalls.

Remote workers also often miss the feedback and the chance to critique or socialise projects that they get from managers and colleagues.

Maintaining professional competence can also be an issue. Some remote workers become so focussed on work outcomes that they forget to schedule the time for their Continuous Professional Development to happen.

When they do complete learning, it is frequently an individual activity like online learning which is not always the best medium and provides no opportunity for the learner to ask questions, test theory or discuss application with other learners or a tutor.

Smarter organisations frequently utilise new technologies supporting remote workers with a variety of forums, bulletin boards and chat rooms. These are useful but cannot replace the coffee machine gossip or a chat over a canteen lunch with colleagues, for keeping you in touch and their lack proper development opportunities.

For some remote workers, coaching and mentoring could be part of the solution. These two words are sometimes mistaken to mean the same thing, but they are subtly different. Coaching is about the development of a new skill or knowledge element and is best supported by a coach with insight into the specific topic. Mentoring is more about the application of skills or knowledge in a specific work environment. The mentor should be more experienced at the organisation and would usually be at a more senior level so that they can offer a different perspective.

Good coaches can be found who can support an individual’s development. They do not have to work for the same company or have a detailed understanding about how the organisation does things. The coach’ role is about helping the individual to achieve their learning objective.
They might also, following a training session, enhance the learning experience by checking understanding, discuss application and make suggestions for ongoing development.

A well-matched mentor can provide the sounding board that the individual is missing. The mentor will provide the opportunity to discuss, review and critique plans/projects. Helping the individual to avoid pitfalls and be more successful.

The issue for businesses is do they have the internal support to provide the mentoring and coaching networks required? Many will employ professional coaches from outside the organisation. However, mentors need the be recruited, trained and managed from within the company and because the best people act as mentors are frequently the most important/productive it can be difficult to find time for them to complete the mentoring role as well as their day job.

Another problem can be that the organisation’s systems do not easily facilitate a coaching and mentoring relationships. People who do not have face to face sessions with their coach or mentor using disparate systems can find that information can become fragmented (e.g. spread across the meeting, VOI and social media, etc.) and may allow key information to slip between the cracks? It is important that coaches and mentors share information about the individual’s development, but this is very difficult with disparate systems and is often overlooked.

Keeping records on individual development over a period of time is important for the individual and organisation, but it is not straightforward for remote coaching and mentoring. Another issue for professional workers who need to prove their Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to maintain status is that this type of development is almost impossible to document in an acceptable format.

These areas largely support for individuals who work in larger organisations who have dedicated support for remote workers. However, where can individuals whose organisations are not as understanding or are too small to provide real support turn for support?

Members of professional institutions may turn to them for support and many do provide this.

For others one possible solution could well be a strongly matched independents who can complete both roles. They need to have a deep understanding of the subject and a real experience of the same industry. However, the coach would also need to have an understanding of what remote working is about and the flexibility to be able to provide support when needed rather than at scheduled meetings.

The important thing for all parties to remember is that the Lone Rangers do need support. Out of sight should not mean out of mind. Some key pointers include:

- Ensure that remote workers have access to social/informal information channels with in your organisation, even if this means creating new ones for this purpose
- Promote a mentoring/big brother culture where this role is seen as important
- Look at your systems to ensure that you have an easy way for Coaching and Mentoring to thrive.

Well-being at Work
Why is Well-being so Important?
by Galia Yakimova (UK)

Most of us would acknowledge that work is good for us. Alongside that all-important income, our jobs give us a sense of purpose, identity, structure and valued friendships.

But what if the work begins to affect our well-being?

Firstly, what do we know as the meaning of well-being?

The definition of well-being, according to Wikipedia (Naci and Ioannidis):

"Well-being refers to diverse and interconnected dimensions of physical, mental, and social well-being that extend beyond the traditional definition of health. It includes choices and activities aimed at achieving physical vitality, mental alacrity, social satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment, and personal fulfilment."

Well-being is an approach to personal health that emphasises individual responsibilities for well-being through the practice of health-promoting lifestyle behaviours. Wellness is a pursuit of overall health in physical and mental matters.

The holistic model encompasses the physiological, mental, emotional, social, spiritual, and occupational aspects of individuals. The six dimensions include: emotional, intellectual, spiritual, occupational, social and physical wellness.
I hope you can see here that there is a link right back to our vision happy, healthy and aspiring communities and to our definition of health and well-being.

I wonder how often CEOs, MDs & business owners ask themselves these questions: ‘Is the working environment in my Company Happy & Healthy?’, ‘What can I do to improve it?’ What are our Company’s culture and core values? And why is Well-Being so important? According to Financial Times The UK government is backing workplace wellness schemes: ‘Investing in workplace inclusivity, health and wellbeing is critical’ it says As ageing populations, cost inflation and tight budgets constrain national health spending, more governments are looking for companies to fill gaps in provision that are opening up.

UK government policy consultation last year on work, health and disability illustrates the increased role it sees for business in preventing illness. The green paper called for jobs that actively support and nurture health and wellbeing, provided by inclusive employers who understand the link between work, health and disability’. Among initiatives praised in the report were Barclays’ ‘This is Me’ campaign to build awareness of mental health problems, which has now spread to more than 70 organisations across London.

‘Businesses drive our economy and are rightly focused on growth, productivity and delivering a return on their investments. Investing in workplace inclusivity, health and wellbeing is critical to these goals,’ the government said. Here is what the NHS core strategy states: ‘Healthy People, Living Healthy Lives in Healthy Communities.’

Let’s think for a moment: If we do not have a healthy people in post, who will be doing the work? If we do not have our staff in a good emotional, spiritual and physical state what quality of work and services can we expect them to provide? And what will the financial outcome be?

In the last few years the media are all speaking about ‘mental health in the workplace’: how to recognise symptoms earlier, how to reduce the stress at work, how to prevent staff becoming overwhelmed, depressed, de-motivated and physically ill?

There is a move now for leadership to have a soft-touch approach to their staff, of creating a friendly environment, improving communications in vertical and horizontal, with Human Resources looking after the company staff, offering life coaching services and counselling for their staff.

The era of bullying, demands and one way communicative systems are almost gone. Now there is a policy of offering options with healthy food and drinks, reducing working hours and stimulating staff to do sporting activities: to cycle to work, to walk, to spend time in the park. Companies have started to think creatively. We see roof gardens, indoor waterfalls, plenty of colour, rooms for nursing mothers, for prayer, quiet paces, as well as gyms and spas.

Some of the companies are offering childcare 3 days per week, so mothers can go to work with their children – children who will be looked after during the working hours. Amazingly, companies these days are thinking of everything to reduce the stress of their employees just to increase the productivity and to create an environment, where their employee are happy and satisfied and want to give 100% of themselves.

It is these things that make the differences between those companies and the ones who are constantly struggling to find good staff to work for them. It is wonderful to see that companies these days are recognising that their staff are the greatest asset. They have started to invest in them. We are now seeing and hearing that companies are declaring ‘Identity & Core Values’, how the staff they hire are related to them, developing team building days, coaching and well-being in the work place Ten years ago this was virtually unknown.

Recognising staff needs and individual strengths, indeed, the important of the person itself, shows huge differences in today’s leadership.

Here are well-being factors that leaders should look at in order to have a healthy, happy and fruitful teams and working environments.

1. Recognition – ‘They are seeing my talents & appreciate my work, I am accepted, loved, valued.’

2. Respect – ‘I am one of them. I am part of the family. They Honour me.’

3. Support – ‘I am not alone, I am secure, I am confident, I am motivated’ and ‘Yes, I Can, Do It!’

4. Activity – ‘I am doing activities out of my working place to keep me active and focus and to clear my mind.’

5. Achievements – ‘I am proud of myself of all what I have achieved and that this makes my boss and Company be proud of me. Now my wife and family will be happy and proud of me also.’

6. Connection – ‘My relationships with my colleagues are healthy, and my relationship with my boss is healthy and I am happy, that we are one Team and working as a one family.’

7. Contribution – ‘I am so happy that I am bringing contribution to my company & colleagues and to the world. This make me feel so happy and fulfilled. I am happy that my values are in alignment with my company values.’

All of these should be DNA factors in a company’s structure. If some of them are missing from the core values, then there is a problem. And this is often what we see and experience in different working places. When people feel insignificant, then a link is missing.

In general, as humans, we want to feel appreciated, our work to be recognised and valued, to be honoured & rewarded, both at work and at home. As we are given the ability to create, make changes and contribute we have these desires to be recognised. Whatever we do and wherever we go, we carry this in us, and this is a major driving force, moving us forward in life.

Tony Robbins says:

‘Life is really about creating meaning – and meaning does not come from what you get; it comes from what you give.

As everything is energy in flow, everything constantly is moving, even the physical, solid things, which is unseen by our eyes, there is movements, and based on this, we have to be aware and pay more attention to it, because on this base our lives are created.

This is why it is very important of what we think, how we act, what we say, because this is the way we create things, and we manifest them to come to our physical reality. We create and manifest this all the time; it is in our nature. And it is very important to ask that, as everything is energy, on which frequencies are we vibrating: lower or higher? Because lower vibrations attract negative thoughts, and negative outcomes, we cannot move forwards and upwards.
The Higher vibrations attract light, and positive thoughts and positive and healthy outcome, opening up creativity and we expand and rise up.

This is based on a law of attraction and a law of vibration.

*The law of attraction states that whatever you focus on, think about, read about, and talk about intensely, you are going to attract more of into your life.*

Jack Canfield


And I want to finish with these for us to Remember: When our Mind, Body and Soul are in alignment we are Congruent. In the business, when our collective minds and souls are in alignment we operate as one body, one team and we create and achieve company success.

See:

- The Law of Attraction - by Esther Hicks, Jerry Hicks
- The Science of Getting Rich - Book by Wallace D. Wattles
- The Key to Living the Law of Attraction - Book by D. D. Watkins and Jack Canfield

Here are two books I suggest you read ([https://theewgroup.com/best-books-workplace-wellbeing](https://theewgroup.com/best-books-workplace-wellbeing))

Who Moved my Cheese: An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and In Your Life - Who Moved my Cheese is a modern classic, in which bestselling author Dr. Spencer Johnson highlights the need to be flexible if we are maintain well-being at work and enjoy personal growth at the same time. His playful narrative illustrates why being open to change and embracing new passions makes life an adventure in itself.

The Happiness Track: How to Apply the Science of Happiness to Accelerate Your Success. In The Happiness Track, author Emma Seppala explains why the speed of our lives is reaching overwhelming levels, leaving us stressed and burnt out.

ABOUT GALIA YAKIMOVA

Regional Director at The Alpha Group (London)/Life Coaching/Public Speaking/Healing Retreats/Privileged Partner at Vertera.org - Healthy, live food.

Well - Being is her passion and lifestyle. Having an understanding of Mind, Body & Soul and the power of spiritual wisdom and touch, she invested in bodywork, beauty & life coaching. Galia wanted to grow my Well-Being business to help more people to live stress-free and to experience joy in their lives. And this is what she was doing for the last 15 years.

Galia joined The Alpha Group recently as she loves the vision of the Company and opportunity to be able to help SME’s to grow in the unique way and also contributing to the UK economy growth. By working with CEOs, MDs & Business owners Galia sees her vision coming of creating Well - Being Society Universally coming through. This is her little contribution to the World.


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According to Spencer Johnson in his book, "Who Moved My Cheese", the ‘cheese is always moving’. In other words, we know change is occurring around us constantly. Spencer’s character Haw made the following observations about change, which are referred to as ‘The Handwriting on the Wall’:

Change Happens – They keep moving the cheese.

Anticipate Change – Get ready for the cheese to move

Monitor Change – Smell the cheese often so you know when it is getting old.

Adapt to Change Quickly – The quicker you let go of old cheese, the sooner you can enjoy new cheese.

Change – Move with the cheese.

Enjoy Change – Savour the adventure and enjoy the taste of the new cheese.

Be ready to Change quickly and enjoy it again and again – They keep moving the cheese.

Change leadership must be able to see the ‘handwriting on the wall’

Key Change Factors (KCFs)

Leading change is much easier when you understand the key attributes of change. We call these attribute key change factors (KCFs) because they help define how change factors into—or impacts—your organisation.

Understanding each of these KCFs and how they impact organisational performance has helped me in my efforts to lead change.

Key Change Factors (KCFs)

- Culture
- Timing
- Tenacity
- Leadership

Four Major Attributes Affect Change

The Key Change Factors can be divided into four (4) major groups:

- **Timing** – because change is constant, and timing is everything
- **Leadership** – because change requires shared vision, strategy, and goals
- **Team Work** – because change is only successful if it is executed and execution requires a plan and the work of strategically aligned teams
- **Culture** – because change requires innovation and creativity, which organically occurs when the culture embraces change and includes diverse perspectives

**Sixteen (16) Key Change Factors:**

Each of the KCFs listed below can be associated with at least one or more of the four major groups:

1. **Change is constant.** It really does not matter if you initiate the change, if it is forced, or if just naturally occurs, we live in a world that is constantly changing.

2. **Change often occurs over time.** Leaders and change agents who take the time up front to develop a strategic plan with specific executable objectives, and who also allow time to address unforeseen issues, will have greater success in executing change.

3. **One change often leads to another.** The truth is that sometimes when a team does strategic brainstorming, it discovers that other changes (in the organisation, the process, the product, the people, the technology, etc.) are required before the desired change can successfully occur. At other times, brainstorming reveals a set of completely new opportunities that were not previously discussed or anticipated. When this happens, being able to adapt and change, to be agile and flexible, is critical.

4. **Timing is everything.** The speed of change or a company’s agility—for example, its ability to quickly adjust and ‘morph’ its efforts—can impact its ability to take advantage of the change opportunity.

5. **Change must be led.** Leading change requires a much different set of skills than managing a department or team. Organisations that confuse the two roles often have difficulty implementing and executing change.

6. **Change requires shared vision, strategy, and goals.** Before the change is implemented, there must be a group of key stakeholders who get the vision. This group must also agree on the strategy and desired goals.

7. **Change does not have to begin at the top, but change does require commitment from the top.** In fact, change often begins because someone (often in the trenches) discovers an opportunity and initiates change to take advantage of it. But one thing is true: organisational change—whether it is related to operations or personnel—if it is to be effective—must have a commitment from the top. An organisation’s leadership should lead change.

8. **Change leadership requires courage and commitment.** The wimpy and fainthearted need not apply. Why? Change requires risk, and sometimes that risk is so large that if you dare take it there is a 50-50 chance of failure. You may lose everything, including your job! But if you are not willing to see it through, if you are not all-in, the people you are trying to lead will lose faith in you, in their ability to achieve the goals, and everyone will lose—the ability of the company, the employees, the customers, and you! Agility is key: You must fail fast and move quickly to the next opportunity.

9. **Change must be communicated well and often.** Communicating change is like writing a letter: you must clearly state its purpose up front, provide specific details, including any benefits associated with the change, then reiterate the reason for the change. And because change is often difficult to accept, this communication must be repeated across every available communications channel. Messaging must be developed so that it is appropriate for each of the levels of the organisation.

10. **Change requires the work of a team, and not just any team.** Understanding and being able to optimise team dynamics are critical to success. Using team profile and assessment tools such as DISC™, Strength Finders™, etc., can help team members relate and collaborate better while enhancing the leader’s ability to utilise team members more strategically in the change effort.

11. **Change is only effective when it is executed, and execution requires shared vision, strategy, goals, and planning.** A plan of execution must be developed to provide a roadmap for the rest of the organisation, so that each person understands his/her role and the specific tasks that must be completed to successfully achieve the shared goals.

12. **Change is more easily integrated into organisations when it is inspired, not forced.** Leaders or change agents must find ways to empower people and to inspire adoption, even when the change is forced.

13. **Change requires purposeful innovation.** If you use the same people and you do the same things repeatedly, you will get the same results. You must be willing to purposefully innovate so the change is integrated across all aspects of the organisation.

14. **Diversity and inclusion are essential for change.** In organisations, diversity is not just a gender or ethnic issue. Sometimes diversity is related to differences in industry experience, age and/or seniority, culture, and more. And having diversity without inclusion misses the mark! Organisations often miss out on opportunities because they fail to listen to ‘outsiders’ or ‘new’ people who have different perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds.

15. **Change that just happens and is unmanaged can be chaotic.** Good leaders know how to thrive on chaos and to capitalise on innovation that springs from unstructured situations.
Finally, sometimes change is not possible because of culture. While effective change should be a part of an organisation’s strategy, sometimes ‘culture eats strategy for breakfast,’ as Peter Drucker is said to have famously observed. Change agents and their leadership should not be expected to win a popularity contest. Executing change requires courage and commitment, sprinkled with a dose of diplomacy. While people in an organisation may not initially embrace the change agent or the change, with proper planning and development of executable tasks, people can begin to see and celebrate progress as each milestone of the change is achieved. When this does not happen, the organisation’s leadership must step back to examine and address cultural stymying blocks before real change can occur.

This article is an excerpt from the book, Leading Change, A Practical Guide for Change Agents, by Dr. Peggie W. Koon. To learn more about change leadership, contact the author via email at: peggie.koon@gmail.com

**Key Thoughts & Questions:**
- How might you use the KCFs to help you see the “handwriting on the wall”?
- How can you use your understanding of the KCF’s to help lead the change?
- Which of these KCFs applies to your own specific change initiatives? Which of your company’s KPIs are impacted by at least one KCF identified above?

**About Dr. Peggie W. Koon**
Dr. Peggie Ward Koon, is an executive strategist, change leadership and management consultant, author, and coach. Dr. Koon is the former CEO and Founder of Leading Change, LLC. She is also the former Vice President of Audience at the Augusta Chronicle/Chronicle Media, Morris Communications, Augusta, GA (USA). She was the 2014 President of the International Society of Automation (ISA, www.isa.org ) and the 2015 Chair of the Automation Federation (AF, www.automationfederation.org ). She has more than 40 years of experience in change leadership, management, IT and OT systems - with specific expertise in the automotive, aerospace, nuclear reprocessing, insulating products, textile manufacturing, and media industries. To learn more about Dr. Koon, connect with her on LinkedIn at: http://www.linkedin.com/in/peggiewardkoon or visit her blog at: https://peggiewardkoon.wordpress.com/

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- Designed from the ground up for coaches just like you

**Think of each of the listed KCFs as an opportunity.**

**Change Leadership must be able to see the handwriting on the wall:**
- Change Happens
- Anticipate Change
- Monitor Change
- Adapt to Change Quickly
- Change
- Enjoy Change
- Be ready to Change quickly and enjoy it again and again

**Key Questions:**
The Key Change Factors (KCFs) are divided into four main groups: **Timing, Leadership, Team Work and Culture**.
How might you use the KCFs to help you see the “handwriting on the wall”?
Shut Up or Speak Up Work Spaces?

In workplaces that employees feel are caring, fair and reliable; know that they are appreciated, belong and are free to fully express themselves, may safely engage and contribute their views and concerns without any fear of backlash or of being ignored – they find satisfaction and meaning in what they do. Their organisations benefit by the sharing of diverse viewpoints, misgivings, questioning and ideas, and achieve greater agility and resilience, happy and motivated workforces, better and more sustainable results. Such workplaces may be termed ‘psychologically safe’ and are carefully crafted and cultivated by winning organisations.

Conversely, in psychologically unsafe workplaces, that is, where there are obstacles to expression and the contribution of knowledge and feelings, where the ‘employee voice’ is curtailed, there is fear of reprisal, being penalised, ostracised or negatively assessed for sharing uncomfortable information or not ‘towing the line’ (a personal risk) - then the organisation will tend to perform below par. We have noticed a widening risk) - then the organisation will tend to show compassion to themselves and others of unconditional, positive regard, members learn to ‘psychic prisons’. There are no scary performance conversations. Employees are co-leaders, not merely factors of production to be maximised. In turn, they engage intellectually, emotionally and socially. (Weller, C. 2019). There is an atmosphere of unconditional, positive regard, members learn to show compassion to themselves and others and ‘see each other through’ rather than ‘see through each other’.

In the divisive and the polarised age in which we find ourselves, psychologically safe workplaces deserve loud and prolonged applause for bringing about cohesiveness and sustained high levels of performance. This is captured by the acronym CLAP, which stands for Culture, Leaders, Attributes and Practices.

In such an open culture, employees are confident, curious and energised, and good things happen. CEO of Quantum Workplace, Greg Harris has stated in a significant research report that The two most important organisational aptitudes today are innovation and resilience, and culture is the single biggest driver of both. Therefore, the link to wealth creation should not be a surprise'. (Wright, H. 2013)

Leaders (individual and collective) carry the primary responsibility for creating psychologically safe workplaces.

Sustaining individual wholeness and ability to flourish, whatever the circumstances, is essential to living a good life. If we are integrated (whole) and not fragmented, we find purpose and meaning. This requires that we feed (maintain and nourish) our inner and outer lives – through reflection and relationships. And through a resilience-capacity that keeps things together and healthy.

Studies of our different brain states show that we cannot continually drive in first gear without burning out the engine. We can’t stay in Beta mode, but learn to gear down and ‘sharpen the axe’ for consistent peaking. Being ‘idle’ without feeling guilty helps well-being and introduces balance to all-too-often hectic, frenetic lives. But why sharpen the axe merely to repeat a vicious cycle of working frenetically until a rest is imperative, then resting only to repeat the process? - Work, break, work, break – if harmony, balance, seamlessness between different compartments of one’s life does not transpire? David Whyte points out that we have ‘marriage’ commitments to another, to work and also to self and that “in these pages I am looking for a marriage of marriages”.

He says that our ‘current understanding of work-life balance is too simplistic. People find it hard to balance work with family, family with self, because it might not be a question of balance. Some other dynamic is in play, something to do with a very human attempt at happiness that does not quantify different parts of life and then set them against one another. We are collectively exhausted because of our inability to hold competing parts of ourselves together in a more integrated way’. (Whyte, D. 2010)

When integrated, we carry the same principles, values, relating habits, ethics and behaviours across work, social life and family life ‘boundaries’.

Moods, emotions and states are contagious. People frequently ‘catch’ one another’s emotions and this spreads like wildfire. Negative emotions tend to be expressed more emphatically and negative emotional contagion runs deep, hurting organisations. Aware leaders who discover what is required to regulate their emotions effectively, and can habitually express positive emotions such as enthusiasm, openness, and joy, reduce negative emotional contagion. (Reitz, M & Higgins, J. 2019). This needs inner work to address shadow sides, unconscious biases, raise consciousness, identify personal triggers of negative emotions and deal with them maturely.

Much has been written about the dark side of leadership. Refreshingly, the British Psychological Society recently published a report ‘Living life with so much care’ which attempts to address shadow sides, unconscious biases. (Jarrett, C. 2019):
Aware, sensitive, calm, steady, compassionate (which soothes and bonds) and focused leaders help others to experience similar psychologically safe states. This empowers followers to think clearly, innovate, and perform at peak. Mindfulness and reflection practices are the fundamental operating system that drives all that they do. In our coaching work with leaders we place emphasis on two character-elements borrowed from theology: metanoia (higher level, non-dualistic thinking) and kenosis (a prosocial, other-orientation fed by self-emptying). (Williams, G & Cooper, E. 2018). They are not afraid to speak out clearly on wider environmental, societal and economic issues and allow healthy discussion of any topic in their organisations. And they tell transcending stories that capture minds and hearts, and inspire.

Attributes vary greatly by the organisation, but common threads in psychologically safe workplaces are civility, respect, inclusion (Exclusion causes feelings of social pain and distress, rejection, loneliness), and leveraging the richness of diversity to bring about equity, support, belonging.

On Abraham Maslow’s famous needs hierarchy, feeling loved and belonging is followed by finding support, belonging. The attributes outlined above emerge with the habitual practice of certain behaviours and actions. The story holds enormous potential to facilitate learning, share experiences, establish rapport, forge connection, hold empathy, convey insights, stimulate the imagination, support a prosocial culture. (Williams, G & Haarhoff, D. 2016) In the coaching situations, story (and imagery, symbol, archetype, metaphor ...) can be effectively utilised to encourage reframing, active imagination, time-lining, plumbing the depths, uncover the underlying truth.

Coaching, in many formats, plays a major role in establishing and sustaining a psychologically safe workplace. These formats may include ‘traditional’ professional coach: client, peer to peer, manager as coach, team coaching, self-coaching. Non-judgemental, unconditional acceptance, trust, emotional regulation and respect are key elements. We use special tools to guide and facilitate the coaching journey.

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Recommended Resources:

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Thinking of Moving on From the Corporate World? 10 Questions to Ask by Deepak Sawhney (India)

My friends & ex colleagues from corporate world very often talk to me, candidly, their wish to get out of a 10-5 routine and do what their heart desires. Having observed me for few years operating independently in the domain of executive & business coaching, the questions are about when I thought about it & how I went about it? I do share honestly all of it. It seems to build their confidence. I am, however, cautious enough to add that each of us who change their career direction have to think through their transition and journey. Each individual is unique and so is their thinking.

At the end of the day, each one of us takes our decisions based on our goals & current situation. It is therefore imperative that we focus on these two and ask ourselves the questions.

My ten questions would be:

1. What would I love doing (goals) if I do not wish to continue a job in the corporate world?
2. What are my key requirements and desires that I want fulfilled by doing what I love?
3. What is special and unique about these requirements that it can only be fulfilled by change?
4. What more do I need to acquire (knowledge & skills) to do that successfully?
5. Who all would be helpful & supportive of my plans & thereafter?
6. Which stakeholders will be impacted by my decision?
7. What could be expectations & needs of the stakeholders that I must take care of? How can I address the needs of my stakeholders (Parents, Kids, Spouse) in the transition phase?
8. What actions would I need to take to be successful in my new career? Am I committed and comfortable doing this?
9. What are my FINANCIAL obligations that I need to manage now & later (within the next 2 years of change)?
10. What would I miss out on, if I do not make a career change now?

There could be questions, different and more, which people who have changed careers could tell you. It is my view that answers to these 10 questions would make you reflect rigorously and ultimately take a better decision.

So, when you come to a point where you cannot tolerate where you are, because you want to celebrate your goals, it is time for a new start. Begin with these questions.
Then any time one of the monkeys tries to climb the ladder, spray the entire cage with cold water. Hanging from the ceiling. Underneath the bananas, place a ladder just tall enough to reach them.

Imagine conducting this experiment. Put five monkeys in a cage with a bunch of bananas hanging from the ceiling. Underneath the bananas, place a ladder just tall enough to reach them. Then any time one of the monkeys tries to climb the ladder, spray the entire cage with cold water. Pretty soon, the monkeys learn to avoid the ladder and they just give up on the bananas.

Then take one of the monkeys out of the cage and replace it with another monkey—monkey number six—and put down your sprayer. The new monkey has no idea about the booby-trapped ladder and water, so sooner or later, it tries to climb the ladder. When it does, the other four monkeys jump all over it to prevent getting a cold shower. The new monkey, of course, has no idea why it was attacked. Despite that, when another original monkey is replaced, and the same thing happens, even monkey number six participates in the attack.

Now, keep replacing monkeys, one at a time until none of the original monkeys are left. Still, all five monkeys will avoid the ladder, and attack any new monkey that tries to climb it. They all obey the same rules of behaviour, even though none of them have any idea why.

This is how corporate policy is formed.

That story has been told in many forms and in many places. The original author is unknown. But it does appear to be loosely based on an actual experiment by G. R. Stephenson in 1967 with rhesus monkeys.

The point, of course, is that rule books do not govern behaviour in any organisation. Behaviour is dictated by what is rewarded or punished, even if the original reason for that rule is long forgotten and perhaps no longer present. This holds true whether the reward or punishment is witnessed in person or relayed through a story. With monkeys in a cage, of course, it must be witnessed personally. In a corporate environment of humans, it is usually a story that carries the message. Here is a case in point.

Getting ‘Polked’

At the corner of Pike Street and Columbia Parkway in downtown Cincinnati, right across from Procter & Gamble’s world headquarters, stands a 100-year-old, eight-story building. Today it serves as owner-occupied condominiums. But in the 1980s and 1990s, it was a commercial office building, known by the name of its largest tenant, R.L. Polk & Company.

Over one of those first free lunches, one of our trainers regaled my new-hire class with stories about the company. The first was a highly engaging one about two of our predecessors several years earlier.

Two young men, just out of college, had joined P&G and spent their requisite time in the Polk Building. A few weeks later, one of them arrived at work without his wallet. Not wishing to spend an entire afternoon working on an empty stomach, and too embarrassed to ask anyone for a loan, he remembered the free lunches across the street. He simply walked into the Polk Building, went to the cafeteria, ordered his lunch, and enjoyed his free meal.

Pleased with his resourcefulness, he shared his exploit with his roommate and convinced him to join him the next day for a free lunch. Together, they walked in and leisurely consumed their free meal without a single question or sideways glance from anyone. There were no security guards to keep them out, no signature required, no badges to swipe to authenticate their “trainee” status.

All new hires spent at least a week there during their first-year learning about the company and how to do their jobs. It was also the subject of the first story I ever heard told at P&G.

Part of the training philosophy at the Polk Building was that the most effective learning takes place when the student is completely immersed in the material and isolated from distractions of the main office across the street. The floor was equipped with a cafeteria that served a free lunch and snacks to all trainees to keep them in the building and focused on their studies. And since the only people on the floor were the trainees and trainers, they did not even have the need for a cash register.

Emboldened by their success, they repeated the exercise twice more that week and several times over the rest of the month. Of course, after seeing the same faces returning for lunch so often over such a long period of time, the cafeteria staff began to wonder what was going on. Even the instructors teaching the courses have usually never in the building more than a week at a time. They had full-time jobs across the street to get back to as well. Had these two been hired as P&G’s first full-time trainers? The women in the cafeteria made a few phone calls to check, and quickly realised these two were interlopers, bilking the company one lunch at a time.

A Free Lunch?

Getting Caught

Despite their pleas of ignorance, the story ended with their unceremonial exit from the company, the details of which were highly entertaining and almost certainly exaggerated by our host. The laughter at the lunch table continued among my colleagues and ended with the coining of a new phrase that meant being fired for stealing from the company in a flagrantly stupid fashion. From then on, we referred to such an expulsion as being “Polked.”

It was never clear to us if the story was true or apocryphal. But it did not matter. It stuck. There was no entry in the policy manual that told us we would get fired for eating in the Polk Building if we were not in training. But after hearing that story, none of us would even consider repeating the offence.

More importantly, it puts us on notice that there are probably all kinds of bad behaviours that could get you fired without being explicitly told so in advance. The story taught us to use our common sense of what’s right and wrong. We did not need a rule book. If you do right, good things happen. If you do wrong, there are consequences, up to and including getting fired.
The story, and the phrase coined from it, became a self-policing mechanism among my peers. If any of us ever said or did anything even remotely questionable, they would be quickly met with a probing look and the admonition, ‘Careful, genius. Keep that up and you will get Polked.’

The Lesson

Rarely does anyone ever actually read a company policy manual. The purpose manuals primarily serve is a legal one. If the company is ever sued for wrongfully terminating an employee who broke the rules, the company lawyer can cite chapter and verse in front of the jury exactly the policy the now-terminated employee violated.

But if your objective is to keep people from violating the rules in the first place, the policy manual will do you little good, because nobody reads it.

So how do employees learn the rules of an organisation? One way is through their own behaviour and experience. If they get punished for something, they quickly learn not to do it again. It must have been against the rules, written or not. If they get rewarded for something, they will keep doing it.

But nobody can possibly break all the rules themselves. So, the main way people learn the rules is through the stories they hear about other people—those who broke the rules and suffered the consequences, and those who did not and got rewarded. In addition to your legally required policy manual, what you need are some good stories, like this one. Find yours and tell them.

[Adapted from Lead with a Story: A Guide to Crafting Business Narratives that Captivate, Convince, and Inspire by Paul Smith]

ABOUT PAUL SMITH

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