

Mentoring for Change

executive mentoring and coaching, values management, storytelling

Welcome to the Mentoring for Change newsletter.

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With Best Wishes




On Valuing

We all do better at work and in the rest of our lives if we have the experience that what we do matters, that we are valued, and that our presence makes a difference to others. One way we experience this is by hearing regularly from others how they value what we do. But what is the most effective way to give this kind of feedback?

Probably the most *common* form of feedback involves telling people what they're doing wrong and how they should be doing it. Whilst this may on occasion lead to improved performance, it certainly doesn't make people feel valued. So instead, it is often suggested that feedback should focus on what the person is doing right so that they are encouraged to do more of it and feel appreciated.

What both these approaches – focussing on what doesn't work or on what does work - have in common is that the feedback giver decides what is right and what is wrong. But, in giving feedback that evaluates the person and their behaviour, we implicitly attempt to impose our view of the person on that person: we try to shape and mould them to what we see them to be: we presumptuously entitle ourselves to determine what makes them valuable. And, in doing that, we implicitly devalue the person's view of themselves.

So for example, someone may say to you "That was an excellent presentation you gave yesterday. You really understood the key issues. You were stunning." Which is nice to hear. But the problem is that you have your view of how excellent the presentation was, how well you

understood the key issues, and how stunning you were. And, if your view is different, to accept the appreciation you have to devalue your own experience.

So what is the alternative? Kegan and Lahey in their recent book "How The Way We Talk Can Change The Way We Work" suggest that the most powerful feedback occurs when we don't evaluate or characterise the other person's attributes but rather describe our own experience of what has happened. Instead of "Alan, I appreciate what a generous person you are", we might say "Alan, I really appreciate the way you took the time to fill me in on what I missed – it made a real difference to me". So instead of telling Alan something of who we think he is, he learns what your experience of him or his actions is.

Thus, rather than praising, or positively defining a person to themselves, we inform the person about our experience of them. By not trying to tell someone who they are and how they are doing but instead telling them about the impact they have on others we empower them in two ways: by giving them information about the impact they have on those around them and by giving them the freedom to be who they are.

Smiley Faces

To complement the Inner Game feature (see over), here's a story from the December 2000 issue of Fast Company:

When my daughter Chelsea was eight, I coached her softball team. On one of the first days of practice, I have everyone try to do some batting. I take a really soft,

Classic Coaching Models – The Inner Game

Po – i = Pe

In the early 1970s Tim Gallwey, on a year's sabbatical from Harvard, was doing some tennis coaching at his local club. Noticing that players often improved their play despite his coaching rather than because of it, he became curious about how learning was actually taking place. He noticed that there was an internal conversation going on in the player's head and he got curious as to who was speaking to whom! Gallwey labelled the part that was doing all the talking ("Get your racket back early", "That was a dumb shot", "Come on, concentrate", etc) Self 1 and the part being talked at Self 2.

In reflecting upon his own tennis game, Gallwey also noticed that when he was playing at his best, he wasn't trying to control his shots with self-instruction and evaluation. He expresses this experience of how he is able to play closer to his potential when the interference produced by this self talk is reduced in the equation:

Potential – Interference = Performance, or

$$Po - i = Pe$$

This "inner game" of how to reduce the interferences that Self 1 generates which prevent us from being in the high performance flow states associated with Self 2 is what the Inner Game (IG) coach focuses on. One way of doing this is to give Self 1 something to do, as in the Smiley Faces story below.

This story also illustrates the key role of *non-judgemental awareness* which can, on its own, lead to learning and improved performance. Or, as Gallwey puts it, "Awareness is curative". To generate focussed awareness, you will often see an IG coach repeatedly asking the following sequence of questions: "What do you notice? ...", "What else? ...", "Which of these is most interesting? ...". Successfully done this moves the coachee into a state of focussed but relaxed concentration which leaves no space for Self 1 and so releases Self 2's potential. It also ensures that it is the client's interest, rather than the coaches agenda, that drives the coaching making this a highly non-directive form of coaching.

More at www.theinnergame.com

spongy ball, and I toss it to the first girl. She's standing maybe 10 feet away, I'm throwing baby tosses, and she screams and hides her head. So I say, "Hey, no problem, Suzy. Go to the back of the line. That's fine. Betsy, you step up." Next girl in line. She does the same thing - buries her head and screams. So I'm realizing that this is going to be a really long practice if we don't do something different.

I go out to my car where I have my handy whiteboard markers in my briefcase. I take the bag of practice balls and draw four smiley faces - red, black, blue, and green - on each ball. When you look at a ball, all you see is one smiley face. I go back out and call the girls back over: "Okay. We're going to play a different game this time," I say. "This time, your job is to name the color of the smiley face. That's all you have to do."

So little Suzy stands up, and I toss a ball by her. She watches it all the way and goes, "Red." Next girl, Betsy, gets up there, Betsy goes, "Green." They're all just chirping with excitement because they can identify the color of the smiley face, so I say, "Okay. Now I want you to do the same thing, only this time I want you to hold the bat on your shoulder when the ball goes by." Same level of success. Excitement builds. The third time through, I ask them to touch the smiley face with the bat.

We beat our opponents 27 to 1 in the first game. I can't tell you how many Little League baseball games I have

been to where parents and coaches are yelling at the boys, "Stand up straight. Hold up that bat elbow. Dig in that back foot. Rotate those hips." They're giving all kinds of detailed instructions to get the kids to change their actions - instead of doing what I did, which was to work hard on shifting the kids' perceptions. When you shift people's perceptions, their actions follow.

Events

July 9-10 2001: Oxford School of Coaching & Mentoring Conference, Oxford, England. More at www.ocsm.co.uk

August 16-18, 2001: 6th Annual ICF Conference, Chicago, USA. More at www.coachfederation.org

Sept 12 2001: Next School of Coaching Accredited Coach Training Programme starts (10 days over 3 months). More at www.theschoolofcoaching.com

October 29-31 2001: 4th Coaching & Mentoring Conference, London. More at www.linkageinc.com/coaching2001e/

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