

Mentoring for Change

executive mentoring and coaching, leadership, storytelling

Welcome to the Mentoring for Change newsletter. In this issue:

- Working Identity
- Classic Models – Solution-Focused Coaching
- Time Management

With best wishes

Heike the Mentor



Working Identity

Our increasing affluence coupled with the ever-increasing rate of change in the world of work gives us the opportunity, or sometimes the necessity, of changing careers several times during our lives. As Herminia Ibarra points out in a recent article in HBR (*How to Stay Stuck in the Wrong Career*, Dec 2002, pp 40-47), the conventional approach to this is to try to work out which career to follow and then go off and do it.

The problem is that this “plan and implement” approach doesn’t work for significant career transitions. Ibarra suggests that this is because what we do is strongly determined by our Working Identity – our sense of self in our professional roles, what we convey about our selves and others, and ultimately how we live our working lives.

If this is true then changing careers means redefining our Working Identity. We often think of ourselves as having a single monolithic identity but, as psychologists such as Roberto Assagioli, the originator of Psychosynthesis, have suggested, we are actually a multitude of selves. These selves, or sub-personalities, co-exist within us. Some get a lot of air-time, others less; some we are comfortable with, others we fear or deny; some inspire us, others keep us wedded to routine. But in all their variety and diversity, they contain the seeds of who we can become and of new Working Identities.

To explore these possible selves we should use instead a “test and learn” model of change in which we seek opportunities to experience different aspects of ourselves and make our alternative futures more vivid, more tangible and more doable. Ibarra identifies three basic techniques:

- **Crafting Experiments:** The only way to figure out what we really want to do is by giving it a try and

discovering if the reality matches our fantasies. Most people create new identities on the side at first, for example by getting involved in extracurricular activities and weekend projects.

- **Shifting Connections:** Who we spend time with influences who we become. So another thing we can do is to find people who can help us see who we are becoming and help us grow into our new selves. This may be an individual mentor or coach, or a group such as a new professional community.
- **Making Sense:** We are the stories that we tell about ourselves. Therefore key to redefining our Working Identity is finding a new, more meaningful story to tell about who we are and who we are becoming. We must tell and retell our story, allowing it to evolve.

Each of these approaches will require many iterations – we try some activity and discover that we love one part of it but can’t stand another part so we craft a new experiment; or we try telling a different story about what we’re doing with our lives and notice which parts resonate.

Ibarra gives an example of Gary, a former investment banker, whose possible selves included a “ditch it all and open a tour-guide business with my wife in the south of France” self; a socially respectable “junior partner” self that his parents would have endorsed; a youthful, outdoorsy “follow your passion” self who renounced convention and wanted to open a scuba business; a “responsible spouse and future parent” self who wanted to make good dual-career decisions; and various others.

Gary dabbled in wine tours and flirted with buying a scuba diving operation; he used his alumni and company networks; and he also grasped the opportunity to work

Classic Models – Solution-Focused Coaching

Many of our approaches to change are problem-focussed – in that we attempt to move forward by exploring the problem: we try to understand what the problem is, what has caused it, and what we need to do to get rid of it. This works well in many situations, particularly those involving machines and other man-made artefacts. For example, we may notice that our car seems rather sluggish which prompts us to inspect the wheels. We discover that one of the tyres is flat and so replace it – problem solved!

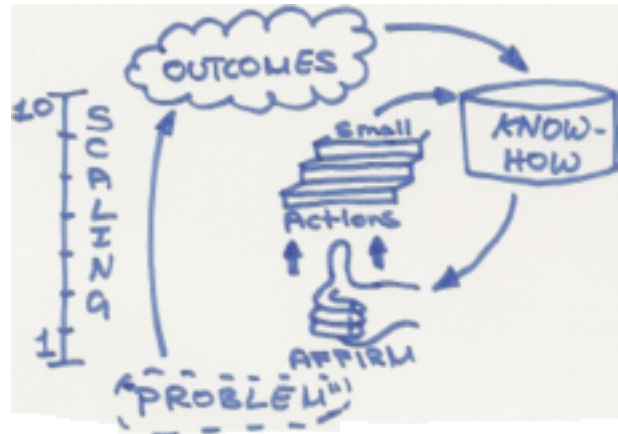
But when we are working with people, diagnosing the problem often gives us little indication of the solution and indeed may even make the situation worse! Fortunately there is another way – we can focus on solutions instead. At heart this solution-focused approach involves:

- finding out what works and doing more of it
- stopping doing what doesn't work and doing something else.

It doesn't mean that we refuse to discuss the problem but it does mean that we use any problem discussion to discover what the person wants to do, to learn about their commitment and passion, and to unearth evidence of skills and resources they are already using

OSCAR is a framework for solution-focused coaching:

1. **O**UTCOME:
 - What is the objective of this coaching?
 - What do you want to achieve today?
2. **S**CALING:
 - On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 representing the worst it has ever been and 10 the preferred future, where would you put the situation today?



- You are at n now; what did you do to get this far?
 - How would you know you had got to n+1?
3. **K**NOW-HOW & RESOURCES:
 - What helps you perform at n on the scale, rather than 0?
 - When does the outcome already happen for you - even a little bit?
 - What did you do to make that happen? How did you do that?
 4. **A**FFIRM AND ACTION:
 - What's already going well?
 - What is the next small step?
 - You are at n now, what would it take to get you to n+1?
 5. **R**EWIEW:
 - What's better?
 - What did you do that made the change happen?
 - What effects have the changes had?
 - What do you think will change next?

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for a long admired role model. His exploration finally led him to a job as an internal venture capitalist, a role that allowed him to use his skill set in consulting and finance but granted him creative latitude and total ownership of his results.

Time Management

Over the years I have tried many different ways to improve my use of time and be more productive at work. Whatever I try, I find that initially the new technique makes a real difference – but only for a short while.

I've finally realised that this is less to do with the technique itself and much more to do with the thoughtfulness that applying a new technique requires. Applying any new technique initially forces me to think about my priorities and focus on where my time is going. But then, as I become more skilled in using the technique, so I stop thinking about it.

And so I've come to a much simpler – but more challenging – approach in which I keep asking myself "What do I do now?" Tim Gallwey, in his book (*The Inner Game of Work*) has a neat little process (which he calls "The tool of all tools") for this called **STOP**:

- **S**tep back – from action, emotion and thinking
- **T**hink – about what's most important here
- **O**rganise your thoughts – to create coherence
- **P**roceed – when purpose and next steps are clear.

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