

Mentoring for Change

executive mentoring and coaching, leadership, storytelling

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

- Classic Models – Core Qualities
- Parallel Worlds
- Endings

With best wishes

Mike the Mentor



Parallel Worlds

I spent a few days last month walking along Offa's Dyke, the ancient boundary between England and Wales built by King Offa in the 8th Century. In May, the border country is stunningly beautiful with the fresh growth, the extraordinary range of greens and the delicate hedgerow flowers. When all I had to do each day was to walk to my destination for the day, life became very simple, divorced as I was from the everyday complexity that I, like most of us, am usually immersed in.

Having finished the walking, I was on a bus travelling home gazing at the passing countryside and I noticed my mind turning back to my everyday life and to the tasks and obligations awaiting me – the 'musts', the 'shoulds', next week's schedule, and so on.

And then I saw through the window a path leading across a field to a stile and beyond the path continuing into the countryside. And, for a few seconds, I was on that path, stepping over the stile and disappearing back into the simpler, carefree world I had inhabited the last few days.

What I learned in that moment is how thin the line between the different ways we approach our lives are – and also how wide the gulf between them! Back in my everyday life it is so easy to fall victim to the complexity of my outer life – and it is possible, even in the midst of this – to choose the path of simplicity.

"Asceticism is not that you should not own anything, but that nothing should own you." Ali Ibn Abi Talib

Endings

We tend to avoid endings, to rush over them, to pretend there're not really happening and try to avoid experiencing them fully. But endings in coaching and mentor-

ing are potentially one of the most powerful parts of the relationship. They offer the opportunity not only to review the journey and consolidate the learnings but also for the coachee to reclaim and revitalise parts of themselves.

One of our aims in working as coaches and mentors is to evoke from our clients the fullness of who they are. And one way we do this is by embodying qualities that the coachee is not yet able to fully manifest. So the coachee may see us as having insight, understanding, balance, etc but not recognise these qualities within themselves – though they must have these qualities themselves to some extent since how else could they recognise them in us? In psychological terms, this is "projection" whereby one's own traits, emotions and qualities are ascribed to another. It is most commonly encountered when looking at unwanted feelings but applies equally with positive qualities.

One thing we are continually doing throughout the coaching is helping clients re-own these projections – helping them see and develop their strengths and recognise their own developing insight, balance and so forth. But it is likely that, at the end of the coaching, our clients are still lodging parts of themselves in us, and are still projecting onto us qualities which they don't realise that they also possess.

I therefore use a simple ritual to return these projections and bring to a close the coaching relationship. This is done right at the end of the final session. It is designed particularly to help clients own their ability to self-coach but also provides the opportunity to re-own other qualities too. I start by explaining that we are about to complete the coaching process with a short ritual.

The next and key step is to uncover at least some of the remaining projections. I ask the coachee what qualities they have noticed me bringing to our work together and

Classic Models – Core Qualities

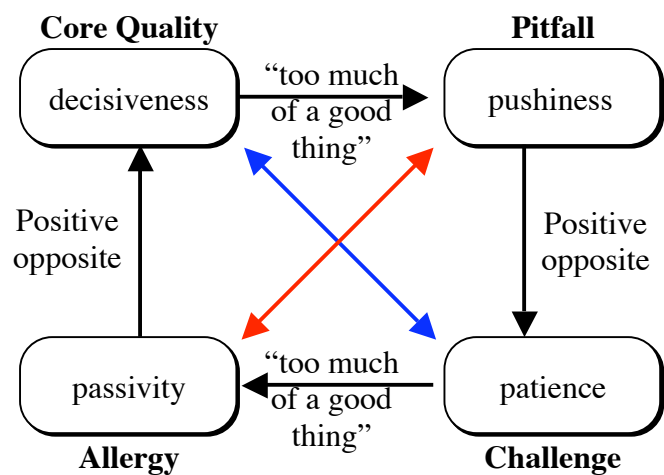
One way of enabling a person to become more aligned with their true nature is to help them recognise their Core Qualities and see the dynamics behind them. Core Qualities (CQs) are attributes that form part of our essence (core). We often take them for granted, not realising that these natural abilities are part of what makes us uniquely who we are.

Examples of CQs are determination, consideration for others, precision, courage, receptivity, orderliness, empathy, flexibility, etc. The more we are tuned into our CQs, the more inspiring and motivated we become.

If this were all that there was to it, life would be straightforward. But every CQ has a dark side or *pitfall* - the result of overdeveloping the CG. Jim, a senior salesman in a corporate bank, saw himself as decisive. But he often over-played this decisiveness and was generally seen by his colleagues as pushy. So too much of a good thing becomes a person's *pitfall* and turns a strength into a weakness.

Besides a *pitfall*, a person's CQ also comes with a *challenge*. The *challenge* is the positive quality which is the opposite of the *pitfall*. For Jim the *challenge* was to develop patience. Jim had to find ways of striking the right balance between the CQ and the *challenge*, for example by being both decisive and patient at the same time. It was not a matter of being less decisive out of a fear of being pushy, but of developing a "patient decisiveness". (This is the same idea as Psycho-synthesis's "synthesis of opposites" which is part of the process whereby we can become more whole)

However what makes this challenging to do is that people are typically allergic to an excess of their own



challenge (particularly when it is embodied in another person). And when we are confronted by our own *allergy*, we tend to fall into our own *pitfall*. For example Jim was infuriated by others' passivity and reacted by becoming increasingly pushy (his *pitfall*). But he eventually came to see that what he was allergic to in others (passivity) was actually an excess of the quality he most needed (patience).

In this model, to heal yourself is to become more whole. Jim did this by practicing the synthesis of his CQ (decisiveness) and his *challenge* (patience). As they came into balance so they began to merge and he found that he not only fell into his *pitfall* less often but he also started to value more the patience of others. Jim had moved to a new level of integration.

An excellent free introduction to Core Qualities can be downloaded from <http://www.kernkonsultusa.com/html/menu/products.htm>

what skills and strengths they have seen in me. I encourage them to be as exhaustive as they can. I also suggest qualities that I believe they may see in me based on our work together over the course of the coaching. (When I first started doing this, I was afraid that I would be seen as being self-indulgent so I would explain the process in advance. But this dilutes its effectiveness and I now risk being momentarily seen as seeking praise for the much greater impact the ritual can have.)

Once these projections are clear, I come clean on the process and explain that these qualities that the coachee has identified are actually their own. I also explain that we are about to perform a ritual to enable the coachee to reclaim these qualities and the resources they bring.

I ask the coachee to be as aware as they can of the qualities they have seen in me (I will have noted them earlier and now say them back to the coachee). I tell the coachee that I am going to get up from my chair but will leave these qualities behind.

I get out of the chair reminding the coachee to see the qualities as being left behind in the chair. I then ask the coachee to, with consciousness, sit in my chair and as they do so, to "sit into" the qualities and absorb them. I ask them about the experience to check it has worked.

This process of re-owning these projections can be a powerful experience for the coachee and they often report a very real and visceral experience of feeling these qualities within them. The coach too will notice a tangible shift in their relationship with the coachee and a clear sense that the relationship has now changed.

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