

# Transformational Coaching

*Hone and practice three core skills.*



by Kevin Cashman

**I**N THIS COMPLEX WORLD, the need to focus on where we are headed has never been more critical. Today, survival and its rewards go not to the fittest, but to the most purposeful. By guiding us to step back from the fray to ascertain which parts of the action are crucial and important and which parts are distracting, non-essential, or downright damaging, a coach can help us maintain our focus and direction.

If you were on a mountain-climbing expedition, lost in a fog or snowstorm, not able to see the top of the mountain or much of the path ahead, you would be grateful for a veteran guide, calling from above, "Go to the right," "Dig in," "Watch out for loose rocks," "You're doing fine." The guide has perspective, experience, and crucial knowledge.

Similarly, the players on a sports team, caught up in the action on the field, have little perspective. An effective coach has a more complete picture, from which to call the plays.

A personal coach works in the same way. Using evaluation tools and interviews to understand the client's situation and life and career goals, the coach combines knowledge and expertise with facilitation skills to draw forth potential and impart wisdom.

The coach's task is not to pontificate, not to take a stand, not even to teach. The real task of the coach is to help the persons he or she is coaching to open up to their own gifts, and their own inner guidance, so they can determine for themselves their best possible direction, bring forth their greatest abilities, and make their best contribution.

Some coaches simply assert their expertise. *Great coaches blend expertise and facilitation to help the players go beyond their previous boundaries.* In his book, *Masterful Coaching*, Robert Hargrove notes, "When most people think of learning they don't think in terms of having to

change themselves. They think of acquiring ideas, tips, and techniques. Seldom does it occur to them that the problems they face are inseparable from who they are or the way they think and interact with other people."

Athletes have coaches. Actors have coaches. Politicians have coaches. Increasingly, business people have coaches. Too often, business coaches aim for a "charm school" or image enhancement outcome. That is not enough. We need coaches who focus on transformation leading to exceptional, sustainable performance, whose aim is developing the whole person rather than merely tweaking the external facade.

Coaches need to move from a transactional model concerned primarily with



competencies, learning skills, and techniques to a transformative model focused on shifting people's views, values, and sense of purpose.

## Three Core Skills

What are the core skills to help us move from being a transactional coach, focused on skill building and imparting knowledge, to being a transformational coach, focused on revealing patterns and shifting perspective? Three processes are required:

**1. Building awareness.** As leaders, we constantly face the task of building awareness. Changing market conditions, emerging economic realities, new

capital needs, cost concerns, and operational issues tend to dominate our time and attention. But often the greatest task of building awareness is in the interpersonal domain. Most business problems today are in this area. People problems are typically quite complex, yet when individuals, teams, or managers in conflict come to us with their concerns, don't we all-too-often slip into a reactive, knee-jerk mode, looking for a simple fix?

Helping others to build awareness requires discipline on the part of the coach to stay out of the expert or fix-it approaches to coaching. If we don't, the awareness we build will be our awareness—that is, imposing our awareness onto the coachee—versus building the awareness of the person we are coaching from the inside out. Building awareness requires openness to help the person we are coaching to sort out their current reality for themselves and begin to chart out alternative future possibilities.

To build awareness with people you coach, stay out of expert or fix-it mode, use questions to help people sort out their situation, be courageous enough to discuss the undiscussable, speak directly but with concern, help others explore their intentions, and uncover and align with what is meaningful and important to them.

**2. Building commitment.** Having awareness without emotional engagement and commitment is an empty promise to ourselves. We want to exercise; we just don't feel compelled to do it. We want to spend more time at home, but we never seem to leave the office before 7:30. We say our spiritual life is important, but we rarely reflect on it beyond Sunday services. So what makes us committed to actually do something?

Commitment comes from *emotional engagement* with the life-enriching and life-damaging consequences of our current behavior. Building awareness is a good beginning, but it's not enough. We have to truly feel it. This is why trauma is such a superb teacher. Lying in a hospital bed after a heart attack, we can see the ramifications of our behavior in no uncertain terms.

Help people to envision the positive and negative outcomes—what they will gain and what they will lose—if they



continue on their current path. When the emotions deeply register both the compelling reasons to change and the damaging behaviors to leave behind, transformation begins.

To build commitment with people you coach, help people to sort out consequences; allow your commitment to catalyze their commitment; look for openings; and make sure commitment leads to practice.

**3. Building practice.** Without practice, there is no transformation. Practice breathes life into our new awareness and commitment. We can be fully aware and committed to noble goals, but if we fail to practice them, it is like someone who lights a lamp and then closes his eyes. Beginning practice makes the possible probable; advanced, enduring practice makes the possible real.

Practices involve the consistent repetition of new behaviors that transform our lives. Exercise is a practice to build health. Meditation is a practice to unfold our spiritual life. Reflecting at the end of each day on how our interpersonal interactions went is a practice that builds relational effectiveness. Not letting fears or limiting beliefs sabotage our goals can be a life-long practice for most of us, helping us to move forward when the easier or lazier way would be to remain where we are, locked in our limiting belief systems.

For a practice to become a habit, often it needs to be consistently engaged for at least 40 days. A day here and a day there will not affect transformation. At first our practice requires discipline, that is, doing something we may not be inclined to do. Over time however, the discipline is replaced by the life-enriching benefits we are gaining; then the practice becomes more self-sustaining and requires less effort. Discipline bridges us to the benefits, and the benefits sustain the new behavior.

To build practice with people, you coach; co-create the practice with them; hold them accountable; avoid intellectualizing; and just do it.

Coaching is drawing potential onto the canvas of high performance. Build awareness, commit, and practice to create a masterpiece of living and leading. EE

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**ACTION:** Become a transformational coach.

# Seven Essential Behaviors

*Here's how you can improve performance.*



by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan

**A**N ORGANIZATION CAN EXECUTE ONLY IF the leader's heart and soul are immersed in the company. Leading is more than thinking big, or schmoozing with investors and lawmakers. The leader has to be engaged personally and deeply in the business. Execution requires a comprehensive understanding of a business, its people, and its environment. The leader is the only person in a position to achieve that understanding. And only the leader can make execution happen, through his or her deep personal involvement in the substance and even the details of execution.

The leader must be in charge of getting things done by running three core processes—picking other leaders, setting the strategic direction, and conducting operations. These actions are the substance of execution, and leaders can't delegate them.

What does a leader do? There are seven essential behaviors:

**1. Know your people and your business.** Leaders have to live their businesses. In companies that don't execute, the leaders are usually out of touch with day-to-day realities. They get lots of information delivered to them, but it's filtered—presented by direct reports with their own perceptions, limitations, and agendas, or gathered by staff people with their own perspectives. The leaders aren't where the action is. They don't know their organizations well, and their people don't really know them.

The personal connection is critical when a leader starts something new. The business world is full of failed initiatives. Good, important ideas get launched with much fanfare, but six

months later, they're abandoned as unworkable. Why? Most managers feel that the last thing they need is one more time-consuming project of uncertain merit and outcome. Result: the company wastes time, money, and energy, and the leader loses credibility.

The leaders' personal involvement, understanding, and commitment are necessary to overcome this passive (or active) resistance. They not only need to announce the initiative, but to define it clearly and define its importance. They can't do this unless they understand how it will work and what it means in terms of benefit. Then they have to follow through to make sure everyone takes it seriously.

**2. Insist on realism.**

Realism is the heart of execution, but many organizations are full of people who are trying to avoid or shade reality. Why? It makes life uncomfortable. People want to hide mistakes or buy time to figure out a solution

rather than admit they don't have an answer at the moment. They want to avoid confrontations. Nobody wants to be the messenger who gets shot.

Sometimes leaders are simply in denial. They may state their strengths fairly well, but either can't identify their weaknesses or don't know what to do about them.

**3. Set clear goals and priorities.** Leaders who execute focus on a few clear priorities that everyone can grasp. Why just a few? First, focusing on three or four priorities will produce the best results from the resources at hand. Second, people need a small number of clear priorities to execute well. Without clear priorities, people can get bogged down in warfare over who gets what and why. You've got to have a few clear, realistic goals and priorities.

Strive for simplicity in general. Leaders speak simply and directly, plainly

