

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE JOURNEY

## *What Is Masterful Coaching?*

*Masterful Coaching involves expanding people's capacity to make a difference with individuals, their organizations, and their world. It involves impacting people's visions and values and offering them a powerful assist in reinventing who they are being, their thinking, and behavior that is consistent with achieving what they need to achieve.*

Masterful Coaching involves challenging and supporting people to be extraordinary leaders, as well as to achieve extraordinary levels of performance. It starts with becoming clear on the goals and aspirations people passionately care about and offering them a powerful assist in calling forth who they need to be in the matter. It requires building new skills and capabilities so as to bring out the best in those around them. It means fostering not just individual excellence, but also creative collaboration.

Masterful Coaching is based on being completely committed to the person(s) you are coaching and engaging with them in conversations (or, actually, a network of conversations) that leave them inspired, empowered, and enabled with respect to their concerns. The acid test is that when you leave the presence of a Masterful Coach, you have "freedom to be" and you have new openings for possibility and action in areas where you were stuck and ineffective.

## A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION

Masterful Coaching is a journey, not just a destination. Whether or not you will embark on the journey depends not on whether you are a leader, project manager, or individual contributor; it depends on whether you dare to see and meet the calling to make a difference, whether in the life of one person, a group, or an institution. We admire others who make a difference, who have an impact, who are effective.

Perhaps our inspiration to take the journey to Masterful Coaching comes from these people. Each of us can remember a handful, but only a handful, of coaches, teachers, and mentors who touched our lives with new possibilities we didn't see before, who enabled us to achieve results that we never dreamed of or dared to imagine. They were people who held up an honest mirror, one that led to a revelation of our own foolishness. They had conversations with us about the lessons we needed to learn about life, laced with a sense of humor.

The journey is driven by passion, commitment, and zeal. It calls for a hungry spirit, a person who not only has the desire to be a *success* but also to be a *contribution*. It calls for those who know that the true joy in life is to bring people together to create and invent the future, rather than just trying to predict it. It entices those who have achieved something splendid at some point only because they dared to believe that there was something inside them that was superior to circumstance and now they want to pass that on.

It calls for leaders who recognize that the highest leverage in the adventure of business (and living) is elevating their concerns to making an Impossible Future. This can only happen if people let go of being the hero and being in the center of the action and focus on developing the next generation of leaders in the process of getting the job done.

It involves recognizing that Masterful Coaching is a journey, not a destination. To be sure, the ideas, tools, and methods offered in this book will provide you with a roadmap and the necessary wherewithal to get you on your way. Yet, as with mastering anything, it can take a lifetime to develop the skills and capabilities. It involves dedicated study and practice, a continuous cycle of making progress, plateauing, striving, and reaching the next level—from individual to group, from group to organization.

While it takes a powerful commitment to become a Masterful Coach, there are different stages along the way and each must be valued:

1. Beginner (sometimes a nuisance);

2. Advanced Beginner (does okay with supervision);
3. Competent (capable);
4. Virtuoso (brilliant); and
5. Mastery (invents new rules, becomes a legend).

## **The Setting Is Today's Workplace**

The setting for the journey we are making to Masterful Coaching begins not in sports or the performing arts, but in the workplace—government, business, schools, hospitals. The performance bar has been raised for all. There is a growing clamor to reinvent organizations for the 21st Century. In order for this to happen, executives and leaders at all levels must first reinvent themselves. Coaching makes it possible to dramatically accelerate this process, without stepping on landmines. The time to take the journey is now.

- *Every Global 1000 corporation needs coaches who can help people to set unreasonable expectations and stretch their definition of themselves and their business to reach them.*
- *Every legislative body needs skilled facilitators to assist them in moving beyond government gridlock to building common ground.*
- *Every school is facing a crisis in how to educate students that demands teachers be less enforcers of curriculum-directed learning and more enablers of learner-directed learning.*
- *The world as a complex social and biological system is presenting us with ever more pressing dilemmas, and to solve them, we need coaches who can help us think and work better together and accelerate the process by which we produce results.*

This is the domain of Masterful Coaching. I invite you to hear the sounding of the tone . . . to come to the tone . . . and to join in sympathetic resonance with it.

## **THE FIVE COMPASS POINTS OF MASTERFUL COACHING: MAPPING THE TERRITORY**

To me, the lifelong journey toward Masterful Coaching is one of the highest expressions of what it is to be a human being, even though it is fraught with challenges. For at its very core, it means bringing people into alignment with

their highest human goals and aspirations, while at the same time linking them to the needs of their organization. It involves taking a stand that it is possible to make a difference, even when the mountain is high, the winds strong, the climate cold, and the road lonely. It is a journey filled with joy and pain, comedy and tragedy—all the ironies of life.

A Masterful Coach is a leader who by nature is a vision builder and value shaper, not just a technician who manages people to reach their goals and plans through tips and techniques. To be able to do this requires that the coach discover his or her own humanness and humanity, while being a clearing for others to do the same. At the same time, Masterful Coaches know when to shift weight to the opposite foot and focus on expanding people's capacity to accomplish what they need to accomplish. Such coaches know that being extraordinary is the key to producing extraordinary results, and they consistently bring out the best in those around them.

Masterful Coaches are not only great human beings, but also “monsters of effectiveness.” They have the ability to inspire people to declare an Impossible Future they passionately care about to be possible and then to make it a reality. It is by standing with people inside a nonnegotiable commitment to an Impossible Future that the coach sets the stage for breakthrough results and breakthroughs for people. People see that the limiting factor is their level of intention and imagination, not their level of staffing and resources.

***A Masterful Coach enters into the learning system of the individual or group with the intent of producing breakthroughs for people and breakthroughs in results.***

Masterful Coaches show people how to take mere possibilities and translate them into live opportunities by formulating concrete projects that have a beginning, middle, and end. Their presence on a team is felt as having objectives agreed on, doing inventive and effective planning, ironing out conflicts, and creating a rallying momentum. They look for new openings for possibility and action in places where people are stuck or ineffective, honestly acknowledging all breakdowns and providing what's missing that will make a difference.

Masterful Coaches possess within themselves a potent combination of toughness and compassion, which shows up as a “listening for people's greatness” and at the same time “speaking to penetrate illusions that get people in trouble.” They encourage people to stretch their minds and skills in pursuing results that are beyond and out of the ordinary. They return people to themselves

and their promises in the face of disappointment or upsets brought on by unintended results.

At the same time, while Masterful Coaches are effective, they are not just results machines. They have the generosity of spirit to step back from their own preoccupations on the front lines and give someone the gift of their presence. “Got a problem? Let’s talk about it.” Such a person always has a touch of what the Buddhists call “crazy wisdom” (being colorful, dramatic, shocking, and wise).

I am often asked, because all of this sounds like a tall order, “Just how does one become a Masterful Coach?” The following Compass Points map the territory to be crossed in this journey. They are the navigational aids for the voyage, the street signs that let us know whether or not we are in the right neighborhood. If you have at least some of the right makeup that we have been describing, by following these navigation points you will eventually get there.

The Compass Points that you will find here were discovered from the direct experience and hard-won lessons gained in coaching leaders; they are not just an intellectual exercise. For the most part, they take the form of rich stories that are full of many lessons, like hidden jewels for those who care to look for them. Some of the stories are based on extraordinary successes and others on failures and honest mistakes. That’s the purpose of creating a map. By using it, you can greatly increase your chances of succeeding and avoid dangerous rocks.

The intent here is to guide the reader into a different world. At the same time, while there are no magic bullets, you will be provided with guiding ideas, methods, and tools that will help you develop as a coach and that can be put to practical and immediate use. The starting point is with the people you most want to work with and in those areas where you have the most control.

## **COMPASS POINT I. Coaching Is a Powerful Partnership**

Augusta, Georgia—There were thousands upon thousands of golf fans at the Augusta National in May 2001 who would have killed for a moment of Tiger Woods’ time. Butch Harmon, Tiger Woods’ coach, had Tiger’s undivided attention for well more than an hour on the putting green. Then Harmon jogged over to the caddie shack, pulled on the requisite white coveralls and, at Woods’ request, carried his clubs in the Masters’ rain-shortened par-3 tournament. One reporter said, “I actually had a guy in the gallery ask me—I swear this happened—if that fellow over there by Butch Harmon was Tiger Woods.”

Butch and his prize pupil have been practically joined at the hip since 1997 when Woods dominated the field and won his first professional Gold Major at the Masters at the age of twenty. Tiger was sitting in his house studying the videotapes from his performance, blasting 300-yard drives, hitting crisp iron shots right at the pins, draining putts from everywhere. Yet something he was seeing wasn't sitting right with him. He called Harmon, a respected coach, and said, "My swing really sucks."<sup>1</sup>

He knew he wasn't in the right position at various points in his golf swing and had won because "my timing was great." At the same time, he knew that his swing wouldn't hold up under pressure for the long haul, so he told Butch Harmon, who was the former golf coach to the King of Morocco, that he wanted to make serious changes in the way he struck the ball. Harmon concurred with this assessment, and told him that it would take months to groove a new swing, and that his game would get worse before it got better. This might lead some to say that Tiger's success at the Masters was a flash in the pan.

***Like Tiger Woods, the real leaders in sports, the performing arts, and business aren't content to merely be good. They want to be great.***

Tiger told Harmon that it didn't matter. He relayed something that his pal Michael Jordan had told him: "No matter how good they say you are, set incredibly high goals and keep working on your game." He told Harmon his goal was to eventually surpass his cherished idol Jack Nicklaus (eighteen golf majors), and that he was sure he couldn't get there on his own. He wanted to build a powerful partnership with Harmon, who had worked with him on and off since Tiger was seventeen. Harmon accepted.

Harmon began working with Woods day in and day out. He told Tiger he would have to pump more iron to get his forearms stronger. Tiger then went to work on a Kaizen sequence (Japanese for improvement) that could be described as "disciplined intensity": (1) pounding hundreds of practice balls a day; (2) reviewing tapes of the swing for hours so as to get meaningful feedback; (3) bringing Harmon with him to all his tournaments; and (4) repeating all of the above.

It's rare in golf when a top pro teacher like Harmon accompanies a player like Woods to a tournament and walks every fairway with him (as Harmon did in 1998), even carrying his bag during the practice round to get a bird's eye view of his swing under pressure, all the while giving some appropriately wise counsel. The fact is that most top professional golf teachers have egos about as big as the players do, and would consider such a thing to be beneath their station in life.

***A powerful partnership is created when there is chemistry, lots at stake in shared goals, regular interaction, and disciplined intensity.***

The reason Harmon did this was that he took the partnership with Woods seriously and became a celebrity in his own right as a result. Woods took it equally seriously, spending hundreds of hours practicing, with Harmon relentlessly giving him the same corrections. In golf, old habits die hard. In some practice rounds, Harmon would tell Woods the same correction fifty to one hundred times. "Here's the grip you need to have." Then holding the mirror up, "Tiger, you went back to your old grip position on that last swing." Or "Here is the position you want to be in at the top, Tiger." "No, you went over the top," and so on.

Harmon was wise enough to recognize the impatience of the twenty-year-old Woods. To make sure Woods mastered each piece of the swing, grip, stance, and swing plane, he only told him one piece at a time. Harmon didn't show him the next piece until he had completely integrated the previous one.

Eventually, it all paid off. One day in 1999, preparing for the Byron Nelson Classic, Woods noticed some real improvement. Then suddenly, on one swing he sensed for the first time in a year that he had accomplished exactly what he wanted to accomplish. The motion felt natural and relaxed, and the contact solid. The ball flew high and straight.

Excited, he rolled another ball into place, but didn't make the same swing. Another ball. Didn't get it. Another ball. Didn't get it. Then he hit another pure shot. A couple of misses. Another pure one. And another. Soon the good swing started flowing like popcorn popping in a microwave.

***Masterful coaches will tell you that it takes at least one year to accomplish something big, to break the grip and excel beyond old patterns.***

Woods called Harmon and told him, "I'm back!" The same year he won six pro tour events in a row. Nicklaus never won more than three in a row in one year. With his victory at the British Open in 1999, Woods completed a career Grand Slam of golf's four major tournaments, a feat accomplished by only four other golfers in history.

It is interesting to compare the powerful partnership between Tiger Woods and his coach Butch Harmon to the average professional golfer (or 15 handicapper player) who takes three lessons with a pro at the driving range when the wheels come off his swing and doesn't come back again for years,

playing with the same crippled swing forever. In point of fact, most professional and amateur athletes have anything but bold goals and tend to get by on the minimal amount of coaching, which is why they never get better.

The same can be said of most businesspeople. In my experience, coaching in most organizations is the exception rather than the rule.

### ***Getting to the Next Level***

The Tiger Woods/Butch Harmon story is intended not to inspire people in business to take up golf, but rather to see the power of coaching. In Masterful Coaching Inc., we strive to create with executives and leaders the same kind of powerful relationship that Harmon and Woods created.

The model I have found most useful to use with leaders is one of a powerful partnership, where you are joined at the hip over the course of a year or more. This is definitely not the three sessions at the driving range variety of coaching. The leaders we work with, like Woods in his field, are already successful, but on some level know that they can get to the next level—from good to great. Further, they know that coaching will give them an edge or advantage.

This involves not only setting ambitious goals and aspirations that represent taking their game to the next level and creating a concrete plan to realize them, but also actually making something happen with colleagues in their business—with colleagues amidst change, complexity, and competition. There is a world of difference between having a Masterful Coach in your corner, someone who is there to empower your specific situation, and a “B” school executive education or an abstract training program that offers too much, too soon, or too little, too late. The same applies to Masterful Coaching that is done by leaders and managers within organizations.

### ***The Qualities of a Great Partnership***

It is my experience that, whenever human beings excel to great heights, accomplishing something extraordinary, it is being achieved with a Masterful Coach either in the foreground or background. It is also my experience that Masterful Coaching is based on an extraordinary partnership, which has some extraordinary and rare qualities.

First, for a coaching relationship to be established, there must be a personal

chemistry in the mix that draws two human beings to each other in the pursuit of goals and aspirations that each finds meaningful. There is a powerful human bond that develops as a result of the coach's sincere desire and relentless effort to cause the person's success, along with the coachee's listening for the coach. (As Butch Harmon told Tiger, "You need to lift weights ninety minutes a day.") While this human bond is important, the coach has to make clear at the start of the relationship that it needs to be okay to disagree, as well as to tell the truth. This means providing potentially embarrassing feedback needed for growth and learning.

***A Masterful Coach stands for the future and space of possibility, while shaping concrete goals and prompting concrete action.***

At the heart of the matter, Masterful Coaching dwells in what I call a "listening for greatness." The coach provides an environment for that person to find him- or herself, and find his or her greatness and capacity to be extraordinary. It is based on a complete commitment to the other person and to what that person is committed to and capable of, even beyond what he or she sees right now. The coach stands for the future and the space or spirit of possibility, while shaping concrete goals and prompting concrete action. The coach must be prepared to "go above and beyond" to cause the person's success, as Harmon did by carrying Tiger's golf bag in the Masters par-3 match so he could better observe and teach him.

It is this listening for people's greatness that allows the coach to see what is really possible for people and to open people's eyes so they can see and believe in it themselves. Once people are enrolled in that possibility, the coach is then in a position to support them to set more powerful goals for themselves or to make powerful "unreasonable" requests that no one else in their lives would dare make. For example, I once told an up-and-coming executive that he needed to go sing in the subway at the top of his lungs to break through barriers he had to full self-expression. He did it.

Another extraordinary and rare quality in this kind of partnership is that the coach stands committed to the coachee in the face of breakdowns. In going for powerful breakthrough goals, the person being coached will inevitably produce breakdowns that in any other relationship would be highly annoying. This can take the form of becoming heavy-handed with direct reports, making the same mistakes despite repeated correction, or not following through on key actions that have been promised.

***A Masterful Coach is a listening for people's greatness.***

As Masterful Coach Veronica Pemberton says, "I am listening for people's greatness and who they are when they forget their greatness and descend into pettiness. The person I am coaching can do no wrong in my eyes (assuming it is ethical). If who they are being at a meeting is counterproductive with others, if they make repeated mistakes or don't deliver on promises, I never make them wrong. That just makes people defensive. Instead, I return them to their commitments, address the breakdown in a very matter-of-fact way, and identify what's missing that, if provided, can make a difference."<sup>2</sup>

It is important to point out that the coach needs to come to each and every conversation with the person without any other agenda except the agenda of that person. As a Masterful Coach, one of the things that keeps my agenda from getting in the way is that I only take on coaching engagements for a minimum of a year, and secondly "coachees" need to pay me a big chunk of money in advance. There are, as a result, never any hidden agendas about "continued work" or "money." If I have an agenda I want to talk about, then I can be frank about that.

If the Masterful Coach is in a leadership role within an organization, it is important to first align around goals and expectations that meet the needs of the person and meet the needs of the organization. This allows you to focus the conversation on being a listening for the coachees' concerns, offering them a powerful assist in accomplishing what it is they need to accomplish.

***"The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible and discover possibilities you didn't see before due to veil of your own beliefs."***

**—Arthur C. Clark**

**COMPASS POINT II. Stand in the Future People Want to Create**

Richard W. Severance is a vice president of Conoco Downstream North America (a refining and marketing group), the fourth largest oil company in the world. "Severance," as he calls himself, is a charismatic, good-humored, sharp-as-a-tack Texan who looks just a mite like Tommy Lee Jones, and sounds just a mite like him too.<sup>3</sup> As someone told me, "When Severance struts into the Marlin Room," a sancta sanctorum named after the company's

founder, “you have no doubt who the leader of this business is.” He fills the entire space with his presence, which is true grit.

I met Severance as a result of putting on a number of Masterful Coaching seminars for Conoco. I should explain that in an oil company, you have two powerful organizations: an upstream company whose business is exploration and production, and a downstream organization, which has to do with refining and marketing. The downstream business, which generally produces a lower return on capital employed than the upstream, received the message that, in effect, their purpose was not to grow, but rather to be cost-efficient and produce excess cash for upstream. The reason: New refineries cost a lot of money and building new gas stations, at \$3 million each, on pennies for gross margin, ain’t that profitable.

This purpose had been put in place by a real fireball of a leader, Jim Nokes, Severance’s boss. The reason: Dupont, the company’s previous owner, had threatened to sell the downstream organization if its results did not significantly improve. Nokes’ message to the troops was, “Wake up and take charge of your own destiny. The Indians are coming and there’s no cavalry.” His refining and marketing approach, “Run full and run cheap,” saved the day, and then the law of unintended consequences took over: a climate of resignation where people did not feel they had the opportunity to be creative, innovative, and take risks.<sup>4</sup>

***A Masterful Coach stands in the Impossible Future people are committed to and encourages them to act boldly in the present.***

When Severance got wind of the power in creating an Impossible Future in the Masterful Coaching course, he decided to take a stand to transform the climate of resignation that existed in the company into a climate of opportunity. He asked me to be his executive coach and I told him, “While I appreciate the request and like you, it’s got to be a big enough game. I’m not interested in doing remedial leadership BS.” I carefully select every coaching client I work with on the basis of who they are and what they are up to.

I saw Severance as a bag full of possibilities, the kind of person who not only has vision, but who can also rally larger numbers of people and actually make something happen. Severance is generous and warmhearted, but his view of a shared vision and an aligned organization could be likened to sitting around the campfire and pondering what trail to follow the next day with a group of trusted hands, and then the next morning proclaiming, “Well, we’re burning daylight, let’s go.” Sure, Severance had some warts as a leader,

like being dismissive of those who are “all hat and no cattle” or people who “talk big, but don’t do big,” and was bull-headed at times, but these seemed small compared to the possibilities.

We agreed on a focus for our Masterful Coaching partnership of creating a powerful new future for Downstream (DS) Conoco, which involved producing extraordinary results and creating a climate of possibility and opportunity. I told him that we would only focus on calling forth who he needed to be as a leader to get the job done. I wanted to make it clear here that this was to be a true partnership. Over the coming year, the role of “master” and “student” changed many times. I was to learn as much from him as he from me. For in setting the bar very high for himself, he also set the bar high for me as a coach to take my craft to the next level. An email he sent me said, “Hargrove, I intend to set the bar around here so high you have to go back to school.”

### ***Defining an Impossible Future***

The next step was to define the Impossible Future that he wanted to create in the company, going beyond the predictable future based on the company’s winning strategies and history. One day at a meeting in the stateroom of Severance’s 46 Grand Banks Trawler, I suggested that he discuss the idea of designing an Impossible Future at the next monthly meeting of his executive staff. He replied, “Man, we have a packed agenda.” “What do you and your staff create at those meetings?” I asked him. Suddenly a light went on in his eyes: “We don’t create anything, we run the business.”

### ***The first step in creating an Impossible Future is to create some Big Hairy Audacious Goals that force people to challenge orthodoxies.***

Severance saw that, to transform the company, he had to shift his viewpoint and start thinking in terms of *Creating the Business (CTB)*, rather than merely *Running the Business (RTB)*. At his next executive team meeting, he told people he had a vision he wanted to share with them. He then declared his commitment to creating an Impossible Future that would result in an inspired, energized organization, one that would take him and the rest of the organization beyond running the business to creating the business.

The first step in creating an Impossible Future was to create a vision of an inspired, energized, engaged organization. I often tell leaders that to realize their vision they need to create a Teachable Point of View (TPOV) that will shift the prevailing mindset or point of view in the organization.<sup>5</sup> For

example, Coca-Cola's Roberto Goizueta had a teachable point of view used to grow the business. It was "share of stomach," as opposed to the prevailing point of view of "share of market." Andy Grove's teachable point of view is: "Only the paranoid survive."

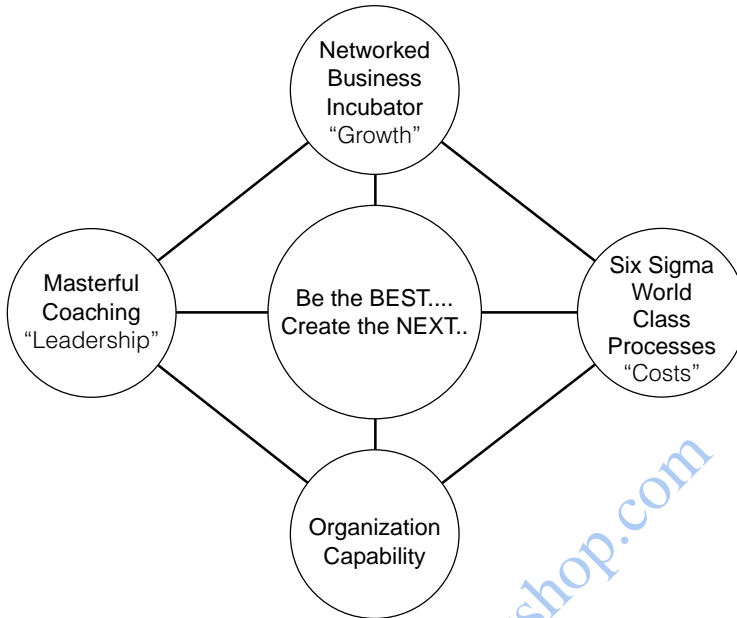
I asked Severance what his teachable point of view was, and he told me a story from when he was in high school on the baseball team. It was 110 degrees and, between innings, he told the coach that he was too exhausted to move. The coach's response was, "Take another salt tablet and get back in the game." "That's my teachable point of view," said Severance, chuckling out loud. "Hey, a lot of leaders in business today have lost their drive, determination, and edge." Severance has another TPOV: "Extraordinary leaders, the kind who can create an inspired organization, develop in the process of producing extraordinary results."

The next step in creating the Impossible Future was to create what Severance called BHAGS—Big Hairy Audacious Goals—in the area of leadership, profitable growth, and real process improvement (reduced costs), the kind that comes from creating a sustainable competitive advantage. The idea behind the BHAGS was to both raise the bar—"We're gonna be a high performance organization"—and also to create a new managerial frame to get people to think outside of the same old boxes.

### ***Structure for Fulfillment***

The next step is to design a structure for fulfillment. Creating an Impossible Future starts with declaring an exciting new possibility. Yet a structure of fulfillment is required to realize the possibility and make it a reality. I told Severance that you create a structure for fulfillment by design. Together we acted as thinking partners in looking at the question of what is missing to realize the vision and achieve the BHAGS. Diagram 1.1 illustrates the structure for fulfillment that we came up with.

The structure for fulfillment included creating a cadre of generative leaders, giving them each Masterful Coaches, as well as creating forums for strategic conversations to take place with new voices free to fundamentally question the strategy of "buying, boiling, and selling oil." The structure of fulfillment also included a "business concept incubator" and the implementation of a high-voltage Six Sigma process improvement program. "If we control costs through Six Sigma," said Severance, "that will create space to do some highly innovative things."

**DIAGRAM 1.1** *The journey to creating the Impossible Future*

I saw it as my role as Severance's coach/partner to stand in this Impossible Future he was committed to creating, as well as to encourage him to focus his agenda on including "calendar time" for making that Impossible Future a reality. The fact is that most leaders don't have the power to create an Impossible Future, because they tend to become too easily sucked into squandering their time and attention on petty people issues, circumstances, and events. "Someone wants me to go to a meeting on refinery security. What the hell do I know about refinery security?" Severance said, as he began to question how he spent his time.

Obviously, the kind of Impossible Future we are talking about doesn't just happen; it takes leadership. A large part of my coaching was spent on working with Severance to be the kind of generative leader it takes to "source" the Impossible Future, as opposed to a reactive RTB manager. I provided Severance a teachable point of view about who he needed to be in the matter. He provided the charisma, leadership, and drive to get the "sourcing" of the Impossible Future formulation over the line (vision, TPOV, structure of fulfillment). He began rolling the Impossible Future out to hundreds of employees with the intention of enrolling people's voluntary participation in the process.

My role not only included supporting Severance in keeping the different dimensions of the Impossible Future at the top of his agenda and in taking bold and powerful action, but I also acted as cheerleader. “Man, that IF presentation was great!” I provided further coaching and feedback to address breakdowns and provide what was missing. One potential breakdown we observed was that, to source the Impossible Future, we needed to have generative leaders at every level, people who could re-create the sourcing (in other words, the vision and TPOV). We needed leaders who were coaches and teachers.

### ***Take Bold and Unreasonable Action***

Severance saw this and declared a personal commitment to become a Masterful Coach in his own right. He started by holding coaching sessions with his direct reports. He set the expectation with them that each become an inspiring leader, recreating the sourcing of the Impossible Future, and creating “line of sight” to it for the people in their respective organizations. He also asked each leader to set up some goals that were based on producing some extraordinary results for the coming year. This would take each of them showing up as a dramatically different kind of manager.

As coaching and teaching represented new territory for Severance, he sometimes came on a bit strong here, putting on not a coach’s hat but a judge’s, and asking, “What was wrong?” rather than “What’s missing that, if provided, would make a difference?” (At issue here is that “what’s missing” is not always obvious.) This sometimes caused people to react defensively and shut down. I emphasized to Severance that, while all coaches make judgments, not all judges are coaches. I began looking for someone or something that could serve as a role model or metaphor.

I found one totally outside the world of business. It was Ben Zander, conductor of the Boston Philharmonic orchestra, who invited me to attend his master class. Zander’s job was to transform talented music students from being good technicians to being great musicians. They needed to learn to play with passion, but were afraid of making mistakes and not receiving an “A” grade. Zander was frustrated by this breakdown, but soon discovered what was missing.

As I shared with Severance, Zander said, “I am going to give each of you an ‘A’ in this class.” The only thing they needed to do was to write a paper entitled, “Dear Mr. Zander, I got my ‘A’ because. . .” “It has to be a story of transformation,” Zander told me, “from this to that.” Then he asked people to

stand in the Impossible Future of transforming into an “A” player (as opposed to a “C” or “D” player) and to act from that possibility. Further, he never diminished his listening for the students’ greatness when they didn’t transform overnight. There was a not-so-subtle suggestion here that Severance do this with his direct reports.

I told Severance that, while Zander extended people an “A,” he also provided something else that was missing. He was totally relentless in coaching them to actually show up that way. I heard him interrupt a cello player, Carl, who was playing Bach in front of the class and say, “Carl, I am now going to make a comment to you in the context of your ‘A.’ You could get a job today with a symphony orchestra making \$50,000 a year, and have a nice little wife, and a nice little house, and 2.7 kids. The only thing is that Bach didn’t write this music for someone who wanted to make \$50,000 a year and have a nice little wife, and a nice little house, and 2.7 kids. He wrote it for the glory of God. Play with more passion, Carl!” Moments later Carl broke through.

***Masterful Coaches extend people an “A” and then relentlessly coach them to show up that way.***

Severance and I had many debates about how this applied to a Fortune 500 company, which led to the creation of an enlightened A,B,C,D performance management system based on extending people an “A” where possible and then coaching them to show up that way. Soon Severance began showing up more like a Masterful Coach, making some powerful commitments to develop people in his group.

These leaders and others soon began to show up as inspiring leaders, recreating the “sourcing” of the Impossible Future in their respective organizations and in getting the job done. It wasn’t long before the prevailing climate of resignation began to be transformed into a climate of possibility and opportunity. The different elements of the Impossible Future were all in motion, and a rallying momentum was being created. The extraordinary and tangible business results that came spoke for themselves.

One last story about Richard W. Severance: One of his favorite movies is the classic Western *The Magnificent Seven*. There is a scene that reminds me of him. Some of the top guns in the West happen to converge on a south-of-the-border town that is being shot up and ransacked by bandits. The Seven try to ignore this at first, but eventually it starts to stick in their craws. One of the guys takes the lead and straps on his gun. The others,

although not really a group, follow suit almost without a word. “Let’s get this done,” as Severance says.

### **COMPASS POINT III. Leaders Must Reinvent Themselves First**

Jann Jarvi, the newly anointed chairman and CEO of the European-based giant high-tech firm Global Electronics (pseudonym), ushered me down the grand marble steps of his corporate headquarters in Stockholm. At six feet, five inches, towering over me like a skyscraper, Jarvi gently slapped my back, graciously opened the door of his BMW 750, and asked his personal driver to take me to the luxurious Grand Hotel. His parting words as he stepped away from the car were, “I don’t just think I want to move forward with the Masterful Coaching.” He continued, “I *definitely* want to move forward, and boldly. The only way we are going to reach our vision of creating a high growth technology company is to reinvent this company, and I need your help.”

“So far, so good,” I thought.

To provide some background, Global Electronics had stumbled badly in the late 1980s due to a lack of competitive advantage and escalating costs. The company was brought back to financial credibility by early 1990 by a new CEO, and then began to enjoy an era of profitable growth, based on a matrix structure that allowed the different product divisions to operate as independent businesses without a lot of bureaucracy. This winning strategy reached its limitation, however, leading to a total lack of cooperation that made it difficult to respond quickly to new market opportunities such as the mobile phone and the PDA (Palm Pilot).

Soon after becoming CEO and chairman, Jarvi announced at a company meeting of the top one hundred leaders that he was standing for a new possibility, that of “bringing Silicon Valley inside” and of becoming a company that would foster “profitable growth” and “shape the future of our industry.” This would require reinventing their corporate culture so that it was much more innovative and collaborative. It would require a Six Sigma approach, and it would require talented people at all levels with a radically different leadership style. To make this happen, every person in the room was going to use an executive coach.

What Jann Jarvi didn’t realize is that he had vastly underestimated the extraordinary leadership that it would take on his part to make this reinvention happen and so he stepped into what’s called the “Great Programmatic

Fallacy.” One of Jarvi’s behaviors was that he often tended to speak in terms of transforming other people as leaders and to deflect conversations about transforming himself. A company can do a lot of “programs,” but unless the leaders see that, in order to transform the organization, they must first transform themselves, the programs are generally doomed to failure.

What happened next reminds me of something Jacques Barzun talked about in *From Dawn to Decadence*, a cultural history of five hundred years of Western Civilization. He said essentially that, without extraordinary leadership, the most inspiring vision tends to be diminished by the reactionary defenders of the status quo. Even those hungry spirits possessed with the calling to make the vision a reality tend to eventually give up and adapt their behavior to the absurd norms created by reactionaries. In Global Electronics’ case, this is exactly what happened.

While the CEO, a lifetime employee whose father had worked in the company as a maintenance engineer, had made bold pronouncements at the meeting of the top one hundred managers, he soon became very tentative in implementing them. One staffer told me candidly that Jarvi once confided to him that he wasn’t sure why they picked him for CEO. There were others he thought more deserving. “He isn’t sure of himself or the solidity of his position and is highly conflict averse,” this person told me.

While the powerful chieftains of the different product divisions liked the idea of becoming a high-growth technology company, they balked at the idea of losing any shred of independence in favor of the new flavor-of-the-month collaboration. They were also resistant to a corporate-wide Six Sigma effort and would back it only if they were allowed to implement it in their own separate ways.

When I coached Jarvi to take a stand with his product division managers and use the coaching network we were creating to foster alignment, the HR manager, fearing that the coaches would become too powerful, stepped in and deliberately sabotaged both the entire reinvention strategy and the coaching effort.

***Reinvent yourself, rather than reduce your vision, when you hit the inevitable roadblocks.***

Jarvi, seeking to avoid conflict, reduced the vision, “We will be a high growth technology company that serves the best interests of the product divisions.” He also agreed to make the way Six Sigma was implemented discretionary. Finally, he delegated the coaching effort to the HR manager, who sentenced it to a kind of solitary confinement.

Under the HR manager, there would be no collaboration between coaches or comprehensive effort, as he claimed this would be too hard to control. Coaches were to coach only on leadership issues, not on business issues. (Let me note that we have found that the collaborative approach where the coaching is based on a marriage of leadership development and business performance allows the coaches to not only support the leaders they are coaching as individuals, but to also ensure that the coaching is aligned to the larger vision, mandate, and objectives of the organization.)

Jarvi chose to make the HR person's behavior undiscussable, covering it up with reasons and excuses. At this point, I had no choice but to withdraw our coaches from the assignment.

Yet before I did, I had one last meeting with Jarvi. I told him that what shapes the cultural clearing of any organization is who leaders are being, which shapes how people occur. "The way you and others think and act has been a key force in providing the cultural clearing of the organization that exists today," I continued. "I know that you started out with a grand vision for the company, one that you truly believed needed to happen for the company to get to the next level. Yet, when you met disagreement and dissention, you lowered the vision. I don't believe you know how much you are influencing the culture of the company and what is possible here. You may not like what I have to say, but to me, you are not showing up as the leader and, consequently, leadership is showing up as missing in the company. You are not showing up as a collaborative and, therefore, collaboration is missing. You are colluding with the organization's defensive behavior and so is everyone else." I concluded, "If you do not reinvent yourself before you begin this reinvention effort, then it will surely fail."

I have seen over and over again the most sincere, well-intended efforts to reinvent organizations fail, because without leadership reinvention, leaders do not have the kind of personal power they need to succeed. Powerful organizational reinvention requires leaders from the executive suite to the shipping dock to reinvent themselves. The excuse that is often given for organizations that fail to reinvent themselves is resistance to change: "People did not embody the new attitudes and behaviors and get on board with the change program."

As Tracy Goss points out, "If you are a breathing human being, you are resistant to change. Like all your fellow human beings, you are designed to be incapable of starting with a blank sheet of paper"<sup>6</sup>. That is why it is necessary to reinvent yourself first. If you are in a key leadership role and you want to

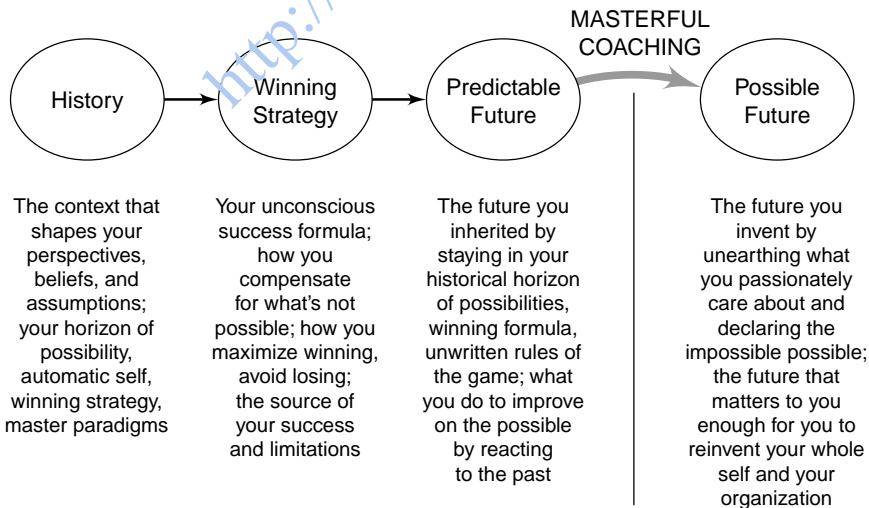
reinvent the organization, reinventing yourself first is the only way you can create the kind of cultural clearing in which resistance to change can be resolved.

It is not that people on the leadership teams are resisting, it is that they come with a “master program” and don’t have the ability to start from a “blank sheet of paper.” Before you or anyone else can draw on your blank page, it is already filled up right to the edges. It is encrypted with your history, the company’s history, the winning strategies you think are right for yourself and the business, thrown ways of being, thinking, and attitudes. Usually the things that have made us successful in the past eventually become a source of constraint and limitation.

***Masterful Coaches support people to invent a new future that is not an extension of the past by unearthing what people passionately care about and then encouraging them to declare the impossible possible.***

It is not until the leader(s) reinvent themselves that they are personally freed of the constraints of the past (of which past successes are a part) and begin to have the power to create a new future. This not only is a matter of declaring new possibilities for yourself as a leader and for the organization as a business or culture, but it is a matter of giving up old ways of thinking and operating that you have come to rely on. Diagram 1.2 illustrates this.

**DIAGRAM 1.2 Creating a possible future versus a predictable future**



You can attempt to reinvent yourself on your own, but it happens much faster with a Masterful Coach around, for just as soon as people start preaching the new way, they revert to form without even being aware of it. Other people see this and model their behavior according to who you are being and what you are doing, not just what you are saying. Chris Argyris calls this shifting from your “espoused theory” (what you preach) to your “theory in use” or regular practice. This most often happens under conditions of pressure and stress.

In effect, what we are talking about here with respect to the CEO and leaders at all levels reinventing themselves is something transformational, not incremental. We are talking about transforming who we are being, which in turn shapes our thinking and actions. We are not simply talking about grafting on some new attitudes or changing a few behaviors. We are talking about an alteration of substance, not merely a change in form.

Leaders almost always show up in the world as a function of some way of being that they are presently unaware of. (Are you showing up as a leader or follower? As dominating or collaborative? And so forth.) This often results in them creating a cultural clearing that is inconsistent with their goal or intentions of reinventing the organization. The role of the Masterful Coach is to “rip the blinders off,” to make people aware of what they are unaware of. It is also to empower people to declare their commitment to new ways of being and to call those forth into the organization. This is a key to the leader being able to create a new clearing.

The kind of personal transformation we have been discussing is intimately tied to organizational transformation. It goes hand in hand with declaring an Impossible Future for your business—and then acting boldly to make it a reality. In fact, it starts with people committing themselves to a future they care so passionately about that they are willing to reinvent their entire selves. Only then do human beings develop the individual and collective will to jettison the past and start over. (We will explore the ideas, methods, and techniques more deeply in Chapter Four, which is on transformational learning.)

#### **COMPASS POINT IV. A Coach Is a Thinking Partner**

“It is like trying to deal with an enigma, wrapped inside a conundrum, surrounded by a dilemma,” Sheryl Steel said to Bill Brock, chairman of Shearing Inc. She was talking about her leadership role in Antigen, a subsidiary and a fast-track biotech company.

Brock laughed, recognizing the quote, which originally came from a comment Bertrand Russell made about dealing with the former Soviet Union. “There are a number of puzzles here that I am looking for a thinking partner on,” said Steel. “Have you got about a week?” she joked.

First some background. In 2000, one of Antigen’s project groups, previously lead by Carl Conti, succeeded after a decade of research in bringing to market a potential breakthrough bio-tech drug called “Arterio,” a drug that is highly effective in treatment of congenital heart disease. However, the drug development process took five years longer than expected and ate up huge amounts of the company’s research capital.

Steel, who had been lead marketing manager for the Scheering group, was appointed to head Antigen, with a special leadership role to play. “Keep the aspirations of the organization high. We can hit a home run here,” Brock told her. “And bring some short-term discipline and rigor to the business at the same time.” Brock affirmed, “It is a *both/and*, not an *either/or* situation.”

Steel’s appointment was made to the deep chagrin and anger of Carl Conti, who expected an upward promotion as a result of the Arterio success. Instead, Conti was moved sideways to a role of lead project manager for “CATS,” which held the promise of being a breakthrough cancer treatment. After the move, he stopped showing up as the hard-driving leader he was previously, which confused the people in his organization. He also became highly defensive in his behavior.

First of all, Conti resisted even the most gracious attempts by the highly capable and affable Steel to build a relationship with him—resenting it when Steel asked him questions about the business. “Are you questioning my judgment?” he demanded to know. Another one of Conti’s defensive routines was always to speak through rose-colored glasses about the new CATS project, touting it as a potential breakthrough, but refusing to look at any breakdowns that were occurring.

The issue was that “CATS” was a drug that could potentially treat many different forms of the disease. Conti and his team were out marketing various applications of the new biotech drug to the Big Ten pharmaceutical firms. A major issue for Antigen was that the pre-trial drug was still not out of the labs, and each different drug application required heavy capital investment to develop. When Steel asked questions about the wisdom of this approach, Conti said, “We don’t know which of these drug applications will ultimately be successful, and we need to hedge our bets.”

There was a distinct lack of purpose, focus, and discipline in Conti's organization. There were seven different development projects going on, which made it difficult to marshal enough resources to spearhead a breakthrough in any one of them. The word on the street was that the competition was moving fast in a highly focused way on related drugs in a key application area. Steel was not only puzzled about how to deal with Conti's defensive routines, but also her own as well. She told Brock, "I feel caught between trying to build a relationship with him and trying to bring some purpose, focus, and discipline to the business."

The whole festering situation boiled to a head when Bill Brock called Steel to his office that day to tell her that the board had noticed that the CATS project was a million dollars over its projected budget, and there was a need to make some very significant cutbacks. It was at this point that one of our coaches from Masterful Coaching, someone who had both a marketing and R&D background, was brought in to help sort out the situation.

The Coach, Thomas Halpert, framed it for Steel this way: "There are four dilemmas that you are faced with:

1. What strategic direction do we take the business in: Spearhead a breakthrough by focusing on one application, or spread our bets?
2. How do you deal with the defensive routines\* of Carl Conti: Build a collegial relationship to engender trust and safety, suppress dilemmas and defer to his reasoning, or confront dilemmas and ask him to make not just his views, but his reasoning public so it can be tested?
3. How do you deal with your own defensive reactions: Trying to be nice and avoiding conflict in order to be liked and accepted (Steel's own behavior) or unilaterally advocate your position?
4. If Carl Conti does not shift his attitude or decide to leave on his own, who will replace him? How do we not lose momentum?

### ***Why a Thinking Partner?***

First of all, shifting from the term "coach" to the term "thinking partner" can move people's thinking from "This is the boss telling me what to do" to "This

\*A defensive routine is anything you do to avoid embarrassment or threat that does not remove the source of embarrassment or threat. Common defensive routines are withdrawing and distancing, suppressing dilemmas, making face-saving moves, easing into difficult conversations, and making hot issues undiscussable.

is a colleague who wants to offer me an assist.” Second, a thinking partner is one of the most powerful ways to leverage the intellectual capital of any organization. When two people with different views and backgrounds come together with a basic attitude of curiosity and learning to solve a puzzle, the chances are that they will brainstorm ideas, question what they take for granted, and come up with insights that are not attainable on an individual basis.

Third, as to why a thinking partner, I am reminded of a quote from Wittgenstein: “A man’s thinking goes on within his consciousness in seclusion, in contrast to physical action, which is an exhibition open to public view and thereby subject to scrutiny.” Left alone to think in seclusion, there are any number of subjective factors that can distort the outcome. One benefit of using a thinking partner is that another person is able to bring some objectivity to the process.

Being a thinking partner often starts with simplifying people’s thought processes, without overlooking complexity. I often start a conversation with people when there are overlapping dilemmas by saying, “This is not a trivial conversation, so let’s be prepared to be in the confusion room for a while.” It is okay to be in the confusion room on the way to clarity. At the same time, I say, “Let’s see if there is anything we can simplify without overdoing it.” To this I often cite a quotation from Oliver Wendell Holmes: “I don’t give a damn about simplicity, from this side of complexity, but I would give everything for simplicity from the other side of complexity.”

***Roles of a Masterful Coach: thinking partner, sounding board, inquirer.***

In the case of Sheryl Steel, Thomas Halpert first pointed out that she was stuck in a kind of pea soup, trying to think through the “people issues” and “business issues” at the same time. He suggested that the way to get out of it was to separate the business issues from the issues of organization defensive routines, and then to deal with each, one at a time. “Let’s start with the issue of business strategy and then look at how we can begin to recognize and disperse (personal) organizational defensive routines.”

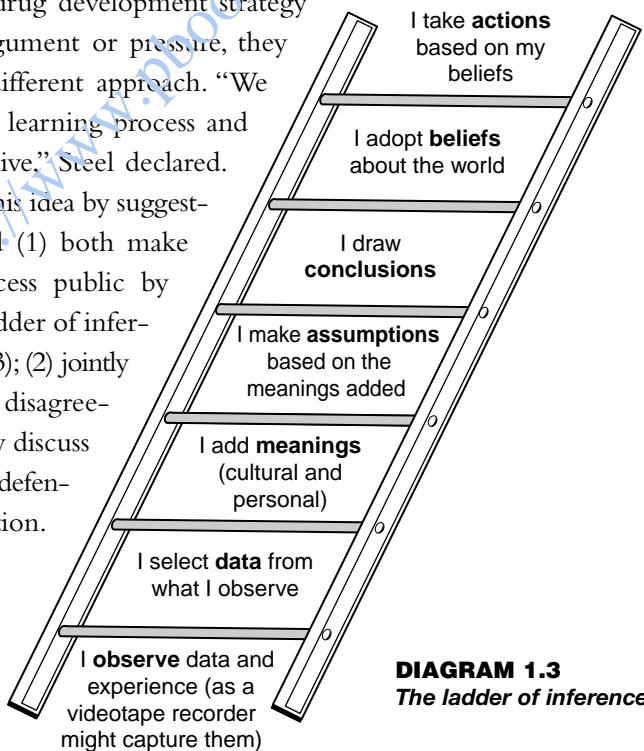
Another key role of a thinking partner is to act as a “sounding board.” The coach can do this by asking a question that gets to the heart of the matter and then by listening with an inexperienced ear. This empowers the person to make tacit knowledge (what they know but can’t say) explicit. The coach creates the space for the coachee to do her own thinking and discover her

own answers, keeping in mind that the coachee is nested in the situation and an information-rich context the coach doesn't have. The coach needs to draw out threads of insight and "half-baked ideas," with an ear to helping the person come up with inventive and effective solutions.

Halpert asked Steel a provocative question: "If you were a consultant who was being paid \$5,000,000 if you could come up with the right solution, what would you do: Spearhead a breakthrough or spread your bets?" This led to a spirited dialogue in which they came up with a way of narrowing down their focus to three major initiatives, not putting their eggs all in one basket, but at the same time not spreading their resources too thin.

Then Steel and Halpert addressed the people issues and the defensive behavior. He asked about the relationship with Conti, "If you could wave a magic wand and have the relationship be a certain way, how would that be?" If you listen loudly enough, as well as "build and jump" on ideas, connecting disparate streams of thought, the person will often move beyond answers and come to the moment of true insight.

The answer that Steel came up with was that instead of she and Conti either withdrawing from each other, suppressing disagreement, or trying to advance their views on the drug development strategy through force of argument or pressure, they needed a radically different approach. "We need to engage in a learning process and stop being so defensive," Steel declared. The coach built on this idea by suggesting that they should (1) both make their reasoning process public by walking down the ladder of inference<sup>7</sup> (see Diagram 1.3); (2) jointly find ways to test disagreements; and (3) openly discuss with each other their defensive reactions and action.



**DIAGRAM 1.3**  
*The ladder of inference*

## **“Everything you say reveals you.”**

**—Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Acting as a “sounding board” and “drawing out” accomplishes two things. It allows people the opportunity to express what they know on a vague intuitive level but are not able to articulate. It also allows the coach to understand the underlying patterns of thinking that govern the person’s thinking process that might cause distortion when he or she begins to draw conclusions.

One of the obvious traps is having frames of reference in our thinking that go unnoticed. For example, there are

- *Role Frames*: “I am the boss, I have more experience and therefore I am right.”
- *Thought Frames or Pet Theories*: Seeing this situation as the one you were previously in and thereby thinking or doing the same thing.
- *Industry Frames*: Old orthodoxies that inhibit inventive and effective thinking.
- *Personal Mental Models*: Rigid patterns of thinking or thinking based on unexamined assumptions or assumptions that may no longer be accurate.
- *Gaps in Reasoning*: Conclusions ungrounded in data or jumping to conclusions.
- *Crooked Attitudes*: Ways of looking at what happened based on blame, shame, or guilt; they get in the way of making accurate interpretations of reality.
- *Emotional or Defensive Reactions*: Reacting to what happened based on past hurts in a way that is intended to defend and protect yourself; may cloud your ability to see clearly.

It is generally an excellent practice for the coach to question everything that the coachee takes for granted. This starts with graciously, but provocatively, challenging all assumptions and inferences. Here are some good stock questions to ask: “What lead you to that conclusion?” “Could you walk me down your ladder of inference?” “What is your reasoning process?” “Do you have any data to substantiate that opinion?”

## COMPASS POINT V. Expanding People's Ability to Take Successful Action

Many coaches focus on speaking and listening in a manner that enables people to go beyond answers and come to a moment of true insight. It's my observation that people value a coaching relationship or session that creates a clearing for them to not only have powerful insights, but to also take effective action. The acid test for the effectiveness of any coaching session is: Did the person go back to work and take some powerful actions? It's very important then to end every coaching session with at least three action items.

Coaching people to take successful action not only involves setting goals, but also observing people on a daily basis, honestly acknowledging breakdowns, identifying what's missing that, if provided, can make a difference, and moving people into action with respect to it. My approach is to translate what's missing into a small project or doable action that can be accomplished in the next forty-eight hours (or at most two weeks).

There are different pathways to coaching people to take successful action. The first involves a fine-tuning (doing the same thing better). The second involves helping people learn to do something that is fundamentally different. This involves single-, double-, and triple-loop learning, which will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter Four.

A Masterful Coach is always asking penetrating questions: "What unintended results are you getting?" "How are you contributing to them?" "How are you looking at things now?" "How do you need to look at things differently?" "How could you look at the problem or solution in a different way?" "Where are you stuck in an old pattern?" "How do you need to shift your way of being, thinking, or behaving?"

It is very important for the Masterful Coach to hold people accountable to their word through some kind of follow-up. As Veronica Pemberton says, "I always presence people's commitment and I never let anything fall through the cracks." At the same time, there is a difference between presencing people's commitment at a monthly (or bimonthly) meeting and hovering over them on a day-in, day-out basis. It is very important to not only hold people accountable, but to act as a cheerleader for their accomplishments.

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