

Mentoring for Change

executive mentoring, life coaching, values management, storytelling

Welcome to the last Mentoring for Change newsletter of 2000.

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With Seasons Greetings
and Best Wishes




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Context - a powerful tool for change

Changing ourselves (ie, changing our behaviour, beliefs, thoughts, etc) or coaching others to change can be difficult. This is hardly surprising. The alternative would be to treat every situation as without precedent and respond to it as if for the first time. Our flexibility and creativity would be huge but it would take us most of the day to get out of bed!

We thus have powerful internal mechanisms to ensure that we behave consistently and do not easily change. These include, for example, the anxiety or fear that often comes with doing something new. This emotion may be appropriate and helpful if what we are doing might threaten our safety or survival - it is less appropriate if all that is at stake is our pride.

Such forces for predictability also exist at the social level. Our ability to work together and form social groupings requires that we are not forever meeting each other as if for the first time. We expect that when we see someone again they will be and behave much the same as when we last saw them.

Going against such pressures to create change requires an act of Will; making and acting on a choice. One way of doing this is through will power (Strong Will) - this can work but it can also take a lot of energy to sustain as anyone who has tried to change an ingrained behaviour knows.

However, there is another way to change and that is to use the Skillful Will. (These ideas on the Will are drawn

from Roberto Assagioli's writings, in particular his book "The Act of Will" and form a central theme of Psycho-synthesis, the psychology he created.) Applying the Skillful Will involves redirecting the forces that resist change so that instead they cause the change. A primary way to do this is to alter the meaning of what you are experiencing - that is, to alter the context.

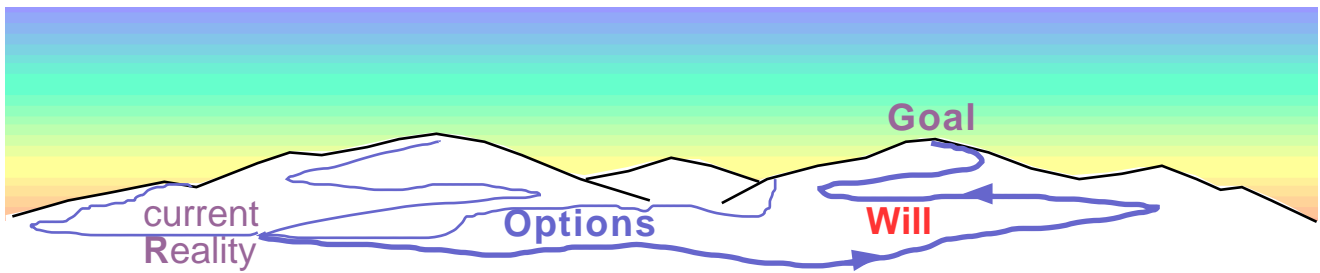
A personal example will make this clearer. I used to be a moderate smoker and for several years tried to give up. I was motivated to do so - I knew that it was harming my health, particularly in Winter when I got chesty coughs I couldn't shake off, and that it was probably shortening my life. I was also becoming increasingly embarrassed that I lacked the ability to kick the habit. So, sustained by this motivation, I would decide to stop smoking.

I would then spend the next days and weeks trying to resist the urge to have a cigarette but the physical and psychological urge to smoke eventually always overcame my motivation and sooner or later I would start smoking again. Essentially, I was relying on Strong Will to stop smoking - and I was failing.

Then, a few years ago, inspired both by the idea of the Skillful Will and by some of the NLP work on Reframing, I took a different approach. In trying to stop smoking, what was always my undoing was the strength of the feeling of wanting a cigarette. So I decided to change the meaning of this experience so that it would become the reason why I was not smoking rather than the reason I did.

I spent time noticing as precisely as I could what exactly the experience was that "told" me I wanted a cigarette.

Classic Coaching Models - The GROW Model



The GROW model is deservedly one of the best known and widely used coaching models. It provides a simple yet powerful framework for navigating a route through a coaching session, as well as providing a means of finding your way when lost.

It is described in a number of coaching books, including John Whitmore's excellent book "Performance Coaching". GROW is an acronym for **G**oal, **R**ecurrent **R**eality, **O**ptions and **W**ill - which are seen as the four key elements of a coaching session.

The GROW model is described here as it applies to an individual session but part of its strength is that it can equally well be applied to a part of a session, or to series of sessions. In each case, the principle is the same.

Firstly, a session must have a **G**oal or outcome to be achieved. The goal should be as specific as possible and it must be possible to measure whether it has been achieved. So, having identified the goal, questions like "How will you know that you have achieved that goal?" are useful here.

As well as knowing where you are trying to get to, you need to know where you are starting from - the **C**urrent **R**eality. It is surprising how often this is the key part of a coaching session and that by just seeing clearly the

situation (rather than what was thought or imagined to be the situation), the resolution becomes obvious and straightforward.

Once you know where you are and where you want to go, the next step is to explore what **O**ptions you have for getting there. A useful metaphor for GROW is a map: once you know where you are going (the goal) and where you are (current reality), you can explore possible ways of making the journey (options) and choose the best.

But this in itself is not enough - you must also have the motivation or **W**ill to make the journey. The "W" is often taken to stand for a number of other elements of a session, all of which are important. Myles Downey in his book "Effective Coaching" suggests it stands for "**W**rap-up"; others have it standing for **W**hat, **W**here, **W**hy, **W**hen and **W**ow. But whatever is emphasised, the desired outcome from this stage is a commitment to action.

The GROW process has been presented sequentially here. In practice, it is a much less linear process which may start anywhere and revisit each of the stages several times. Often when I have lost my way in a session or got stuck, I turn to the GROW model to check out where I need to put my attention.

Essentially, it was an empty feeling centred on my solar plexus which I associated with feeling anxious and tense. However, as I focussed on just the experience itself (rather than the overlay of meaning I was placing on it) I realised that the experience itself was not altogether unpleasant. But it was in changing the meaning of the experience that the real difference was made. By choosing to experience this emptiness more as a vacuum which was pulling out the toxins from my body that I had inhaled, the experience stopped being negative. Indeed, it became a reminder of the benefits I was gaining from not smoking and that my body was being cleansed. It was also a reminder to me of my sense of personal power in giving up my addiction. I haven't smoked since.

This example relates to a specific behaviour but the principle applies to almost any change we wish to make - and

that is if we can find a way to make the direct experience of the change positive, then the change will come easily.

Events

January 16 2001: Next School of Coaching Coach Training Programme starts (10 days over 3 months). A training at a special reduced rate for the not-for-profit and educational sectors starts on February 5th. Tel: +44 (0) 207 479 2203. Email: jwrout@indsoc.co.uk

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