

Developing the leader within:

*maximising the
hand–heart
connection[©]*

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ABSTRACT: Coaching successful and fulfilled executives at various levels of the corporation, I have discovered one common denominator that unites them all – their ability to discover their strengths and to organise their professional careers so that these strengths are utilised on a daily, almost moment-by-moment basis. Developing and utilising strengths is vital to maximising individual and group productivity and performance. Untapped, undiscovered, under-utilised and underestimated potential is unleashed through greater self-awareness and self-regulation of strengths and a heightened awareness of the context and the environment operated in.

Although knowing your strengths and minimising your weaknesses to the extent that they diminish your strengths will guarantee success, it is no guarantee of fulfilment. Fulfillment is a by-product of effectively using your strengths combined with your life values and sense of purpose and personal vision. Successful and fulfilled leaders are able to find the optimal balance between what they have in their hand and what they have in their heart – what we term the hand-heart connection[©].

The hand-heart coaching approach presented here enables leaders and teams to become significantly more effective by combining increased awareness and utilisation of their major strengths areas with their core life values, purpose and guiding passions to enable and sustain the attainment of goals and desired outcomes. All executives throughout the organisation can be considered as leaders, if we consider leadership as simply influence and the ability to obtain followers, rather than the ability to achieve a position, rank or title. The hand-heart coaching approach facilitates the development of an individualised and/or team plan that concentrates on

where leaders are and what they must do to leverage their greatest strengths to achieve desired outcomes. The approach fosters:

- Growth and progress towards attainment of goals and desired outcomes.
- Discovery, understanding and application of strengths and core values as they relate to one's career roles.
- Development of a focused action plan to improve job performance, reach goals and overcome challenges and the impact of blind spots (those areas of strength or weakness of which we are unaware).
- Increased understanding of self and inter-connected stakeholders.

Incorporating the hand-heart coaching approach in the current phase of professional development enables leaders to focus and prioritise on key deliverables and outcomes, thereby reducing stress, focusing energy and simplifying the decision-making process. Executives learn to effectively and efficiently use time allocated to execute action steps today so that desired outcomes are realised tomorrow.

THE HAND-HEART CONNECTION®.

What we have in our hands is tangible and comprises:

- - Talents.
- - Strengths.
- - Knowledge.
- - Experience.
- - Personality.
- - Personal style and personal brand.

By contrast, what we have in our heart is intangible:

- - Core life values.
- - Purpose.
- - Ambition.
- - Vision.

It is essential to appreciate that lasting professional growth is impossible without personal growth. This is often evidenced with executives who are mostly hired for what they have in their hands, but remain latently unfulfilled in their careers because there is a disconnect with what they have in their heart.

Optimising the hand-heart connection involves taking an inventory of what is in your hand and building a strengths-based image of yourself, while uncovering what is in your heart. This invariably increases the leader's sense

of self-motivation, purpose and ambition so that empowerment, energy, focus and direction begin to flow from within the executive instead of from without, ie the external environment.

All leaders can learn how to maximise their hand-heart connection and, in so doing, effectively differentiate themselves. This is an invaluable skill that can be leveraged to help increase your professional market value and achieve desired results in your professional roles. If you do not clearly utilise your strengths, you run the risk of being

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perceived as a commodity in a marketplace that trades on the basis of price. However, communicating your strengths is primarily in the being and doing, ie the attainment of desired outcomes. If you find yourself continuously having to remind people what you're good at, then somewhere there's a conflict and you may not be perceived as good as you think you are. Effective differentiation starts with knowing what differentiates you among other smart people – knowing what you are and knowing what you are not; knowing what you do and do not want, and knowing what it takes for you as an individual or group to excel in your chosen career role.

ALL LEADERS ARE UNIQUE. It is a scientific fact that each human being is a uniquely crafted original. With over six billion people on earth, there is absolutely no duplication. Therefore every leader is unique, with unique DNA, a unique heartbeat, unique fingerprints, thumbprints, eye print and voice print. By virtue of our unique DNA, personality and experience, each individual leader is ideally “shaped” to do certain things and play certain roles optimally.

Nevertheless, leaders tend to either over- or underestimate what they have in their hand because it is obvious and natural (familiarity breeds contempt); it involves others' expectations and reflects the current situation. Similarly, heart values are often silenced and ignored in the relentless pace of day-to-day activities and

constant deadlines. What's in the heart is often a stretch goal, and is independent of others' expectations. What's in our hearts also has everything to do with purpose and calling, and is often both where and how we would like to be. Optimising the hand-heart connection enables leaders to capitalise on their uniqueness by recognising trends, patterns and traits in their personal history and thereby helping them course-correct accordingly. by enhancing emotional and intuitive intelligence as they move toward hand-heart desired outcomes. Once leaders overcome their

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initial reluctance to explore heart issues at a deeper level, the resulting awareness and embracing of one's life values, purpose and vision releases a surge of inner energy, self-motivation and taking of initiatives that propels them towards reaching goals and desired outcomes with renewed dedication and deliberation.

Leadership coaching incorporating the hand-heart connection© can help senior executives who possess cross-functional or general leadership responsibilities to enhance their strategy and decision-making processes, which ultimately will result in the achievement of desired outcomes, thereby enhancing overall performance.

TALK TO THE HAND. Our talents are the most important raw material for developing and cultivating strengths. They can be defined as special natural ability or aptitude in any recurring pattern of thought or behaviours that can be productively employed¹. Therefore intangibles such as persistence and a sense of humour can be considered talents along with tangibles such as literacy and numeracy, provided they can be productively employed. However, because our talents are woven into the fabric of everyday life, they are sometimes difficult to discern. Hand-heart coaching can play a role here in helping the leader view himself differently and identify his dominant talents. Skills are the learned steps of a talent, whereas knowledge consists of facts and lessons learned combined with life experiences. Powerful strengths, which can be defined as

consistent, near-perfect performance in an activity, are developed when dominant talents are refined with knowledge and skills.

Unfortunately, many of us who have gone through the education system and hold responsible positions in our professions are not fully aware of our dominant talents and sometimes sacrifice their development for the reinforcement of weaker ones, as dictated by our environment, peers and careers. This will invariably lead to an ongoing sense of frustration and unfulfilment. Needless to say, once identified, it takes courage to purposefully develop dominant strengths by combining dominant talents with education and experience. Therefore, building a strong life and career does not occur automatically. It is dependent on different variables, including your:

- Level of self-mastery (self-awareness and self-regulation).
- Ability to gather your resources in a concentrated manner and redirect them towards attainment of goals and desired outcomes.
- Resilience, ie the ability to bounce back after a setback and handle external stress.
- Initiative, ie the power to be internally motivated, relative to your opportunities.
- Emotional intelligence, ie your ability to connect well with others.
- Ability to correctly “read” your environment and respond appropriately

Equally important for the “hand” side of the equations are our life experiences. Whether they were within or beyond our control, we are shaped by our responses to them. The leader's personality – extrovert or introvert, thinker or feeler – is also evaluated and assessed in depth, along with their personal business style and the way they have consciously and subconsciously branded themselves to create particular perceptions about themselves.

It can be a pleasant or unpleasant wake-up call for leaders to realise the personal brand that they have developed based on their creed and their deeds (ie what they say – their values – and what they do – their needs). When the perception that their stakeholders may have of them is disliked, leaders are encouraged to re-examine their personal values.

WHAT'S IN YOUR HEART? Your values are your inner compass and guide in the current and next phase of your life. They point you toward what matters most to you. Your values:

- Comprise your principles, standards and your personal code of ethics which you bring to all our relationships and situations you encounter.
- Are largely responsible for the perceptions you create.

In optimising the hand-heart connection, it is necessary to ensure that things which matter most are never at the mercy of things that matter least. Leaders are coached to uncover some of the passionate destinations (desired outcomes) that they want to get to from their values at this phase in their life. How do they want the next phase in their career to turn out? What results would they like to achieve? Each developmental phase of the adult years has a different value base from previous ones, whereby priorities change and career and life expectations may shift, particularly during life transitions.

Becoming acutely aware of personal values enables the leader to create new preferences and ways to spend their time and resources, both professionally and personally. As values are clarified, they help to define a general purpose, encompassing career and life direction, and illuminate the leader's desired level of impact in his current professional and personal roles.

Since our current reality comprises both our perception of the current situation and what we know it to be, defining the leader's vision completes the hand-heart equation. This stage of the coaching process helps the leader to understand their vision, develop or recapture professional and personal vision, simplify it and document it.

Just as a partially-sighted individual will often stay within their comfort zones with the aid of a cane or a guide dog, so leaders suffering from a lack of vision will remain within familiar territories, refusing to maximize opportunities and take initiatives, thereby often stifling the energy of progress for themselves and for their teams. If sight is a function of the eyes, then vision can be defined as a function of the "heart". Vision unlocks the gates that keep leaders locked in past successes and failures and propels them beyond current limitations into enlarged possibilities.

The combination of vision, values, purpose and ambition with a realistic knowledge of the leader's

strengths, preferences and blind spots is used to coach the leader to deal with current challenges and direct the next phase of his career, keeping him at the growth-edge of his potential and career development.

BENEFITS. The benefits of hand-heart coaching to leaders and their organisations are numerous, enabling them to:

- Develop a comprehensive understanding of personal strengths and how to apply them to increase their leadership impact and results.
- Understand how their leadership style influences their

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working culture and employee engagement, which ultimately affects business outcomes.

- Identify recurring patterns of self-enhancing and self-limiting behaviours in their past experience.
- Become more goal-orientated while simultaneously being more process-aware.
- Become more effective and self-motivating.
- Build a strong network of stakeholders (those who follow and enable the vision).
- Mentor and accelerate the growth of other leaders throughout the organisation.
- Develop the ability to handle the stress involved in managing transitions and mastering change, with sharpened focus and increased confidence.

In essence, finding the optimal balance between the hand and the heart serves to eliminate difficulties in goal- and priority-setting caused by conflicting and competing priorities within the leader. This leads to an increased sense of personal integrity, authenticity, and purpose, which inevitably leads to an increase in influence and followers (those who buy into the vision), because people are always drawn to individuals (and teams) who know who they are, what they stand for and where they are going. ■

Reference:

1. Buckingham, M and Clifton, DO (2001). *Now Discover Your Strengths* (London: Simon & Schuster, UK Ltd).