

# Catalyst

Catalyst is published three times a year, for alumni of our seminars and workshops to remain connected, and for coaching clients, prospective clients, and other interested parties to learn about who we are and what we do. Also available electronically in Writings at [www.DancingStar.com](http://www.DancingStar.com)

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## Building a Coaching – e.g. Leadership – Culture

An executive recently asked me “how do you develop a mentoring/coaching culture in a company?” This article focuses on the coaching aspect of that question.

First, as a client commented recently, “Coaching is about compassion, not coercion”. This is true of wise leadership, and is true for leaders as well as for followers. If you want credibility, what you ask your organization to practice, practice yourself. To develop a coaching culture, get yourself coached.

Colleagues and I often talk about how to implement change throughout organizations, and about the negative impact that resistance or denial at the top can have on even the best of programs. So a second consideration is to have others at your level – from the board on down – be coached. Individuals can typically have an impact only within a limited scope. When all the leaders at the highest tier of an organization understand the value of coaching at a deep level, then work together to bring it into a culture, real change is possible. Otherwise, all your change agents can do is plant seeds for the future.

Coaching is about helping people set and achieve goals – goals in which they believe passionately, both personally and professionally. It is then about tapping their unique experience, talents, and wisdom, coaxing out that which most needs and wants to be expressed in the world – be it a

new product, a new way of doing business, or a new way of interacting with and leading others.

A culture of coaching is a culture of leadership, one that brings out the best in people. It is a culture that challenges people to continually grow, to search for new answers and new perspectives, to step back from the “fray” of daily activity and identify new solutions to those intractable problems which we are sometimes loathe to even acknowledge.

So, how do coaches and business leaders make this happen?

### *A culture of coaching is a culture of leadership*

Doug Garnett, CEO of Atomic Direct, recently outlined how he’s implementing a coaching and leadership culture in his company.

First, taking a page from Jim Collins’s **Good to Great**, define who the right people type of people are to achieve your organization’s goals. What roles are needed, skills are missing, intangibles would wake up a slumbering management team?

Then, evaluate whether you currently have those people and if you don’t, whether to hire or train them.

When you have them, identify what additional skills and training they need to grow with the organization.

What “stretch” roles will help them develop the necessary experience to grow and change as your company and markets do?

Then, on an on-going basis:

1. have regular sit-down sessions with your staff, and make sure they take the time to do so with their staff, all the way down the line
2. offer guidance, not solutions
3. ask open-ended [rather than “yes/no”] questions for broader thinking and problem solving.
4. don’t give advice unless you’re asked, and then sparingly
5. build confidence that you can stay out of your staff’s decision-making unless asked; even *if* asked
6. make room for mistakes, and for learning from those mistakes – your own as well as your team’s
7. practice “strategic invasion”
8. remain involved but hands-off, staying in touch without doing it all yourself [see #6 above]
9. stand “on the mountaintop” and describe what you see
10. create a “talent management” plan including stretch assignments, let staff execute it, then together review both progress-to-plan and results regularly. [again: *working your own plan makes you a more effective coach of others*].

Building a mentoring and coaching culture takes time and effort. As research on the ROI of coaching has shown (see *Coaching at www.dancingstar.com*), it’s worth it.

### ARE YOU UP FOR IT?

If you and your company are committed to having an impact in the world, and can use the services of a block-busting coach, consultant, or team facilitator to help you stay on target amid myriad demands, contact Dancing Star International. US landline: +1 617 275-5706; UK cell: +44 798 521-4520; e-mail: [info@DancingStar.com](mailto:info@DancingStar.com), or find us on the web at [www.DancingStar.com](http://www.DancingStar.com).

*You never change something by fighting the existing reality.*

*To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete. – R. Buckminster Fuller*



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One must embrace the chaos within to give  
birth to a dancing star – adapted from Nietzsche

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Rates and deadlines available on request.

**RESOURCES**

Books which can help clarify your  
thinking about leadership coaching:

- **Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart** – *A Systems Approach to Engaging Leaders with Their Challenges*, Mary Beth O’Neill
- **Body-Centered Coaching** – *Using the Body as a Resource for Change*, Marlena Field
- **CoActive Coaching** – *Skills for Coaching People Toward Success in Work & Life*, Whitworth et al
- **Coaching for Performance** – *GROWing People, Performance and Purpose*, John Whitmore

*Deb’s Corner*



My approach to coaching and leadership development is to encourage clients to look within.

Within each of us lies our unique vision, our unique set of talents, experience, likes, dislikes, skills, weaknesses, and blindspots that contribute to making us the leaders we are capable of being. Yet how many of us, in our busy daily lives, take time to even look within, much less explore the territory, then share what we’ve learned about the terrain with others?

Looking within helps us see ourselves more clearly – the habitual ways of thinking that do or do not serve us, assumptions that are partly or wholly untrue. It helps us shift our perspective on a given situation to clarify what our role is or should be.

Looking within also helps us identify what type of leader we are – an out-in-front, take-charge type, a behind-the-scenes, let-others-shine type, or some variation therein.

Looking within helps to identify the “elephant in the room” – that issue or set of issues everyone knows is there but no one wants to be the first to point out for fear of being confrontative, wrong, or shot down so someone else can look good.

Whenever a group of two or more people come together, it is almost inevitable an elephant will appear. The question is typically not whether there is one, but how many, how big, and how much of the air they are

sucking out of the room.

For instance, I’ve participated in a number of leadership development programs, including ones I’ve run myself. Invariably, the leadership styles of those in the room come into conflict, as people jockey for position, and try to have their voices and issues heard. This is particularly true when there is a strong leader – it’s hard to resist the temptation of measuring oneself against that person.

We’ve all watched leaders become ensnared by their agendas and egos; seen the inability of co-leaders or followers to confront them. How do we avoid that trap ourselves?

I suggest it’s about ego, and letting go of the need for external approval.

If we listen to Lao Tse, we know that wise leaders are humble leaders. Now, when’s the last time you walked into a room full of people with no egos in it? How many leaders around you practice humility? Yet humility is exactly what I recommend.

If you only work for the money, then forget about being a good leader. However, if your work is about more than the money, then the challenge as I see it is to continually look within, asking *what is my real agenda here?* This question is worth taking time over, looking beneath the first set of answers to the answers that lie beneath, then the ones beneath those. Then ask, *what is the overall goal, how am I helping achieve that goal, and (the tough question) how am I getting in the way?*

**WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?**

To know a thing, define it for yourself. My definition of leadership comes in part from people I know.

One of my favorites is a dancer. As a youth in the 1920s and ‘30s he decided to throw his partner over his back in time to the music. Today these moves are known as aerials, and moves combined to be performed on-stage to music, choreography. Then, they were the bright ideas of energetic youngsters. Today this man is in demand worldwide by people fascinated with what he helped create, at 92 dances like a teenager, and is one of the humbler people I know.

A client had a vision for changing his industry. He worked for years testing and perfecting his ideas, on a fraction of the money he earned working in large global corporations. He and his team now make news nationally with his ideas.

A client who’s a corporate consultant regularly guides groups of thousands at all levels in organizations to better communication, intuitively tapping his story-telling skills from an earlier journalism career and, laterally, combining them with his growing interest in spirituality to reinvigorate, inspire, and motivate people across global operations.

To me, these people are leaders by virtue of their vision, passion, energy for and commitment to what they do, the uniqueness of their contributions, and their willingness to follow their instincts and intuition over the long term, down-sides and setbacks notwithstanding. What is your definition of leadership? Please share, for our next issue.