



Executive coaching - leading with flow and focus

"Responsibility and challenging pressure. A CEO expecting miracles.... An inner drive to achieve and deliver while balance in life is put on hold. Who am I in all this?"

This is a situation I often meet as an executive coach. My experience is that you as an executive are left in peace by your board or CEO so long as you deliver results. The moment results falter, you have them pushing and controlling, which makes it more difficult for you to focus and be creative.

Research is very clear, that taking time for reflection is a critical success factor for executives. We all run faster, get hit by information overload and have our attention fractured. Companies with executives that allow time for reflection are more successful. Clever insight comes when we empty our minds and have a free flow of thoughts. These insights are a high level of intelligence that cannot be taught. With good practice, however, one can open up for them, add wisdom to strategic issues, clarify decision making, strengthen relationships and generally improve one's quality of life.

How can you as an executive move towards this state of flow and focus where you open up to more of your intelligence?

One of the prerequisites is space. Allowing time for coaching is one option for creating space in a packed calendar. Here is an example.

Low in spirit - high in ambition

Carl is forty three years old with an entrepreneurial, outgoing and result oriented personality. He is the founder and managing director of a subsidiary with more than a hundred employees in a listed Swedish IT corporation. The subsidiary merged into the corporation two years ago when Carl became one of several subsidiaries reporting to the CEO.

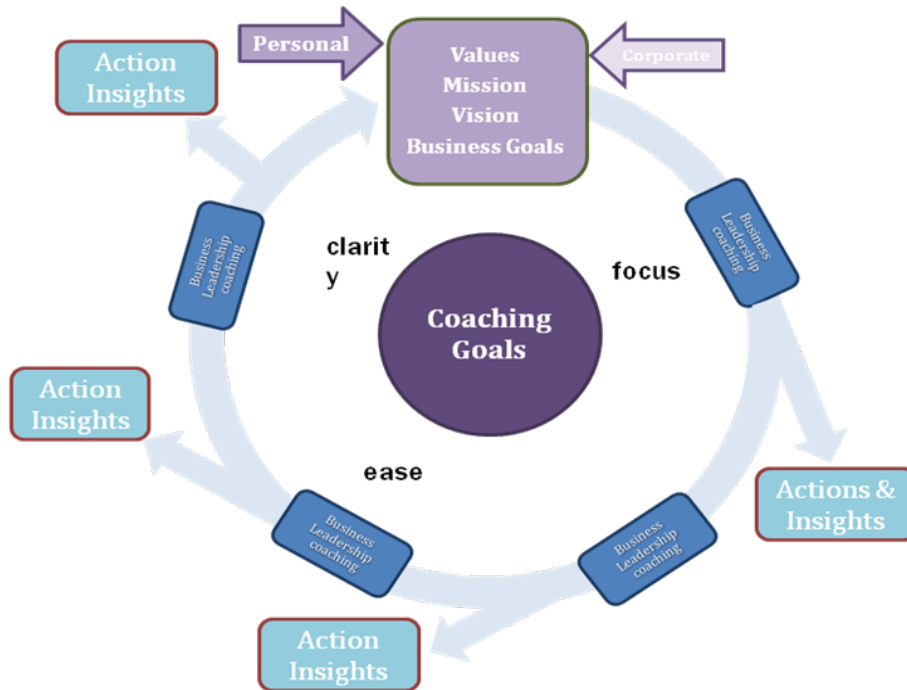
When I meet with Carl he is not his most shining self. He is under pressure from his CEO due to a less successful merger with a smaller company that he initiated and now manages. It has affected his confidence and his enthusiasm for the job. " Maybe I should do something else...". His usual positive attitude and drive is slumbering and even though he is working long hours things are not happening as they should. His CEO is worried. Carl has lost his bearing points.

How do I find my bearing points?

Most corporations have defined their mission, vision and values. It gives the company direction. However, few managers have done it from a personal point of view. I encourage people to go for their dreams. If you don't dream, there are no dreams to come true. We need to take responsibility for our dreams! It is as if the soul comes to rest when we have direction. Behavior comes from values, mission gives us energy when we wonder why we work late hours, and vision guides us towards our dreams.

All coaching starts by defining goals that are experienced as inspiring and meaningful. Carl's goals were to:

- Step into the positive energy he used to have
- Define an inspiring future. "Who am I when I move further into my career? "



Defining values.

By looking at role models and important experiences in his life, Carl defined his values as : freedom, risk-taking and humility. It took a number of iterations of "... and why is this important?" until we had reached the core values.

It is important to give the values flesh and blood. Humility was coming from Carl's urge to be a team member in his organization. One of his role models growing up was a man who built a large truck business, but who never stopped joining the truckdrivers. Carl liked the metaphor of driving the truck with his organization. Coming from values it became clear to Carl that a traditional corporate career was not an important goal, in and of itself, in his life. It was more important to be the spider in the web, having an executive position amidst everything that is happening with familiar relationships to his managers, other subordinates and clients.

It might not sound mind blowing to be clear about your values, but it can be. It gave Carl a foundation from which to expand. He could stop escaping to his victim self and step into the positive energy of building his company stretching his values as far as possible, yet still fitting into the big corporate picture.



Defining mission

Our mission can give us energy getting up in the morning answering the question “Why am I doing this? What is the purpose?”

With values in place it became clear to Carl that his mission is to build companies, creating healthy and efficient corporate cultures. We defined healthy and it became clear to Carl that he could live his mission by bringing in more of who he is.

- He is a person who loves exercising and playing sports. How could he make that part of his corporate culture?
- He is a person who needs to take time out once in a while, for an hour or two. Just by allowing himself to be in the now. He could come back to the office with a refreshed mind and new ideas. How could he make that part of his corporate culture? An idea that came to him was to allow each member of his organization two hours thinking time a month. They could do whatever they wanted, the only requirement was to give a brief report about the outcome.

Defining an inspiring future

A clear vision guides us towards making dreams come true. If we don't have a clear vision, strategies might not show up. It is true at both an organizational as well as a personal level. Research done by Mark Lipton at Harvard Business School tells us that “a clearly articulated vision, fully implemented across an organization, in fact makes a profoundly positive difference.” (*Guiding Growth: How Vision Keeps Companies on Course* published by Harvard Business School Press).

Carl's inspiring future was by undoubtedly to start another company and then another. In the near future he is content to stay in his present position. He was energized by the challenge of bringing in even more of himself creating a culture colored by his heart and soul, leading to a healthy and efficient corporate culture.

In our coaching, Carl was brought back to the meaning of his work. In my experience, by far the most powerful force of attraction in organizations and in our individual lives is meaning.

“Take one step toward our destiny through creative action...The universe turns towards us, realizing we are here, alive, and about to make our mark.” – David Whyte