

WBECS 2019

THE THREE LEVELS OF IMPACT

WORLD BUSINESS AND EXECUTIVE COACH SUMMIT

The Three Levels of Impact

Traditional coaching takes place primarily in a horizontal dimension - we assist our clients in getting from point A to point B. Yet lasting impact nearly always happens in the vertical dimension - a deepening of the client's ground of being and greater access to inspiration and inner wisdom. The horizontal dimension represents what is sometimes called 'the dash' - the distance traveled and milestones passed between birth and death. The vertical dimension, on the other hand, represents our relationship with that journey. To better understand the difference between these two dimensions, let me share a real-life case study that walked into my office not long ago. A friend of my daughter had just discovered (via text message) that she was not being accepted into the advanced performance group at her dance company. Resplendent in anger and frustration, she laid out the insensitivities, biases, and incompetences on the part of the decision-making panel that had led to her rejection and a detailed list of possible actions to get the decision reversed.

SHE THEN ASKED ME FOR HELP IN THREE AREAS:

1. A crash course in effective negotiation and influence strategies to assist her in persuading the panel of their error.
2. Designing a back-up plan for what to do if she was unsuccessful in her attempts, including a potential smear campaign against the relevant parties so that they would lose their jobs and more sensible and appropriately skilled people would be able to review and assess her potential.
3. Brainstorming possible alternative career options if this proved to be indicative of the realities of the industry to which she was committing her life.

LEVEL I: IMPACTING SPECIFIC BEHAVIORS OR PERFORMANCE SITUATIONS ("PERFORMANCE COACHING")

Client is guided from fear to confidence/courage, discomfort to comfort, inaction to action, etc.

- Interventions tend to be tactical or technique based and aimed at the presenting problem (difficult people, handling nerves, "the yips", etc.)
- Success is measured in terms of a shift in behavior or effective resolution of a situation, (winning business or a sporting event, losing weight, negotiating a raise, a successful job interview, etc.)

LEVEL II: IMPACTING SPECIFIC LIFE AREAS AND/OR CONTEXTS ("LIFE COACHING")

- Client is introduced to and trained/supported in developing new and improved life skills in the targeted area or areas
- Interventions tend to be strategy or technique based (wheel of life, values and purpose, belief change, 7 steps, 3 keys, best practice, etc.) and aimed at taking care of perceived underlying causes
- Success is measured in terms of increased skills, confidence, and results in particular life areas (i.e. relationships, sales, parenting, presentations, etc.)

LEVEL III: GLOBAL IMPACT ("TRANSFORMATIVE COACHING")

- Client is introduced to and supported in a pervasive shift in their understanding of who and what they are and how life works
- Interventions tend to be insight based and involve looking to see what's true for all human beings, regardless of individual differences.
- Success is measured by a pervasive sense of confidence, well-being, and resilience and a whole new way of being in the world.

EXAMPLE:

People sometimes get fixated on finding Level II solutions for Level I problems - they've got a headache, but instead of taking an aspirin, they want to analyze the lifestyle changes they need to make to become the kind of person who doesn't get headaches. It's an interesting idea, but it's a lot easier to do when your head isn't hurting. At Level III you may still take the aspirin, but knowing that everyone gets headaches and they invariably pass takes the pressure off you to fix it.

Now, each one of these interventions would have made perfect sense in the horizontal dimension, where our primary goal is to improve our experience of life by changing our circumstances in a particular way. But in the vertical dimension, our primary goal is to transform our relationship with circumstances. We do this by gaining a deeper, more insightful understanding of what's really going on behind our experience of life. While that understanding inevitably leads to clearer thinking, better decisions, and a higher quality of life, it does so indirectly and in ways that are often surprising.

One of the things that's true for all human beings is that when we're drowning in negative emotion, it's a terrible time to trust our thinking. So I counseled my young friend patience in the short term, promising that if she came back later that afternoon, we could revisit her plan after she had allowed herself a bit of time to regain her bearings and take a look at things with fresh eyes. While she was initially frustrated by my 'unwillingness to help,' a few hours later she returned to tell me, quite sheepishly, that the text message turned out to have been a ruse - a misguided attempt on the part of a well-meaning friend to make her think she hadn't made it so that she'd be all the more delighted the next day when the head of the company planned to announce her successful 'promotion' in front of all of her peers.

On reflection, the head of the company was actually 'a very good judge of talent and a very nice person,' dance was 'the only thing in the world she wanted to pursue,' and the idea of sitting down to study negotiation, persuasion, and influence was 'kind of boring' and would I mind terribly if we left it to another time?

Now, it's easy to dismiss this story as the result of an artistic temperament and for our clients to point out that their problems are real and not due to this kind of comedy of errors. But in my experience, our problems are always the result of a simple yet fundamental misunderstanding:

We think we're experiencing reality, but we're actually experiencing our thinking.

In other words, we think we have a reality problem, when in reality we have a thinking problem. And the more time we spend trying to 'improve reality,' the more real our thinking appears to us. This is the ultimate dilemma of the horizontal dimension - no matter how much time and energy we put into tuning up the engine of an imaginary car, it's still not going to get us where we really want to go.

By way of contrast, in the vertical dimension we recognize that we are always already exactly where we need to be. Wellbeing is right here, right now, and there is nothing we need to do, achieve, or change in order to be happy and at peace in this moment.

The more deeply we understand the nature of Thought, the more we see the world around us with clarity and insight. And the more we experience the deeper feelings that are our birthright, the more apparent it becomes that many of our attempts to improve our lot in life in the horizontal dimension are little more than a stressful distraction.

Of course, we can no more live purely in the vertical dimension than we can in the horizontal. Life seems designed to be experienced in 3D, and even though we may know at some level it's just a trick of perception that makes it appear this way, we will still get caught up and at times overwhelmed by the illusion.

But if we can let go of even a little bit of the compulsion to fix our problems and improve our lot, we'll notice that the edges of the world get a bit softer and life seems a whole lot less frightening. Because there's less 'reality' to fix, there's a lot less to do and a lot more time to do it in. Which means that when we find a circumstance we actually do want to change or create in the world, we have all the energy and resources we need to succeed.

The only thing you need to remember is this:

It's all made up, and it's all OK

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