

POSITIVE **OUTLOOK.**

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Ken's Korner:

Don't Become the Stuff of Your Day

I have recently been reminded how easy it is to create exactly the life I don't want. We have recently moved and as is always true I must have a shop, so I am having one built. The whole process has been an exercise in patience. The initial permit application was over four months ago and, due to a series of exchanges between the engineer and the contractor, as of today we still do not even have a concrete floor.

Some of you reading this article know I can tend to be rather impatient. I like to get in there, figure out what needs to happen, take the necessary steps, complete the project and move on. Some things in life work that way and some don't. When they don't I have become aware I can choose a helpful or a miserable response.

Yesterday was one of those miserable response days. The forms were up and we were scheduled to have the inspection that would allow us to proceed. I went out in the morning to look at the site and knew there were a number of things that would not pass. So, I called the contractor and was told he had expected to get there earlier but had been held up unexpectedly and would be late. This was not the first time I had heard him say this. Since we had failed the previous inspection you can imagine where my head went.

I became totally preoccupied with the situation and wasted most of the day in an agitated emotional state. Somewhere in the course of the day I realized what I had done and decided to focus back on the part of my life I had some control over and relax into what I could do.

This situation is similar to what each of us face every day. We blow it when we get so caught up responding to what we imagine and have no control over. We give away time that could have been spent doing something productive or moving us in the direction we would like our lives to go. It was my choice to spend yesterday in an uncomfortable non-productive place despite the fact that I know I chose to do it.

We all make these choices. We choose to get agitated and stew instead of standing back, taking a larger view of the situation, and focusing on something we can do something about. There isn't a human being alive who doesn't choose to do this. We have a tendency to fall back on habitual patterns of response that don't work in the current situation.

This response of focusing on what doesn't meet our expectation of how things should go is in most cases an old unconscious response from the past. There are things we can do to keep learning new responses and discard the old destructive ones. The old habitual responses may never go away totally. Not to despair, life can get more productive and pleasant.

The key is in where we choose to focus. If we only focus on the immediate situation we will become immersed in it and we will become the “stuff” of our day. If we keep the larger view of our life with us and consciously choose a constructive response we will move rapidly in the direction we would like our lives to go. Life is a process, not a destination. May your process be one of continual growth and increasing satisfaction.

Oh, by the way, we passed the inspection.

Kenneth H. Kasner, PhD

The Concept Of A Coach Is Slippery

Coaches are not teachers, but they teach. They’re not your boss—in professional tennis, golf, and skating, the athlete hires and fires the coach—but they can be bossy. They don’t even have to be good at the sport. The famous Olympic gymnastics coach Bela Karolyi couldn’t do a split if his life depended on it. Mainly, they observe, they judge, and they guide.

Coaches are like editors, another slippery invention. Consider Maxwell Perkins, the great Scribner’s editor, who found, nurtured, and published such writers as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Thomas Wolfe. “Perkins has the intangible faculty of giving you confidence in yourself and the book you are writing,” one of his writers said in a *New Yorker* Profile from 1944. “He never tells you what to do,” another writer said. “Instead, he suggests to you, in an extraordinarily inarticulate fashion, what you want to do yourself.”

The coaching model is different from the traditional conception of pedagogy, where there’s a presumption that, after a certain point, the student no longer needs instruction. You graduate. You’re done. You can go the rest of the way yourself.

Coaching considers the teaching model naïve about our human capacity for self-perfection. It holds that, no matter how well prepared people are in their formative years, few can achieve and maintain their best performance on their own.

For example, Itzhak Perlman enjoyed the services of a personal coach all along. “The great challenge in performing is listening to yourself,” he said. “Your physicality, the sensation that you have as you play the violin, interferes with your accuracy of listening.” What violinists perceive is often quite different from what audiences perceive.

“Outside ears and eyes” have been invaluable at every point.

“My wife always says that I don’t really know how I play,” he told me. “She is an extra ear.” She’d tell him if a passage was too fast or too tight or too mechanical—if there was something that needed fixing. Her ear provided external judgment. “She is very tough, and that’s what I like about it,” Perlman says. He doesn’t always trust his response when he listens to recordings of his performances. He might think something sounds awful, and then realize he was mistaken: “There is a variation in the ability to listen, as well, I’ve found.” He didn’t know if other instrumentalists relied on coaching, but he suspected that many find help like he did. Vocalists, he pointed out, employ voice coaches throughout their careers.

Good coaches know how to break down performance into its critical individual components. In sports, coaches focus on mechanics, conditioning, and strategy, and have ways to break each of those down, in turn. The U.C.L.A. basketball coach John Wooden, at the first squad meeting each season, even had his players practice putting their socks on. He demonstrated just how to do it: he carefully rolled each sock over his

toes, up his foot, around the heel, and pulled it up snug, then went back to his toes and smoothed out the material along the sock's length, making sure there were no wrinkles or creases. He had two purposes in doing this. First, wrinkles cause blisters. Blisters cost games. Second, he wanted his players to learn how crucial seemingly trivial details could be. "Details create success" was the creed of a coach who won ten N.C.A.A. men's basketball championships.

There was a moment in sports when employing a coach was unimaginable—and then came a time when not doing so was unimaginable. So outside ears, and eyes, are important for concert-caliber musicians, winning sports teams and Olympic-level athletes. What about regular professionals, who just want to do well as they can?

Coaching has become a fad in recent years. There are leadership coaches, executive coaches, life coaches, and college-application coaches. Search the Internet, and you'll find that there's even Twitter coaching. Self-improvement has always found a ready market; it's teaching with a trendier name. Coaching aimed at improving the performance of people who are already professionals is less usual. It's also riskier: bad coaching can make people worse.

Good coaches let the person-being-coached choose the direction for coaching. The coaching client usually knows better than anyone what his or her difficulties are. Good coaches speak with credibility, make a personal connection, and focus little on themselves. They parcel out their observations carefully.

The sort of coaching that fosters effective innovation and judgment, not merely the replication of technique, may not be so easy to cultivate. Yet modern society increasingly depends on ordinary people taking responsibility for doing extraordinary things. In the absence of guidance, how many people can do such complex tasks at the level we require? With a diploma, a few will achieve sustained mastery; with a good coach, many could. We treat guidance for professionals as a luxury—you can guess what gets cut first when school-district budgets are slashed. But coaching may prove essential to the success of modern society.

The Myth of Individualism

The greatest difficulty, though, may simply be a profession's willingness to accept the idea. The prospect of coaching forces awkward questions about how we regard failure. The myth of individualism can negatively affect our chances for success.

Most people think it is important to "go it alone" due to their belief in the myth of individualism; they hold tightly to the idea that everyone succeeds or fails on the basis of individual efforts and abilities. This assumption is so powerful that when an alternative view is suggested (that success depends on our relationships with others as much as it does on us) the usual reaction is denial. Denial of the role of relationships in the executive's success preserves the self-enhancing illusion that we are masters of our own fates and, therefore, deserving of all the credit for our successes.

For society, too, there are uncomfortable difficulties: we may not be ready to accept—or pay for—a cadre of people who identify the flaws in the professionals upon whom we rely, and yet hold in confidence what they see.

Coaching done well may be the most effective intervention designed for human performance. Yet, the allegiance of coaches is to the people they work with; their success depends on it. And the existence of a coach requires an acknowledgment that even expert practitioners have significant room for improvement.

Are we ready to confront this fact when we're in their care? *Source: The New Yorker, October 3, 2011*

Do Your New Leaders Hit the Ground Running?

40% of new executives are shown the door within 18 months of being hired. There are two reasons. The first is that they were mis-hired in the first place and the second is that there was no systematic onboarding process in place to insure they were properly focused and supported. This is not only a problem for executives, it is also a major issue for managers and supervisors.

At the manager level the outcome is often different. Managers who are not highly successful are often left in the position to perform at a mediocre level. The cost is huge.

The cost of getting people functioning at a high level in a very short time is not that great. There may be a rather small cost to establishing a systematic hiring process that reduces mis-hires. However, once the process is established it can be applied in all executive and management jobs. The content changes but the process stays the same. An advantage is that the same assessment tools can be applied, people get familiar with them and the process gets more and more efficient saving time and energy for everyone involved.

Onboarding has become recognized as absolutely critical for people assuming any new executive or management position. The sink or swim approach that is often used leaves the individual to stumble around on their own trying to discover priorities, resources and systems. This is time wasted and very frustrating for someone wanting to do a good job. Just as with the initial hiring process the onboarding process, once developed, can be applied to most executive or management positions with minor changes.

It is true you will not eliminate all turnover or poor performance when someone new is put in a job. The question to ask yourself is, Can we do a better job and substantially reduce our costs?

If you would like to discuss this further email us or give us a call.

We can help. Give us a call at (602) 357-4399, or check us out on the web at positiveoptions.net

Quick Quip: First Grade Proverbs

A first grade school teacher in Virginia had twenty-five students in her class. She presented each child in her classroom the first half of a well-known proverb and asked them to come up with the remainder of the proverb.

It's hard to believe that these were actually done by first graders. Their insight may surprise you. While reading, keep in mind that these are first graders -- 6-year-olds -- because the last one is a classic!

1. Don't change horses until they stop running.
2. Strike while the bug is close.
3. It's darkest before Daylight Saving Time.
4. Never underestimate the power of termites.
5. You can lead a horse to water but how?
6. Don't bite the hand that looks dirty.
7. No news is impossible.
8. A miss is as good as a Mr.
9. You can't teach an old dog new math.
10. If you lie down with dogs, you'll stink in the morning.
11. Love all, trust me.

12. The pen is mightier than the pigs.
 13. An idle mind is the best way to relax.
 15. Happy the bride who gets all the presents.
 16. A penny saved is not much.
 17. Two's company, three's the Musketeers.
 18. Don't put off till tomorrow what you put on to go to bed.
 19. Laugh and the whole world laughs with you, cry and you have to blow your nose.
 20. There are none so blind as Stevie Wonder.
 21. Children should be seen and not spanked or grounded.
 22. If at first you don't succeed get new batteries.
 23. You get out of something only what you see in the picture on the box.
 24. When the blind lead the blind get out of the way.
- And the WINNER and last one!
25. Better late than pregnant.

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Voice & Fax: 602-357-4399

Toll Free: 866-920-4473 (866 920-HIRE)

www.positiveoptions.net

Ken@PositiveOptions.net

Sally@PositiveOptions.net

"Enhancing Personal & Organizational Performance"

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