

# Graceful Business

Helping People and Organisations Thrive with Executive Coaching

## Pamela Gawler-Wright

*A few months ago a friend somewhat desperately decided upon seeking an Executive Coach who could help him with a particular issue that was gnawing at his soul, leaving him feeling powerless. He needed someone who could help him ethically navigate the world of business and politics, as well as that of his personal psyche. A two-hour conversation with Julian Russell, an elder in the NLP community and UKCP Registered Psychotherapist, and a formal coaching session with his associate, Judith Lowe, resulted in a new course of action on his part, and the obstacles he had experienced for many months began to progressively transform. Is this breakthrough just down to the talent of these two practitioners, or his own perseverance? Or is it explained by what Executive Coaching specifically is and does?*

*The profession of coaching is coming of age and Julian is one of its experts and champions.*

**JR:** In the broadest sense, executive coaching is about helping people make the most of themselves in terms of their own satisfaction with life and the value they create in the world – and in their organisation.

**PGW:** It's a loaded question, but how would you differentiate between Executive Coaching and psychotherapy or counselling?

**JR:** Well, a lot of psychotherapy, but certainly not all, is about getting from a problem place to an average place, while Executive Coaching is largely about going from an average place to very high performance. It has an outcome

orientation and a focus on dove-tailing the agenda of the organisation with one's personal agenda. Emotion takes on a different emphasis as well. In some psychotherapy approaches, how you feel is the most important thing. In Executive Coaching, how you feel is only one contributing factor. It's also a lot about how you think, how you intuit your own and other people's processes, and using that information to get business goals met.

**PGW:** Wariness by psychotherapists of executive coaching has focused on the issue of the split agenda between individual and organisation. What can you clarify here?



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**JR:** Learning to dove-tail agendas between yourself and another person, yourself and an organisation, or yourself in society is a core life-skill for everyone and that isn't a compromise. Dove-tailing means you're getting the best for yourself and for the other players and parts of the system.

**PGW:** This seems to be central to the psychotherapeutic endeavour too – to healthily harmonise the world within with the world outside your skin.

**JR:** That's right. I'm not talking about a covert form of win-lose. It really has to be genuinely win-win, which is the domain of high performance. You are doing what you want because you are passionate about it and that is also bringing value to the organisation. If you know how to be a good business leader, then the people who work with you are also passionate about what they're doing and that's organisational high performance. So successful executive coaching benefits both the individual and the wider system they are working in. In the business world that benefit has to be visible and measurable, because that's what the organisation wants.

**PGW:** What sort of results is regarded by the business culture as measurably beneficial?

**JR:** That can often be anecdotal. For example, someone will say, 'Such-and-such has become a better leader;' or, 'I can communicate with this person better.' It's hard to find a consensus of quantifiable benefits. There are more standards within Executive Coaching than in the more general coaching community, however, mostly because the Human Resources community that vets coaches have an idea about what it is that they want.

**PGW:** One of the greatest benefits of people's experience of Executive Coaching is the set of new key concepts and clear strategies they

are given, which empower their behaviour and restore self-confidence. Effective psychotherapy can also be about learning new things; however, in Executive Coaching the tutoring aspect is very overt. How does Executive Coaching compare to training?

**JR:** Executive Coaching is generally on a one-to-one basis and it can include tutoring, clarifying objectives and the difference between where a client is now and where they want to be. You may need to teach them something as a part of that or just show them that they already know what it is they want to learn.

In addition to my Executive Coaching, I also do Executive Coaching *Plus*, which has three components. The first takes a client from vision to plan to action — so that's quite organisationally oriented. The second is about personal presence and charisma — being a leader that people want to follow — and that's about internal alignment. It's intrapsychic and there's a psychological coaching part to that and maybe also a training dimension that I do one-to-one. A high degree of cognitive-somatic integration in a person is intuitively visible to others as 'congruence,' charisma, or even 'leadership presence'. Every business person knows of colleagues who have excellent business skills, but very little leadership ability. If we are not sensing other people with our feelings as well as our mind, we are likely to be inept at influencing either the cognitive self who wants a rational argument, or the emotional self who wants to feel safe. In a powerful and effective leader, mind and feelings sit comfortably with each other.

The third is about mobilising people — helping the leader develop enough emotional intelligence to get the personal and business agendas of other people and be able to dove-tail multiple agendas so that high performance

is achieved. There may be a communicational training component to that.

Traditional Executive Coaching is about how you get change over time, over a year for example. What I call Executive Coaching *Plus* brings about a more immediate step change in a shorter amount of time. Really going for a quantum leap in the person's achievement and then supporting that change with continued coaching.

**PGW:** What drew you into working in organisations and developing that calling into Executive Coaching?

**JR:** I wanted to work with people who wanted to achieve high performance and extend their potential. And I think organisations are the best sponsors in the world of personal development. They are great champions of good practice in the field, of spending plenty of time on one's own growth, and sponsoring the people who work in personal development to have proper time and financial resources to continue to train themselves and develop the field.

**PGW:** And what brought you to your particular interest in helping people discover and develop their life calling?

**JR:** After more than two decades of coaching experience, it's clear to me that the exploration of personal mission, or life 'calling' is a core component of leadership development. It is what brings each of us into action in the world to make our special mark as a leader.

I know that if a client is clear about his/her 'call,' and embodies it in their somatic, feeling self, then they will be aligned and passionate about what they are doing. This will consequently be reflected in their behaviour. Robert Dilts places 'calling' at the identity level, because it flows via your beliefs and values, through your acquisition of competencies,

through behaviour, and out into the world. Recognizing your calling can increase self-confidence and clarity about your competencies, and thus lead to more success. It can also be a tool to unleash potential that is being blocked by negative self-belief. And it can also serve as the bridge that leads a person to realize a dream of a completely different way of work and life.

I've recently established my Life Talent Programme as a key methodology for transformational personal development. The course focuses on having more personal congruence, a more consistent sense of one's calling and mission, and the self belief to express it powerfully in the world. The umbrella methodology for this is the Ericksonian approach to creating an environment in which self-fulfilling prophecies naturally occur. We naturally grow, our destiny is to develop, and sometimes we just need a catalyst to release the process and let things unfold fully. Erickson talked about 'natural self healing'; in this programme I talk about natural 'self-wholeing'. So that when the winds of change are in our sails, we can let the forces of life carry us.

**PGW:** Good Executive Coaching therefore is also a way of supporting mental health within the working community. Does family therapy have anything to offer to the map of organisational health?

**JR:** Gregory Bateson defined wisdom as being multiple perspectives within a system. One of my main tasks is to look at how people behave as part of a system; to get both a cognitive map of the system as well as a somatic map. Very often as an executive coach you can't tell right away whether the feedback that the individual is getting is a result of their own behaviour or a result of other things happening within the system. You have to get a systems perspective. The best way to do that is to get face-to-face 360° interviews with the

individual's bosses, peer group, and direct reports; i.e., multiple perspectives of the system. Minimally, I talk to a client's boss to find out what are their criteria for success. Then I go back to my client and say, 'This is how your boss will know that you are successful in behavioural terms.' I also talk to the HR person who is involved. Then as part of the coaching, I say to my client, 'It would be really good to talk to people and get some feedback about what you need to do so that you yourself personally have multiple perspectives of the system.'

The environment is really important as an influence as well. I make a point of visiting client stakeholders and finding an excuse to wander around, go and use the coffee machine, chat to people, get some sort of feeling for how they work, how they dress, how they treat each other to help me with my systemic view.

One of the key outcomes of this process is to help a client become aware of their blindspots and to integrate the data from multiple perspectives in a way that can be useful to them.

**PGW:** You organised the first annual NeuroLinguistic Programming (NLP) Executive Coaching Conference in London in March 2004 and you teach an NLP Mastery in Executive Coaching Course.

**JR:** I have a strong belief that NLP training is a terrific basis for executive coaches because there are some key parallels between the way that NLP sees the world and the way that business thinks about the world. Both are interested in outcome orientation, high performance, and focussed change, for example. And both NLP and management are quite cognitive in their training method. So there's an overlap in style as well as great complementarity that makes NLP a powerful

tool in executive coaching. And I'm passionately committed to sponsoring NLP Executive coaching as the coaching of greatest value, here in the UK and Europe.

**PGW:** You also co-trained with psychotherapist Stephen Gilligan in a workshop in London in May 2004 entitled *Integrating Hearts and Minds in Business*, a combined application of NLP and Self Relations for the Executive Coach.

**JR:** The 'Integrating Hearts and Minds in Business' seminar is for people who want to integrate working with emotion into a business environment. While NLP techniques are a natural and powerful complement to Executive Coaching skills, there are still important elements that Stephen Gilligan's Self Relations (SR) theory brings to the table. For example, NLP isn't particularly good at teaching people to pay attention to feelings without trying to change them - just letting a client experience them as they are without trying to reframe or 'fix' them. So a coach with SR training, for example, leads clients into greater internal alignment by helping them to communicate from both their cognitive and somatic selves. Feeling vulnerable becomes an essential access point to one's intuition, emotional intelligence, and embodied rationality. The feeling of feelings gives you more information about what is going on inside of you as well as what is going on in the organisation. So it is also about learning how to use your own emotional centres as a way of sensing the organisation around you.

I really enjoy telling and showing business people how they can increase their competitive advantage by paying more attention to their emotional centres!