

Values Based Coaching

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We often have people arrive on our personal success programmes searching for something which has been elusive. Sometimes they have followed a career path, which has been very successful but is no longer fulfilling. They may be in a relationship, which they have outgrown and feel they should fix in some way. Sometimes it's a combination of both.

Guilt often accompanies these negative feelings as people feel they should be satisfied with their lot and may be letting other people down if they make changes to satisfy some personal need. Very often these feelings show themselves as a series of small tugs – the first few are ignored or described as 'it's just an off day – I'll feel better tomorrow'. As the tugs become more frequent so the further the recipient falls into denial and soldiers on. Irritability sets in followed by frustration and stress and, if unchecked, ultimately illness. There is much documented evidence to link the onset of serious illnesses such as cancer and heart disease with stress. Stress begins slowly and creeps up by degrees – by the time it begins to show obvious symptoms such as irritability, sleeplessness, emotional outbreaks and maybe regular minor illnesses such as colds and flu it has already taken hold.

Coaching is often described as the process of 'getting us from where we are now to where we want to be' a simplistic, forward thinking concept which has much to recommend it. If, however, we continue to apply the same thinking which got us to where we are now we will more than likely end up with the same results. Deciding on a goal and working out an action plan drawn from a series of options may work for some people but for as many others it is a recipe for repeating past mistakes. Failing to achieve goals does nothing to improve self esteem and can go a long way to destroying it. To avoid this at Quadrant 1 International we designed a methodology called AIM. We believe that if people want to change they need first to be aware of the patterns of thinking and behaviour they have been using in the past. Everything starts with a thought, and then other thoughts cluster around that original thought to build the foundation for judgement



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and ultimately action. If we are unaware of how we created the thoughts in the first place then how can we make changes in our thinking? The 'A' in the acronym therefore stands for 'Awareness'. We first make clients aware of the thinking patterns they have been using and where they have come from. The way we think is made up of a multitude of factors including our natural meta-programs (motivation patterns), the way we represent our information internally, the values and belief system we have developed over many years and the vast array of experience we all have as individuals. Once armed with this awareness it is much easier to begin to look at the higher level of the intention behind our thinking and subsequent action - the 'I' part of the acronym. With these two levels in place the 'M' Move to Action is the easy part. Action can be taken from a position of self-awareness and congruence, and goals are much more likely to be achieved from this stance.

Values are a crucial component of our thinking patterns. Sociologists tell us that our value system is operating at an unconscious level by the time we are 21 – values which have been accumulated in a haphazard format from who knows where – school, parents, siblings, TV, films, books, heroes, heroines, culture and experience. It's the conflict with our value system which first begins the series of tugs mentioned earlier but because our value system operates at an unconscious level, very often all we feel is the tug and we have no idea what is causing it. It's an easy enough process for a coach to elicit someone's

value system around a particular topic. Eliciting values around a person's career, for example, can be done by simply asking the questions 'What is important to you about your career?' 'What else is important to you about your career?' 'And if you had a, b, c, d, e, and f what else would be important to you about your career?' Once the coach is satisfied that there is no more to come then a simple either/or comparison with each value will elicit the most important ones. However, further investigation about the origin of the value can reveal so much more and give the client more fuel for change. In our work using values with clients we have found that tracing the source of a value can be highly effective in breaking down the barriers to success.

Inherited Values

Perhaps the most obvious source of values is that of inheritance from our parents. The interesting thing about inherited values is that we tend to assume that everyone has them and therefore we tend not to question them if, indeed, we are aware of them at all. Take Tina for example – Tina had a very high value around achieving qualifications – certificates and diplomas were an all important symbol of her success. Her life was spent in the pursuit of degrees and qualifications – if she didn't pass she metaphorically beat herself up and her self-esteem plummeted. She arrived on our programme stressed and physically ill with dietary problems. An elicitation of her value system clearly showed the importance to her of acquiring qualifications, further

investigation as to the origin of this value indicated that it had come from an over-zealous father who thought that qualifications were everything and that you couldn't be successful without them. Tina believed everyone had this value and a quick check around the room showed Tina the inaccuracy of her belief. In that moment Tina physically relaxed and let go in a way that we had not seen her do before. We now receive regular e-mails from her as she travels around the world fulfilling her dream and she is no longer on medication for her digestive irregularities.

Paul had problems trusting people and yet when eliciting his values around relationships trust was very high on the list. Further investigation showed that this indeed was an inherited value from his father who believed that 'everyone was out to get him, you can't trust anyone and everyone's a crook'. Although Paul wasn't conscious of these beliefs, they were forming a fundamental part of his value system. Once he was aware of the source he relaxed and was able to let go and begin to trust people. The impact was phenomenal – not only could he let his partner go out for the evening without a full inquisition, he was also able to delegate more effectively at work trusting that his team would perform without him watching over them. He was able to take more time off, relax and spend time with his family.

Compensatory Values

Sometimes values are laid down consciously in the system as a result of past experience. For example, Jim had a very poor upbringing with a father

who was absent for most of his young years and when he was around instilled fear into the young Jim. As a father himself Jim consciously established an over-compensatory value. He made up his mind that his children would not receive such treatment and set about giving them everything he hadn't had. When he was made redundant and could no longer provide in the same way, his children felt let down and cheated. Jim's value had a great positive intention behind it, and the fact that it was a conscious value made it easier for him to devise an action plan to rebuild his relationship with his children. Had it not been consciously laid down, it may have taken Jim a little longer to work through the consequences of such a value.

Borrowed Values

At a conscious level it is also possible to borrow values from other people in order to achieve a goal. Sally was given a challenge to sing in public. She quivered at the prospect, having been told from a very early age that she sounded terrible and that she couldn't sing. Never being one to turn down a challenge, she found herself a singing coach and began practising with a vengeance. She made no progress until she realised that to succeed she had first to believe in herself and to believe in herself she had to develop a very high value around singing. She stopped her practice and began to question her teacher about her values around singing. Sally borrowed these values until her quest was over. Only when she started to adopt them did she begin to make progress.

Means Value

Sometimes we adopt a value as a means to an end. In his book 'Mao's Last Dancer' Li Cunxin describes his life as he is chosen from millions of children in the communes of China to attend Madame Mao's Ballet School in Beijing. Initially he struggles because although he was chosen for his build and flexibility, he has no desire to become a ballet dancer. Not until he sees his dancing as a route to the outside world does he begin to place a high value on his success as a dancer and to realise his potential. He dances all over the world before defecting to the west and eventually settling with his wife and children in Australia, taking up a role in the world of finance.

At an individual level we can restructure our value system in any way we wish to pursue success in the various aspects of our lives. Albert Einstein said that 'problems cannot be solved with the same thinking that created them'. Very often our thinking is tied up with our value system so if we want to change we need first to examine our values – what are they, where did they come from and are they still valid? Then we can work on designing a more productive value system.

Accommodating other's value systems

Different societies have their own value systems. The Indian culture has high values around the family, so much so that these values can impact on their business activities. It is not uncommon in India to find many members of the same family working in the same

organisation, not because of their abilities but because of their values around putting the family first. Societal values like this impose restrictions on whole groups of people who may wish to behave in a different way but are unable to because of the value system in operation.

Brian came to us for coaching. He was the Manager of the Customer Care department within a bank, which had taken a purely financial decision to outsource its customer care facility to India. Brian was becoming more and more frustrated in his attempts to manage the offshore department, which was staffed by locals in India. He didn't understand the value system of structure and the importance of the family, and least of all the significance of religious festivals. He was trying to manage using a western value set and wondering why he wasn't achieving results. Once he realised the importance of respecting the Indian cultural values, Brian was able to adjust his management style to gain the cooperation of management and workers in India which led to a much more productive relationship. Fortunately the value system of the bank was flexible enough to accommodate this change.

It is not enough therefore when coaching to just bring values into awareness. They are such a fundamental part of our make up they need to be examined, explored and adjusted if they do not serve us well.