

The last article talked about the learning process. Concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Knowing that these are broad but distinct styles with their attendant pay offs and costs. Recognising them and modeling a coaching plan in alignment with the user's preference enhances coaching success.

The best are coached, role modeled, trained and equipped.
Always, in any field of excellence.

"Why is it that the hardest thing in the world is to convince a bird that he is free, and that he can prove it to himself if he'd just spend a little time practising?"
Why should that be so hard?"

Jonathan Livingstone Seagull - Richard Bach

The ability of the human brain to form and retain patterns and images, and deploy them at will, is one of the key mental functions, which when used well, enhances coaching success. This ability is a boon; but when not dealt with in the framework of appropriateness, a bane. If studied carefully therefore, leadership behaviours are largely a bundle of winning and losing formulae, from which lives are lived close to almost precision and predictability. So much so, that even a person's unpredictability, becomes predictable. It's not surprising then that one often hears this remark 'There he goes again. As usual, unpredictable.' Years of working on these winning and losing formulae, makes them sharp, defined, and so focussed that we live off them as if one is on auto-pilot.

This article, second in the series, covers only the gains of mental patterns, images, and imprints. How these are formed, programmed, and how these show up as skills in day-to-day corporate life.

Core competence in leadership has its behavioural roots in patterns. The ability to deliver. In parameters that are clear, defined and absolute. Consistently. With accuracy. That is what core leadership competence is all about.

Be this at the surgery table, at a board meeting, leading a game of football, conducting an orchestra or in any other field of human endeavour, core competence has a lot to do with the repetitive rigours and disciplines of sustained learning. It is a

product of order, structure, process, rigour and precise implementation that leads to the formation of mental images in the person's mind. Formula 7 suggests that these formations are so deep, so intense, that erasing them and re-writing the programme is as arduous as creating them in the first place.

This was checked out. Before undergoing a coaching experience, CEOs were asked to describe an effective coach. The most common adjectives?

Tenacious. Dogged. Committed to results.
Repetitive.
Incisive. Ruthless. Nasty. Rigorous.
Awful. Painful.
Awesome. Caring.
Mad. Obsessed.
Disciplined. Fussy about order.
Energetic.

And at the macro level, what was the best adjective? For me, they make my impossible, possible.

What are possible and impossible mental images? In this context the sports arena is a brilliant place to study behaviours of those who coach and are being coached.

Remember the Adidas commercial...
Impossible is just a big word thrown around by small men, Who find it easier to live in the world they've been given
Than to go and explore the power they have to change it.
Impossible is not a fact.
It's an opinion.
Impossible is not a declaration.
It's a dare.
Impossible is temporary.

—Impossible is nothing.

When seen through the microscope of limited time, rational minds scream foul at these lines. Yet, to study the role of discipline and skill development, and as a hypothesis to begin a coaching journey, it is commendable.

Directors filming the commercial required that Michael Jordan miss a shot. Michael took a shot at the basket. Twenty times. And the ball went in. Twenty times.

An instance of genius? Or of the manifestation of excellence? Once the mental imagery of successful delivery becomes a core competence, one has to work very, very hard to fail. So also with any corporate action.

In CEO coaching, what is it that makes core competencies 'happen' in the area of Leadership. The context of this entire coaching series precludes that the one being coached is propelled by a tremendous internal need to excel and is prepared to take on a rough path to success. It also assumes that the conventional executive coaching methods of paraphrasing, asking open-ended questions and generating solutions are basics.

There is a demand for more.

Recall. The first lessons in English. Quite a few struggled initially with sounds that were alien. As alien were the letters, words, sentences, paragraphs, and the syntax of grammar. Not to mention the agony of remembering rules like, 'an 'i' before an 'e', except after a 'c'. After years of diligence there is a level of competence gained, which resides in the quietness of the mental system, silently imprinted.

Now read this:

I cdnuolt bliveiec taht I cluod aulacly uesdnatnrd waht I was rdnagie. The phaonmneal pwoer of the hmuam mind. Aocdrnig to a rschearch at Cmabrigde Uinervstiy, it deosn't mtaer in waht oreDr the lteers in a wrod were, the olny iprmoatn tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be in the rghit plcae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can still raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihis is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteer by istlef, but the wrod as a whoe.

Amzanig , huh? Yeah, and I awlyas thought spling was ipmorant!! Ceehrs!

That is the power of imagery, patterns and imprints of a trained and coached mind!

Every coaching experience traverses through stages, discreet as they may be. Discovery, learning and growth are intrinsic as patterns form in the mind. Though not always, often the person being coached discovers an unawareness of exact incompetence; by facilitation and feedback becomes aware of that incompetence; works to gain competence through a process of intentionality—till ultimately the acts that make up competence becomes an unconscious experience.

The four awareness stages of gaining competence then are:

1. Unconscious of soft spots
2. Conscious of soft spots
3. Unconscious of strengths
4. Conscious of strengths

How is that? Let us look at the process of learning to drive a car. At one stage in our lives we were all unaware or unconscious of the fact that there was a something called a car, leave alone the competence to drive. We then became conscious one day that we did not have the competence. By choice, or otherwise, we went through the conscious and laboured process of gaining competence. We let go of the clutch, pressed the accelerator, the car jerked and stopped. We started again, the car jerked and stopped. Then under the hawk-eyed, impatient stare of the trainer we tried again and again till we gained competence. Ultimately.

After years of driving if we were now asked how many times we pressed the clutch or applied the brakes during our last drive or whether we filled in fuel, none of us would be able to say anything that would be close to accurate. This state of automaticity has gained such levels of competence in most of us, that in an hour's drive our hands-free mobile is busy dispatching 302.33 metric tones of iron ore from 36 complex grades, two vice presidents are given the hand shake, bounced cheques are stopped, a customer has been cared for, a quick bite of the sandwich taken.

How then did the driving take place? Where did these commands come from? How were they accurate in delivery and execution?

That's the role of intentionality in the coaching process. Deliberate, systematic and structured approach in coaching the mind to bring results. The aspect of intentionality is almost always the main cause of coaching breakdowns and failures. And, possibly the biggest soft spot of many a coach.

What then are the secrets of intentionality? Good question. What is Formula 7? That is another good question.

"Why is it that the hardest thing in the world is to convince a bird that he is free, and that he can prove it to himself if he'd just spend a little time practising?"
Why should that be so hard?"

Jonathan Livingstone Seagull - Richard Bach

Anand David is the founder of New Delhi-based Manford (Management Foundation for Organisational Research and Development).

Under his leadership, Manford has provided consultancy and training in performance orientation and breakthrough strategies in over 50 countries.

Today, Anand is perhaps the only CEO coach in India.

You can reach him at info@manford.org

