

Coaching Framework and Philosophy

Mastery, Mindset and Influencing

Leadership is about change. Effective coaching is about facilitating change. It takes willingness and skill by both the coach and coachee to have an effective coaching relationship. My coaching philosophy is based on my personal experiences being coached and as a leader where I have coached people. I have found coaching to be a fascinating and fun journey. For my coaching practice, I have been influenced by and use a combination of frameworks from three books – *Mastery* by George Leonard, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* by Carol Dweck and *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything* by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, et al. These books have shaped my life and thinking around performance, effort and coaching.

In my mid-30s, I was formally introduced to the concept of mastery by an Olympic running coach I worked with from 1994 to 2000. In our first meeting he had me read *Mastery*. Over the next six years we met weekly. As part of my triathlon training, I kept a detailed daily record of my workouts (distance, speed, workout type), perceived effort, general feeling, amount of sleep, resting heart rate, and weight – the latter five being the factors most affecting results. Keeping these detailed records helped me see if I was improving and the factors affecting that improvement – as Peter Drucker says, “what gets measured gets done.” The process moved me from a novice athlete to a weekend warrior and then a fairly competitive triathlete up to the Ironman distance.

I. Mastery

Mastery is a process, not a journey. It can begin whenever you decide to learn or develop a new skill – throwing a baseball, public speaking, improving business development skills or leading a complex organization. By definition, the process never ends. It’s often clearly viewed in the world of sports – the tennis player who masters her serve, the basketball player with the perfect “no-look” pass and the martial arts master with cat-like moves. Regardless of the skill being developed, the mastery process continues for a long time.

We are often confronted with whether or not we want to continue the path to mastery of a skill (or set of skills). The question comes up countless times in our lives, not just about sports, but about everything that has to do with learning, development and change.

There are certain keys to mastery:

1. Instruction

- a. Get first rate instruction through a master teacher (one on one or in small group).
 - i. Consider lineage and credentials in teacher; instruction takes a certain humility.
- b. Also through books, films, tapes, computer learning programs, group instruction, classroom, knowledgeable friends, counselors, business associates.

2. Practice

- a. Masters practice, practice, practice. They love it, and because of that they always get better.

3. Surrender

- a. Surrender to your teacher and the demands of your discipline.
- b. Cultivate the mind and heart of a beginner at every stage along the path.

4. Intentionality

- a. Fuels the master's journey and is done through:
 - i. Visualization;
 - ii. Meditation; and
 - iii. Affirmations on audiotape/videotape.

5. The Edge

- a. Learning to push to new limits in a safe way.

There are pitfalls to developing success along the Master's path:

1. Conflicting way of life
2. Obsessive goal orientation
3. Poor instruction
4. Lack of competitiveness
5. Over competitiveness
6. Laziness
7. Injuries
8. Drugs
9. Prizes and medals
10. Vanity
11. Dead seriousness
12. Inconsistency

II. Mindset

A few years ago I started working with a coach who recommended reading *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* by Carol Dweck – a psychologist at Stanford University. It was one of those books that gave me many “ah-ha” moments. Professor Dweck talks about two primary mindsets that people live by: the **fixed mindset** and the **growth mindset**. The mindset you choose or develop has a profound impact on your life and success. To be more precise about defining the differences between the mindsets, below are some common differentiating characteristics of each.

GROWTH MINDSET CHARACTERISTICS	FIXED MINDSET CHARACTERISTICS
Focused on learning and potential.	Focused on ability.
Human traits and characteristics can be developed through effort.	Human qualities or traits are fixed in nature, even predetermined.
Seek challenge and thrive on it; effort makes all the difference, even if someone is endowed with great ability.	Too much to lose if they put forth effort and do not succeed. Their fixed abilities do not allow them to succeed. Idea of trying and still failing is the worst fear within the fixed mindset.
Not discouraged by failure and don't even think about failing. They focus on learning.	Focused on performance, easily discouraged and do not learn to struggle, make mistakes and persevere.
Open to accurate information about your current abilities in order to learn effectively. Exceptional people have a special talent for identifying their own strengths and weaknesses – they can also turn life's setbacks into future successes.	Closed to information about themselves, particularly when it doesn't agree with their own ideas. Can be focused on image at the expense of growing and being effective.
Effort makes all the difference	Natural talent and abilities unaffected by effort

The consequences of which belief system people take are enormous. The view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life. It can determine whether you become the person you want to be and whether you accomplish the things you value.

Mindsets are changeable so if you have a mostly fixed mindset and see advantage to the growth mindset, the way of thinking and acting that comes from that approach can be learned. People can have different mindsets in different areas of their lives. I might think my athletic abilities are fixed, but my artistic skills can be developed. Does it make a difference to be richer, more connected and more educated? Absolutely. Those factors can make a difference in success, but they *only* make a difference – they do not determine success. Success is much more based on **effort and the growth mindset**.

If you had to choose, which would it be? Loads of success and validation or lots of challenge? Growth mind-set persons say their ideal mate is someone who would:

- See their faults and help them work on them
- Challenge them to become a better person
- Encourage them to learn new things

People in a **growth mindset** don't just seek challenge they thrive on it. The larger the challenge the more they stretch. Some key findings in Professor Dweck's research include:

1. Those with a growth mind-set found success in doing their best, in learning and improving. And this is exactly what we found of champions.
2. Those with the growth mindset found setbacks motivating. They're informative. They're a wakeup call.

3. People with the growth mindset in sports took charge of the processes that bring success – and that maintain it.

Members of **growth mindset groups** are much more likely to state their honest opinions and openly express their disagreements as they communicated about management decisions, thereby reflecting key best practices of candor and respect. Everyone is part of the learning process.

Fixed mindset groups end up with less productive discussions out of anxiety their ideas will sound dumb or because of their anxiety for approval of ideas. The group produced much more groupthink results affecting the quality of group decisions.

What does growth mindset research suggest for managers? Our best bet is not simply to hire the most talented managers we can find and turn them loose, but to look for managers who also embody a **growth mindset**: a zest for teaching and learning, openness to giving and receiving feedback, and an ability to confront and surmount obstacles.

Creating a **growth mindset** environment in which people can thrive involves:

- Presenting skills as learnable
- Conveying that the organization values learning and perseverance, not just ready-made genius or talent
- Giving feedback in a way that promotes learning and future success
- Presenting managers as resources for learning

As a coach/manager **under the growth mindset, our mission is to develop people's potential**. The brain forms new connections and “grows” when people practice and learn new things. These tiny connections in the brain actually multiply and get stronger. The more that you challenge your mind to learn, the more your brain cells grow. Then, things that you once found very hard or even impossible – like speaking a foreign language or doing algebra – seem to become easy. The result is a stronger, smarter brain.

What works in changing to a growth mindset is making a vivid, concrete plan. Think of something you need to do, something you want to learn, or a problem you have to confront. What is it? Now make a concrete plan. When will you follow through on your plan? Where will you do it? How will you do it? Think about it in vivid detail.

These concrete plans – plans you can visualize – about when, where and how you are going to do something lead to really high levels of follow-through and ups the chances of success.

So the idea is not only to make a growth-mindset plan, but also to visualize, in a concrete way, how you're going to carry it out. What are the opportunities for learning and growth today? For myself? For the people around me? When, where and how will I act on my new plan? What do I have to do to maintain and continue the growth and learning?

III. **Influencer: The Power to Change Anything**

Based on my personal experiences with change, I believe in the power to change almost anything – couch potato to accomplished athlete, feelings of desperation to a sense of purpose or a financially struggling organization to a thriving entity with ongoing financial reserves. I have accomplished all these previously considered “out of reach.” How did they become so reachable? Building on the principles and findings in *Mastery* and *Mindset* provided the foundational components. The change model is explained extraordinarily well in *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything*. Influence masters focus on the key behaviors that get the desired results.

We call these key behaviors **high leverage behaviors**. Often these behaviors are best identified through a social research tool called **positive deviance**. This involves the study of different groups; at least one where the problem being researched exists and one where it should exist, but doesn't. Through observation, we identify key behaviors that the successful group has and the struggling group does not. From there, it is implementation of the appropriate behavioral changes. However, there can be “relapse” behaviors not conducive to reaching the desired goals. When we falter, we learn to develop **recovery behaviors** by using mistakes as data points for learning. Recovery behaviors make up an important part of every change master's influence strategy.

People will attempt to **change their behavior if 1) they believe it will be worth it and 2) they can do what is required**. While verbal persuasion is often used to try and change organizational behavior and solve problems, it often falls short of what is required. Hence, effective storytelling becomes a vital tool for leaders to enact change – the creation of vicarious experience through detailed vivid stories providing a clear link between current behaviors and existing negative results.

The foundation of the influence model is based on six sources of influence. The illustration below shows the two primary domains of the influence model: motivation (Is it worth it?) and ability (Can I do it?).

	Motivation	Ability
Personal	1 Make the Undesirable Desirable	2 Surpass Your Limits
Social	3 Harness Peer Pressure	4 Find Strength in Numbers
Structural	5 Design Rewards and Demand Accountability	6 Change the Environment

The two domains are divided further into Personal, Social and Structural sources. Let's take a closer look at the six sources.

1. **Personal Motivation** – the key to success here is to make the undesirable desirable. That may sound odd, but it definitely works. Influential public speakers often started off with an extreme fear of getting up in public. They thought in advance that it would be a horrible experience. The truth is oftentimes that the experience is positive, invigorating, freeing and life-affirming; particularly if there is a real personal aspect in the speaking.
2. **Personal Ability** – surpassing limits is what this is all about. This shows up really clearly in athletic endeavors or other activities where measurement is relatively easy. Training the first time for an Ironman Triathlon requires continually surpassing prior limits. You train to increase capacity. The same holds true for any skill, often measured in quality – improved quality of reports, ability to communicate effectively, make investment decisions and similar skills.
3. **Social Motivation** – use your social network and peers as part of your change strategy. Almost no single thing is more powerful than the people in our social networks – they can praise us and be critical, accept us or reject us, approve and disapprove. As is often said in the twelve step universe, “stick with the winners.” Your social network comprises the people who will most positively influence your own behavior.
4. **Social Ability** – find strength in numbers, particularly as it relates to solving problems. This finding ties in with significant research on the wisdom of crowds which effectively states that using groups to solve complex problems achieves better outcomes than using an “expert” in that area. Also, since you can't know everything, it's essential that you find people who can make up for your blind spots.
5. **Structural Motivation** – design rewards and demand accountability. No, it's not money first. In fact, the best influence masters design rewards so that intrinsic satisfaction is lined up first, then social support. Third is the money factor. Reward small improvements in behavior along the way. Make sure to reward the right vital behaviors, not the results which aren't controllable.
6. **Structural Ability** – this really concerns how we change things in our environment to change behaviors. When designing new office space, creating wide walking areas encourages discussion and debate generating new ideas. Moving the investment committee to a windowless room results in greater focus and higher quality decisions. Provide data to support your environmental decision. A hospital desiring to cut costs was providing two different priced latex glove choices for care-givers. When someone placed a \$.25 sign on one and a \$3.00 sign on the other, people chose the less expensive glove and expenses dropped dramatically.

I use a combination of Mastery principles, Mindset approach and Influencing strategies in executive coaching and leadership development.