

*This is the 1st article of 3 in the Transformational Coaching Toolkit series.
You can download the articles in this series, and other tools, at:
www.stproject.org/toolkit_tool/transformational-coaching-toolkit*

The notion of coaching has expanded from the managing of sports teams to encompass a wide array of formal and informal relationships designed to support individual growth, professional development, or improve a particular skill or capacity. Coaching has also become a key ingredient of organizational life, with 90% of large for-profit companies using coaching¹ and over 50% reporting that they “consider coaching as a key part of learning development” and “crucial to their strategy.”²

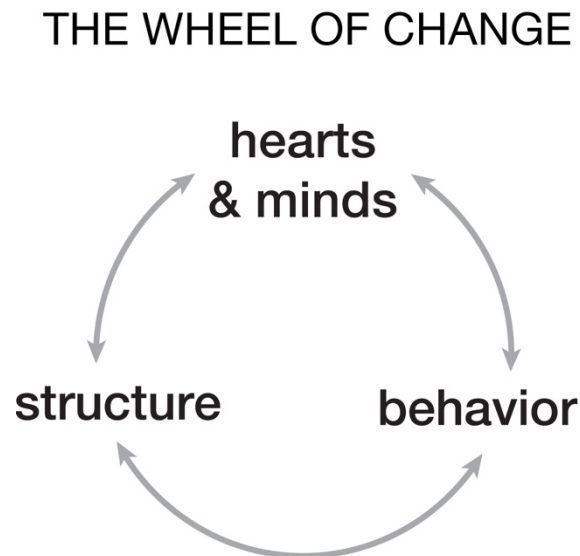
This might look like:

- Consultants offering formal executive coaching
- Consultants offering informal coaching in the context of organizational development
- Managers supervising the performance of staff
- Peer to peer support
- Mentoring of less-experienced colleagues

Coaching is widely recognized as a critical competency for leaders and consultants alike, and there are a plethora of approaches and models for this work.

Transformational Coaching is distinguished by:

- 1) **A systemic approach working in an integrated way with all three domains of the Wheel of Change:**



¹ Institute of Personnel Management, 2009, quoted in <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coaching>

² Institute of Leadership and Management, 2011, <http://www.i-l-m.com/research-and-comment/9617.aspx>

- **Hearts & Minds:**
Utilizing potent transformative processes helps to create breakthroughs in the way people think, believe and feel
 - **Behavior:**
Helping people define and practice new habits of behavior: the actual choices people make to speak or not speak; to act or not to act
 - **Structure:**
Supporting people in making changes in their external social reality
- 2) **A strength-based approach**
We believe in the capacity and potential of people. The coaching process is oriented towards identifying and nourishing those gifts and talents.
 - 3) **Teaching people to fish**
We help people to solve their own problems, using situations to help people access and develop their own power and capacities.
 - 4) **Helping people “be the change”**
We support people in experiencing transformation “here and now.”

Coaching is a unique encounter between two human beings. Life is rarely compartmentalized or orderly. Masterful coaches typically forgo preplanned formats and enter a kind of *flow state*³ where they intuitively guide their “clients”⁴ on an unprogrammed journey of self-discovery.

Still, it’s useful to have some kind of roadmap for transformational coaching. ASPIre is a simple three-stage model that gives form to this powerful process:

The ASPIre Model

Stage I	A ttend
Stage II	S hift
Stage III	P lan

³ People in the Flow State are “fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity.” Proposed and popularized by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, the Flow State is characterized by “a loss of the feeling of self-consciousness, the merging of action and awareness.” There is complete “absorption into the activity, a narrowing of the focus of awareness down to the activity itself.” We receive “direct and immediate feedback; successes and failures in the course of the activity are apparent, so that behavior can be adjusted as needed... There is a sense of personal control over the situation or activity.” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flow_\(psychology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flow_(psychology))

⁴ While coaching may not be taking place in the formal professional coach-client context, for simplicity we will refer to the person being coached as the “client.”

These three stages may take place over the course of a single coaching session or unfold over numbers of meetings. While the stages are depicted as sequential, coaching will often flow back and forth among them. Yet in transformational coaching we do typically see some kind of movement or flow from:

Stage I: Attend to the human being. Listen deeply to their aspirations, their concerns, and their challenges.

to

Stage II: Help evoke a shift or breakthrough in the way the client is thinking and feeling about their situation, unleashing their inner wisdom and authentic power.

to

Stage III: Help client make plans and next steps.

Let's explore more deeply each of the three stages of ASPIre.

ASPIre Stage I: ATTEND

The transformational process begins by bringing presence, deep listening and compassion to our clients. We create a welcoming and safe space for them to share their concerns, thoughts, and feelings.

Goals of Stage I:

- 1) Support client in "getting it all out," authentically expressing their thoughts, feelings, and needs
- 2) Build rapport; provide client the experience of being heard and valued
- 3) Clarify and sort needs and issues to be addressed

Most human beings have a strong need to be heard, to experience being attended to. In a surprising number of situations, this may actually be *all* that people need in the way of coaching. Sometimes, people simply need to hear themselves talk and be witnessed. At other times, the most important change people need to make is coming to peace with life as it is. Whatever the situation, attending is one of the greatest gifts we can bring to others.

When more is needed for completion, we proceed to Stage II: Shift.

ASPIre Stage II: SHIFT

In many if not most situations, clients have the potential inner resources to address the situations and challenges they bring to coaching. With the transformational approach, our objective is to help clients shift into a place of greater self-empowerment and access their own inner wisdom and resources. We are constantly seeking to teach people to fish rather than provide a great meal. Another reason for focusing on this inner shift: if we “give” clients answers, they often do not build the depth of commitment required for successful follow-through and implementation.

In Stage II, we utilize transformative practices to evoke shifts, often dramatic and sometimes almost instantaneous in the way clients think and feel. We help them to “*be the change they want to see.*” Albert Einstein said, “*No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.*” These shifts in Hearts & Minds can provide new awareness, insights, energy, and the courage to make change. It is this dramatic, immediate shifting that helps to distinguish transformational coaching. To learn about these transformative practices, see our tool: *Coaching the Shift*

If the client either resists or appears unable to make the shift, we gracefully return to Stage I.

Goals of Stage II:

- 1) Help shift client's relationship to their own situation:
 - from powerlessness to self-responsibility
 - identify and address what's in the way of the client solving their own problems: limiting beliefs, perceptions, emotional triggers, etc.
- 2) Help clients get clear about what they really need (which may be different than the presenting problem)
- 3) Set goals (if needed)

Sometimes the shift is all clients need – their concerns were really in the domain of Hearts & Minds. It is not uncommon for people to feel complete simply due to new awareness, and no decisions or actions are needed. Or perhaps the shift is making peace with life as it is. When the shift is complete, we proceed to Stage III.

ASPIre Stage III: PLAN

If the first stages have been done well, any needed action planning should go easily.

As always in transformational coaching, we apply the framework of the Wheel of Change to look at next steps to reinforce the shifts in Hearts & Minds and ensure follow-through on changes in Behavior and Structures. We also explore what kinds of additional support may be needed, as well as trying to anticipate potential barriers and ways to meet them.

Goals of Stage III:

- 1) Assess need for next steps through the framework of the Wheel of Change
- 2) Plan action steps using the POP model (Purpose, Outcomes, Process)⁵
- 3) Test for client's full commitment to action steps
- 4) Anticipate and address potential obstacles and challenges
- 5) Build in support (including possible additional coaching)

The three stages of ASPIre are neither always completely discreet nor sequential. If energy becomes bogged down in a given stage, we would usually return to working with the goals and methods of the previous stage.

For example:

- If in Stage III, the client is having difficulty generating viable options or seems unable to choose, we might again work with shifting energy (Stage II – Coaching the Shift).
- If at any point it seems like the client needs to deeply self-express or our rapport with the client seems off, we likely want to reengage in the deep listening of Stage I – Attend.

While transformation is a unique and unpredictable journey, the ASPIre model serves as a compass that helps ensure we keep moving toward resolution of the client's needs.

The ASPIre Model

Stage I **A**ttend

Stage II **S**hift

Stage III **P**lan

*"If the teacher is indeed wise, he does not bid you enter
the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to
the threshold of your own wisdom."*

– Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*

⁵ The POP Model is a tool for focusing teams on specific results. Before undertaking any activity, one clarifies:

What is the **Purpose** of this activity? (P)

What are the specific **Outcomes** we hope to achieve? (O)

And only then: What **Process** will we use to achieve these outcomes? (P)

The POP Model was created by Leslie Jaffe and Randall Alford.