

This is the 3rd 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

When we make choices or commitments, we typically try to mobilize our positive energy in the direction of this choice. This is useful. However, we often carry within us doubts, ambivalence, or resistance to the very thing we have chosen. While much of our energy may be lined up behind our chosen direction, we are often not totally aligned with our own choice.

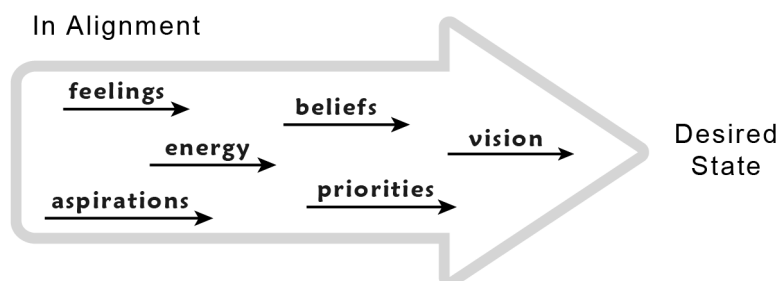
For example, perhaps you have just chosen to take on a new assignment to oversee a new communications strategy. There are several impulses within you aligned with this choice:

- It's an opportunity to advance your own position and standing within the organization.
- A new communications strategy is vitally important to the organization, so it's an opportunity to make a real difference.
- It's an opportunity to develop some new skills.

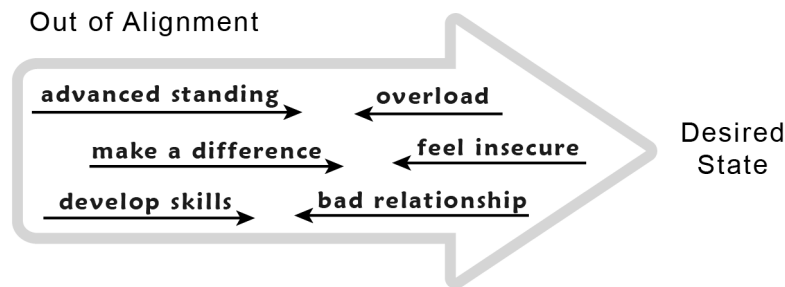
However, you also have other feelings about this new assignment:

- You're already overloaded and stressed, and this adds more on top of what you already can't manage.
- You will have to work closely with someone with whom you have historically had a hard time.
- You actually feel a bit insecure about your skills in communications.

In order to be most effective in moving our energy out into the world, we want to have all our energy available and moving together to do the work. This can be represented by what is called The Alignment Arrow.



Typically, some amount of our energy is out of alignment with our choices, and either unavailable for the work or actually moving in a different direction. In the case of this new assignment, the Alignment Arrow may look something like:



Unfortunately, our instinct in these cases is often to try to ignore or deny the internal countervailing forces. We may try to override the ambivalent or doubting voices, pump ourselves up to get the job done, or make ourselves feel badly about our lack of commitment. None of this helps get the arrows lined up. In fact, denial and repression inevitably create more internal lack of alignment and resistance.

The process of inner alignment is one of skillfully (and sometimes slowly) orienting ourselves around our chosen direction. It involves:

- really giving voice to any unaligned feelings or beliefs
- carefully seeing what is needed to bring each of these unaligned parts into the flow of your chosen direction

In a way, it is similar to building consensus within a group behind a decision. If you don't allow people to give voice to their concerns and disagreements, the group will at best underperform. At worst, you are fighting a running battle with withdrawal, lack of energy, and even self-sabotage.

When we engage with life with a lack of inner alignment, we:

- have less energy and inner resources to bring to bear
- external obstacles quickly become a screen for our own ambivalence. We let ourselves get blocked far too easily because our ambivalence or resistance is triggered.
- we don't enjoy what we're doing

Also, our own resistance tends to create even more obstacles.

In the case of the new communications assignment:

- unacknowledged insecurity about our ability may lead us to limit scope, challenge, or risk
- resistance to working with someone will almost always lead to further difficulties in really partnering with this person
- we've all seen the negative impact of feeling over-stressed

Alignment Coaching is a powerful tool to bring our arrows into full alignment.

THE ALIGNMENT COACHING PROCESS

Part I: Creating Your Intention

Create a simple phrase/affirmation that captures the essence of the intention/decision/choice.

CRITERIA:

- 1) The phrase should be short. Keep cutting unnecessary words. It needs to be easy to remember and easy to say.
- 2) Use positive intent and language. Create what you want, not what you don't want.
For example: *"I will create a successful working partnership with the Board."*
not
"I will avoid having problems with the Board."
- 3) Usually begin your phrase with "I" (I am... I will... I choose...)
- 4) The choice of present or future tense may be important. Test which feels more potent.
- 5) Use language of results and self-responsibility. Avoid words like "try," "attempt," "if," etc.
- 6) Go for what you really want. Watch tendencies to limit or hedge.
- 7) The test is: *"How do you feel when you say it?"*
Is it inspiring? Does it evoke purpose, energy, and passion?
It should "zing" with energy.
- 8) It's O.K. if it feels like a stretch. These affirmations are often aspirational.

Part II Creating Inner Alignment

- 1) Begin by centering.
- 2) Connect with your commitment to this intention. Really feel your positive desire for this.
- 3) Repeat your intention out loud, connecting to this feeling.
- 4) In the space that immediately follows, let yourself become aware of any feelings or thoughts that run counter to the intention.
- 5) Give voice to the first doubt/ambivalence/resistance that you feel. Really get into it. Exaggerate it. Add gestures! Really express it! Move the energy!

- 6) When the wave of feeling passes, take a deep breath and re-state your intention.
- 7) Repeat steps 5 and 6 until all unaligned energy has been expressed.
- 8) Many of the resistances will pass simply from having been expressed.
It is critical that:
 - o this be a full-body, energetic process (not purely mental) – it's as much about liberating and aligning energy as it is about the content
 - o err of the side of making sure all unaligned energies are fully expressed
- 9) For those concerns that are highly charged or especially persistent, there are two options:
 - a. Add the concern to the beginning of the phrase, e.g.,
"Even though I'm afraid, I will..."
or
"Even if it's incredibly difficult, I will..."
Doing this several times will often diffuse the unaligned voice
 - b. Enter into dialogue with each resisting voice one by one. Find out what each 'voice' might need to be willing to "live with" the chosen course of action. In just the same way one works with unaligned group members in a team, you may need to negotiate, offer compromises, allay fears, or meet certain needs of the "voice" to gain true alignment.
- 10) This entire process of inner alignment may need to be repeated periodically over time.

NOTE: It is possible to take the principles or pieces of Alignment Coaching without doing the entire process. For example, if you sense the client has a doubting or ambivalent voice about the proposed plan of action, you can simply ask:

*"It sounds like there's a voice inside that hasn't bought into this plan.
Could you be that voice for a moment, and speak its concerns?"*

The Alignment Coaching process can also be done on one's own – useful for any major decision or aligning to any new initiative.

Some tips for Alignment Coaching

- Resolution may not come in a single session. Clients may need to further meditate on their options or wish to consult with other important people in their lives.
- Alignment is a critical tool for coaching. We sometimes “overlook” signs of misalignment – we fear it may get messy, or it will take too much time, all our good coaching will unravel, etc. Be vigilant. Before you plan, make sure there is true alignment.
- Be mindful of the impact of your own energy on clients. An all-too-common pattern is when a client feels very clear during the coaching session, but afterwards starts to backslide or get confused again. This is sometimes a result of the helper inserting too much of their energy into the session. We become like a drug that temporarily alters our client’s state of being. We get too invested in their success, we need them to get clear, we convince them of the “right” decision, or they want to please us or put on their best face for us.

Even while using potent tools like alignment coaching, be spacious. Listen deeply – with all your senses. Remember that it’s their life. They get to live with the consequences of their choices.