

## **Transformational Coaching: Reinventing Yourself**

*By Tony Stoltzfus*

Over the years I've coached a number of individuals through the process of completely reinventing themselves. For instance, one leader's goal was "to move from being a critical and demanding boss to one who was approachable, kind and built strong relationships with the leaders around him." That's a real goliath to take on in the latter half of one's life! However, over the course of six months he actually succeeded in altering the fundamental way he related. A feedback process confirmed that to his peers, he was a different person. How did that happen? And what can we learn from those stories about how to reinvent ourselves when the time comes to do it?

Here are four principles of reinventing yourself that you can use in your own coaching:

**1. It takes a teachable moment.**

People don't just wake up one day and say, "I think I'll become a totally different person!" It takes a powerful experience to motivate a person to make this kind of change. In the example above, it was a feedback process that shook the leader's self-perceptions to the core. I've seen this kind of change spring out of being fired from a job, from relational breakdowns, or from God-generated wilderness seasons (where God removed activity from a person's life to force them to deal with their own identity.) As a coach, be alert to major shaping events, and help your clients leverage them for personal transformation instead of just surviving them. Our greatest challenges contain the seeds of our greatest opportunities for personal growth.

**2. Keep coaching by staying action oriented.**

I once coached an individual through his desire to "come alive emotionally" after he had squelched his feelings for years. It would have been easy to go into counseling mode, seek the roots of the problem and offer inner healing. Instead, we stuck to a coaching approach by keeping it practical and action oriented. And it worked! Each week we developed new ways he could live every day like a person who enjoyed life instead of hiding from it; such as

positive confessions, disciplined stopping to smell the roses, and letting go of a little money each week instead of hoarding it. As those actions were practiced as habits, they slowly brought in a new reality in his mind and emotions.

**3. Behaviors change when beliefs are shaken.**

What we do always seems reasonable in our own eyes. Our conduct, no matter how irrational it seems to others, looks reasonable within our own belief systems. That belief system must first be shaken before change will occur. If a leader thinks he is really great at facing conflict (even if everyone around him knows different), no lasting change will occur until that belief is challenged. God will supply the challenge through life circumstances. As a coach, look for events that shake a person more than seems called for by what happened. It may be honest feedback from friend, tasting the consequences of our actions, or simply seeing that our belief system can't cut it in real life. We all have unbiblical beliefs – things like, “I can't change,” or “I have to keep things under control,” or “I need to protect myself from getting hurt.” When you see God putting his finger on an area, don't settle for merely changing the actions. Help the leader figure out *why* he does what he does, and then evaluate whether that belief is really sound. When core beliefs change, you'll see lasting, transformational change in the person's actions.

**4. Track progress.**

One thing I've noticed when people reinvent themselves is that they consistently lose perspective on their progress. Transformation not only changes who you are but how you view who you are, and where you are standing when you look at yourself. For instance, the first step of changing a habit is becoming aware of what you are doing as you do it. In the first part of the change process, this growing awareness of falling short makes the client feel like he or she is going backward, not forward. But awareness itself is progress! As a coach, part of your job is to not get lost in the moment like your client. Keep looking back to the starting point and ahead to the goal, and remind your client regularly how far he or she has come and how the end is drawing closer. With one client, I did a self-assessment every other month that put a number on her stress level and the quality of her life. Each



time she was surprised to see that her scores had again gone up and she'd made progress.

Reinventing yourself is difficult process. A coach's encouragement and perspective can make all the difference!

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