

Build it and they will change

Performance Consultants International have been helping organisations to build coaching cultures around the world for over 30 years. [Sue Stockdale](#), Deputy Editor of *Coaching Perspectives*, spoke to [Tiffany Gaskell](#), the company's Co-Founder and Managing Director, to discover the vital elements that are needed to achieve sustainable change.

Sue Stockdale: *Why do companies need to build a coaching culture?*

Tiffany Gaskell: We know that coaching cultures create high-performance cultures. In the past people used to think that 'telling people what to do' was the best way to get results. What we now know to be proven is that it doesn't, and that a collaborative culture, which is a coaching culture, does best. This comes out of masses of research in the health and safety sector. In high reliability organisations where it's a matter of life and death whether good or bad decisions are made, it's been found that when individuals are empowered and take responsibility this leads to the best decisions being made.

SS: *So responsibility and empowerment are key to delivering the type of coaching culture that organisations seek?*

TG: Yes, and coaching also links to the bigger picture – the planet. We are out of touch with who we are as people. Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland, said, 'We all need to become human again,' and that is what coaching is all about. When I watched my first example of coaching, I saw someone put down baggage they had been carrying around for years, and they seemed to flourish before my eyes – that's what coaching can do.



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SUE AND TIFFANY DISCUSS
COACHING CULTURE

SS: *While a coaching culture may positively affect the individual, companies exist to also create profit – how do you resolve this dilemma?*

TG: I used to be a banker who traded derivatives, and measured everything via a spreadsheet, so I know that bottom line impact is required. When leaders change their behaviour, they have a big impact on people within the organisations and we are able to trace the financial benefits of this. For example, we took the top 150 global leaders of a manufacturing company through a coaching programme. They learnt to integrate coaching into their leadership style and in doing so were able to show an 800% return on investment.

A customer came to them with a dispute about a price. Past behaviour would have been to fight with them. Instead, rather than being defensive or aggressive, they got curious and listened. They gained an understanding of the customer's perspective, and the customer was able to also work through their own issues – so the matter was resolved without getting into a dispute. This meant that the company was able to save millions on that particular contract.

LEADERSHIP FROM THE TOP

SS: *Can introducing a coaching culture really have a long-lasting impact?*

TG: We will have only a minimal impact if other systems within a business are not transformed as well. There is a global company headquarters in Turkey where they are looking at getting all of their systems aligned with the coaching mentality and teaching their leaders coaching skills. One can compare it to the McKinsey Consulting 7-S framework, which involves seven interdependent factors which are categorised as either 'hard' or 'soft' elements:

Hard Elements	Soft Elements
Strategy	Shared Values
Structure	Skills
Systems	Style
	Staff

'Hard' elements are easier to define and identify, and so management can directly influence them: with strategy statements; organisation charts and reporting lines; and formal processes and IT systems.

'Soft' elements, on the other hand, can be more difficult to describe, are less tangible, and more influenced by culture. However, these soft elements are just as important as the hard elements if the organisation is going to be successful. Developing a coaching culture involves going through all these systems and 'ticking off' what needs to be changed here in order to support

people in the new behaviours.

SS: *It can be a mammoth undertaking for a business – it sounds as if it takes a long time and costs a lot of money?*

TG: Organisations are constantly evolving, and constantly looking at what's the next strategic area that leaders need to be aligned around. Coaching needs to be tied into strategy, otherwise people are being asked to do something differently without understanding why. It's the 'What's in it for me?' question – this must be really clearly communicated along with the other benefits.

SS: *So is there upfront preparation that companies need to do so as to increase the chances of a coaching implementation being successful?*

TG: Yes, they need a big vision. And I have to pay tribute to our clients and the people who hold the dream for what is possible in those organisations. We call this the *place of possibility*. For example, we are working globally with car and engine manufacturer Volvo, who tell us: we have a vision for how our leaders should behave. Instead of telling people how to act, they empower and develop them on the job. We now work with Volvo to make this happen – in 40 countries around the world. That's about 100,000 lives that have been positively affected. That's what makes it so powerful – when clients can have visions like this and hold that dream for their organisations.

SS: *It seems the leaders at the top of organisations are critical to the success of the initiative. I know from experience of working in large organisations that someone may be the internal champion for a few years and then move on, so the vision is lost. How can you help companies guard against changes that may dilute the essence of a programme?*

TG: In the early stages of the project it's vital that things are stable, and that people stay in place. Some organisations really stand out, like medical technology company Medtronic, for example, with 80,000 people around the world. What they've done is set up a coaching centre of excellence, with very experienced internal coaches. To have people inside an organisation who are at the equivalent level of AC Professional Executive Coach makes such a difference. They are passionate about coaching, so they hold the dream. Every year they train their leaders in coaching, and build internal excellence as a core part of helping to secure sustainability for the long term.

ORGANISATION-WIDE IMPACT

SS: *How do companies balance the value of internal coaching expertise compared to external coaches, particularly to support senior people?*

TG: I believe this is something that needs to be carefully evaluated. For example, one approach that companies often take is to provide their top leaders with external coaches because they don't have internal coaches who could coach

at CEO level. Their internal coaches will coach at middle management level and they also run a coaching programme for leaders to learn coaching skills that they can use on the job, not so much for one-to-one coaching but more likely informally, at the coffee station or in conversations with their people. Using this three-pronged approach supports a coaching culture overall.

SS: *What are some of the core skills that are critical for a coach (internal or external) to help them succeed, be a great coach and make a difference?*

TG: We believe one of the fundamentals of coaching is creating inspiring goals. This skill is especially important in an organisational context. Then there is asking powerful questions, and active listening. Within organisations it's particularly important to offer challenge as well as support, and to pay close attention to the context of the organisational culture. In the recent edition of *Coaching for Performance*¹, and through the work we've been doing in health and safety, we've created something called *The Performance Curve*. The idea is that people can look at the Curve, which goes from low performance to high performance, through different mindsets. They can look to see what mindset their organisation has. When we show this to clients and use it with coaches and leaders in organisations, it helps leaders think about what type of culture they are creating and then what type of performance it relates to.

SS: *It seems that Sir John Whitmore's legacy has been impactful in particular within an organisational context. He was an AC Global Ambassador, and I wonder in what other ways John's legacy weaves its way through the work of Performance Consultants?*

TG: My feeling is that we stand on the shoulders of a giant who moved the whole business world in a different direction. John first went into organisations in the late 1970's and he wasn't shy about telling home truths. He was quite happy to walk into board rooms and tell the leaders that they needed to become more human. The body of work that he left behind is immense – including *Coaching for Performance*, his book that became the 'bible of coaching'. Our team updated it last year before his death because we want to carry on John's work of professionalising the coaching industry. There are all types of coaching out there, with lots of people calling themselves coaches, but really what does it mean? Is there a qualification behind them? What training has there been? We want coaching to have rigour and also for coaches to show the benefits they are bringing to the organisation. As well as *The Performance Curve*, in the latest edition of the book we have included information on how to value the return on investment in coaching. All of these things John was passionate about and his work is present and underlies everything we do.

GETTING STARTED

SS: *What are some of the key steps that will accelerate the chances of success when companies implement a coaching culture?*

TG: The first thing is sponsorship from the top. The initiative needs to be led and communicated in the right way because when a company is embarking on, for example, bringing in one-to-one executive coaching, it needs to be set up so that people are excited about it and understand its enormous benefit. It's like having a tailor-made leadership development programme for those individuals and this has to come across to the audience. Recently we launched a big programme in the United Arab Emirates. The CEO introduced this at a company conference and we also spoke, explaining what the coaching programme was all about. There were a few people who already knew about coaching and leadership who were talking positively about it, and as a result of all this the programme was a huge success. How it is all set up in the first place is vital.

SS: *When you say that the programme was successful, how do companies measure their return on investment or evaluate their results?*

TG: I'm really keen on encouraging companies to do this, but sometimes they don't have the appetite to do it. This is where we use our process – the coaching performance ROI as published in our book. It traces those impacts on behaviour that have changed. For example, we worked with Linde, one of the largest industrial gas companies in the world, in the area of health and safety. Bringing a coaching approach into health and safety was easily measurable. They saw a 74% reduction in safety incidents and accidents, and huge improvements in safety coming out of these behaviour changes. As I mentioned earlier, John Whitmore championed the idea that human beings should change their relationship to the planet. At Linde they understood this through the positive impact on their people, who are now less at risk; through an impact on performance; lower costs; and a positive outcome for the planet as well because there are fewer leakages, slips and spills.

SS: *So here you've got very clear measures in terms of the impact coaching had in a particular organisation. However, you also mentioned that not every company wants to measure. Why not?*

TG: It's down to time and money. What we do needs to be on the strategic agenda, because if it is leaders can see how coaching impacts the organisation. At Linde it was top of that agenda because of health and safety measures. If companies are not clear about why they are actually doing something they will have a hard time measuring it because they're not sure what outcomes they are looking for, and it's not tied in with the strategic agenda.

SS: *Is it critical that any coaching culture programme starts at the top and is linked into the organisational strategic agenda?*

TG: Yes. Another way of measuring impact on the company is through their engagement surveys. A nice example is Mastercard,

which wanted to bring in more of a coaching feedback approach. They measured engagement a year before the programme started and one year later did a survey of all their global leaders who had learned coaching skills. The level of engagement had moved significantly in a positive direction.

DEMONSTRATING GOOD PRACTICE

SS: *Can an individual coach who is working with an executive in an organisation where there isn't a coaching culture influence the culture by demonstrating good practice, setting clear goals and measures, and measuring them at the end of their intervention?*

TG: Absolutely. If the coaching profession can get really robust and clear on what they are doing, why they are doing things, and the value they add to the organisation, it will help everyone to understand the value of coaching. I think there is something going on with organisations at the moment: they have the opportunity to lead the way in terms of setting direction and the agenda for future generations by being inspiring and harnessing the potential of their people. To do this, organisations need to evolve and become different from the organisations we see in the world so often. The essence of a coaching culture is that it's the way to lead the world in the 21st century when we are grappling with huge challenges like climate change, our human impact on the planet and also our relationship with ourselves.

SS: *It seems that these facets of responsibility, inspiration and harnessing potential are things that perhaps a millennial generation pays more attention to?*

TG: Exactly. When we work with organisations one of their big worries is how to engage millennials and future generations, because even older generations are no longer happy with traditional-style top-down, hierarchical organisations. Many leaders are having to completely transform and change their leadership, while previously perhaps they didn't value collaboration. This is such a shift for organisations to make, but if they can see that they are going to have high performance as a result of creating a coaching culture, then they will get behind it.

SS: *This reinforces the value of measurement?*

TG: In the form of the triple bottom line of 'people planet and profit' that John Elkington (who started the organisation Sustainability) talked about. He used to go into large organisations and be the conscience on the board to encourage them to think more widely about their impact.

SS: *My final question is – where do we find the role models that demonstrate this progressive approach to leading organisations?*

TG: Several spring to mind. The first is the Wholefoods chain of organic grocery stores. Their purpose is to 'Nourish People and the Planet'. Another key individual who springs to mind is John McFarlane, the Chairman of Barclays Bank, who wrote the foreword to *Coaching for Performance*. He talks about creating a 'meaningful and purposeful journey' and that's what he did at

ANZ Bank when he transformed the company for 35,000 people globally through his breakout programme. So building a coaching culture is about more than coaching! We talk about creating a culture for people, profit and planet – and this creates that higher purpose and the sense of calling that deeply motivates people.

Coaching for Performance Level 1 is a two-day experiential programme based on the GROW model and pioneering work of the Performance Consultants International's co-founder, Sir John Whitmore. It is designed specifically for coaches, leaders and HR professionals wanting to certify or looking for a new approach to inspire high performance within organisations. Join our programme to discover the power of transformational coaching.

AC members can receive a special 10% discount on any Level 1 workshop in 2019 by using the code coach19 when registering. Register through our website here: <https://bit.ly/2QX1gq7>

ABOUT TIFFANY GASKELL



Tiffany Gaskell is an international authority on leadership development and one of the top performance coaches globally. She worked with Sir John Whitmore for fourteen years and led the revised 25th Anniversary Edition of *Coaching for Performance*, the 'Bible' of coaching, in 2017. Her work is underpinned by her belief in the power of transformational leadership to create high-performance organisations, benefiting people, profit and the planet.

ABOUT SUE STOCKDALE



Sue Stockdale is an inspirational leader, executive coach and coaching supervisor with over 20 years' experience of helping leaders and coaches worldwide. As a polar explorer and an athlete who competed for Scotland, Sue brings the same discipline and commitment required in these activities to her professional life, combining these with an MBA in Entrepreneurship, an MSc in Quality Management and a global outlook. She is Deputy Editor of *Coaching Perspectives*.

1. Whitmore, John, *Coaching for Performance*, 5th Edition, Nicolas Brealey Publishing, 2017