

## EMBRACING VULNERABILITY AS A ROUTE TO GROWTH

In the final interview in our series featuring thought leaders, [Sue Stockdale](#), Deputy Editor, talks to [John Mattone](#), author, executive coach, and leadership expert, and one of eight finalists for the Thinkers50 Ranking Award for Leadership in 2017.

The most important element of personal growth, according to John Mattone, is having the courage to be vulnerable. The world's top authority on Intelligent Leadership, and ranked by Global Gurus as the world's no. 2 Executive Coach, Mattone believes that when a leader has the willingness to look inside, it's the first step on their journey to growth.

Mattone was also executive coach to the late Steve Jobs, so when I asked how he himself role-modelled vulnerability, I was not expecting the candour and openness he showed. Mattone told me that he has had his fair share of ups and downs in his career, including being fired twice, during which time he learned that being selfish, having a big ego and being around unsupportive people, was not the way to go. At 48 he went back into the corporate world as Vice President of Sales, and learned about coaching. As he developed his coaching work, and also began to carry out more research, he was able to hone his concept of 'Intelligent Leadership.' Mattone realised that greatness in the *outer core* – the behaviour and skills that others observe on a daily basis and come to value you for – are strongly connected to our *inner core* – our self-concept, character, values and emotional make up. If

our inner core is strong, vibrant and mature, we have a much better probability of executing the outer core at a higher level.

'Ultimately, your greatness as a leader,' he says, 'has nothing to do with you – it has to do with the people whose lives you touch. I regularly get phone calls from leaders who want to be a better critical thinker, or a more successful CEO, and I always explain that there is no shortage of intellect in most organisations, but what we are short of is leaders who use their heart and soul. If we can help leaders to optimise their head, heart and soul, we can help them to break through and be the best they can be.'

## DISRUPTING BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS

I was curious to find out what methods Mattone uses to disrupt a leader's typical behaviour patterns in order to accelerate their willingness to embark on a journey of personal growth. Mattone believes it is vital to disrupt their comfort zone early on by getting them to see a vision for themselves that is much bigger than what they have become. He says...

'I let the executive know up front that I respect that they want to develop into the leader they want to become, but ultimately it's about opening their eyes to the leader they must become for the benefit of others too.'

'Executives, men and women, arrive at the embracing of vulnerability differently. Some are immediate, and some will profess vulnerability, but as soon as you sit down and talk they are not as vulnerable as they professed. You have got to work a little harder as a coach in that circumstance, and not let it disrupt you.' John believes that if you try to encourage a leader to involve their stakeholders too early on, you don't get the leader really embracing the idea of vulnerability as a courageous decision, or a key to change.

Mattone typically encourages a leader to engage with their stakeholders about three months into the coaching process, which gives the individual time to be comfortable enough to share their vulnerabilities with others, often using some type of 360 process. He recalls Armando, who set up a meeting with 18 of his team to share his development plan. Mattone recalls 'Armando said to his team, "I can't become the best leader I can be without your help, so I have been working with John and we have developed a plan. I want to give you the highlights along with the strategy today and if you want to come and talk to me later that will be great." Armando went through the areas he planned to focus on with conviction and pride, and at the end they gave him a standing ovation. He was moved deeply, to the point of tears. Afterwards he said, "I can never let these people down, ever". That's true vulnerability demonstrated,' says Mattone, 'there in front of your team'.

As Mattone works with clients globally I wondered if he had noticed any differences in how quickly leaders are willing to be vulnerable in different geographies. He believes that no matter where he works around the world, he finds people just want good things for their families, and their kids to be well educated. 'I find that people are open to disrupting their existing ways of behaving if they believe it's going to be of benefit. I had been told that my way of working would not be viable in the Middle East, but I have found that they are embracing it just as much as anywhere else. Recently, I signed a new client who is one of the richest people in the Middle

East. I asked him, 'What do you need to work with me for, if you have everything already?' And he said, 'I wake up every day, but I know I'm not the best I can be.' So I told him about the concept of vulnerability and my approach, and he is now really keen to get started with the coaching.'

As we closed our conversation I asked for John's thoughts on what coaches should do to encourage their clients to be more vulnerable. Here are his tips:

- We need to help executives think big about things, think differently, and to accept that the culture they operate in is not good enough and could be better, so they are motivated to want to change and improve
- As a coach, you also need to show vulnerability in how you behave, which models the value it can bring to the coaching relationship.
- Coaches can help executives to understand the privilege they have to touch the hearts and minds of their people and their families as well, and how important it is for them to keep their eyes open, and be willing to adjust their behaviour.



### ABOUT JOHN MATTONE

John Mattone is the world's top authority on Intelligent Leadership (IL) and the creator of the IL Executive Coaching Process and Certification. He was named as one of eight finalists for the prestigious 2017 Thinkers50 Leadership Award recognising the world's top leadership authority and thinker. John was also honoured by his executive coaching peers (The Association of Corporate Executive Coaches), with the prestigious 2015 International Executive Coach Thought Leader of Distinction Award, in recognition of his thought leadership and his work as a global executive coach.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sue Stockdale is an AC-accredited Master Executive Coach, and a coaching supervisor working with clients in FTSE companies, elite sport and not-for-profit organisations. She was the first British woman to ski to the Magnetic North Pole and has represented Scotland in track and field athletics. As an author, Sue has written and co-authored eight books including *Cope with Change at Work*, (Teach Yourself Books 2012); and *Risk: All that Matters* (Hodder & Stoughton 2015) and is Deputy Editor of *Coaching Perspectives*.