

# Coaching on the Dark Side

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*Dysfunctional personality characteristics can derail the career of an otherwise competent executive. Personality predicts both leadership effectiveness and derailment, and assessment of these characteristics is critical for effective coaching and leader development. This paper reviews the relationship between personality and leadership and offers a taxonomy of flawed interpersonal strategies that can degrade a leader's capacity to build and maintain high-performing teams. Assessment of these dysfunctional dispositions facilitates the coach's ability to build an effective coaching relationship, enhance the executive's strategic self-awareness, and identify appropriate targets and strategies for intervention.*

**Keywords:** Executive coaching, leaders, leadership, personality, derailleurs, dark side.

ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS seek executive coaching to enhance the effectiveness of leaders and, by extension, to improve the performance of organizations. Depending upon their own theoretical orientation and the context in which coaching takes place, practitioners can offer interventions ranging from strengths-based to solution-focused to narrative to developmental coaching (see Cavanagh, Grant & Kemp, 2005; Peltier, 2001; Stober & Grant, 2006; for excellent summaries of the range of strategies available to executive coaches). Coaching is a relatively young field. As a result, some suggest that the rationale for executive coaching is poorly specified and that coaching lacks a cohesive conceptual foundation and firm research base to guide practice (Barner & Higgins, 2007; Berman & Bradt, 2006; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Kilburg, 1996; MacKie, 2007; Passmore, 2007; Passmore & Gibbes, 2007). Still, Grant (2005) documents the exponential increase in scholarly papers devoted to executive coaching in recent years. The outcome data collected to date reveal that coaching generally does help executives become more effective leaders (Dagley, 2006; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001) and can offer a substantial return on an organization's investment in the coaching effort (McGovern et al., 2001).

All coaches assess those with whom they work. At times, assessment is primarily

impressionistic, based on interviews with the executive and others in his or her work environment (peers, superiors, etc.). Filtered through the coach's expertise, and adapted to the context in which coaching occurs, these impressions form the basis for the coaching relationship and its goals. Structured assessment (e.g. through personality testing, 360-degree feedback, etc.) offers a more systematic strategy for identifying a leader's strengths and developmental opportunities (cf. Cronbach, 1960). Standardized measures are becoming more widely used in coaching (Alworth & Griffin, 2005; Passmore, 2008), and we believe that psychometrically sound, well validated measures can enhance and accelerate the coaching process.

Assessment in executive coaching is not merely an intellectual exercise; rather, valid assessment will provide the coach useful information on which an intervention can be based. Personality characteristics predict leadership effectiveness and, by extension, organizational outcomes. In this paper we review briefly the literature linking personality to occupational performance, focusing on characteristics that can degrade executive effectiveness – the 'dark side' of personality (R. Hogan & Hogan, 2001). These are dysfunctional interpersonal and self-regulatory patterns that interfere with the leader's capacity to build and maintain high-performing teams. Awareness of these 'dark

side' tendencies, and the underlying 'mental models' with which they are associated, allows the coach to design interventions that will mitigate their impact on leadership and, indeed, on the coaching relationship itself.

### **Personality and Leadership**

Competent leaders build and maintain effective teams that compete successfully with others (R. Hogan, Curphy & Hogan, 1994). Research indicates that effective leaders understand their subordinates' needs, abilities, and aspirations, and can persuade them to share the leader's vision for the organization as a whole. This is, of course, the essence of the 'transformational' leadership style (Avolio & Bass, 1995; Avolio et al., 1996; Bass, 1985) that complements the equally important focus on 'taking charge,' communicating clear expectations, and maintaining accountability. Indeed, the capacity to move seamlessly between 'enabling' and 'forceful' styles – without overdoing either – appears to be critical for effective leadership (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2006). Coaching and leadership development help executives remain versatile in their leadership style, and resolve flawed interpersonal strategies that impede their ability to motivate subordinates effectively.

Poor leadership is not simply an absence of technical, cognitive, and strategic skills. Rather, dysfunctional dispositions (and the flawed interpersonal strategies associated with them) can degrade whatever skills and competencies a leader might otherwise possess. At their worst, such leaders may be experienced as 'destructive' (e.g. Einarsen, Aasland & Skotgstad, 2007; Tepper, 2000; Tierney & Tepper, 2007) or even 'toxic' (Frost, 2004; Padilla, Hogan & Kaiser, 2007) by their subordinates and the organization as a whole. Managerial incompetence creates great misery for those associated with the dysfunctional leader (R. Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Thus, recognizing and modifying the destructive interpersonal strategies of leaders will improve the competitive advantage of the team and the satisfaction and well-being of the executive's subordinates.

Bad management exists at all levels of most organizations. Hogan (2007) estimates that the base rate for bad managers may range from 65 per cent to 75 per cent, and one recent survey of managers and executives suggests that as many as 27 per cent of their subordinates who have been rated as high potential are at risk for 'derailment' (i.e. being either demoted or fired) for performing below the level expected of them. Such findings are consistent with the results of earlier reviews (e.g. Bentz, 1985; Dotlich & Cairo, 2003, Leslie & VanVelsor, 1996; McCall & Lombardo, 1983) which identified insensitivity, abrasiveness, micro-management, and other dysfunctional interpersonal behaviours as the primary causes of managerial failure. Bad leadership is both common and highly consequential for the productivity of organizations, and the resolution of flawed interpersonal strategies is another important goal of executive coaching and leadership development.

An executive may seek out or be referred for coaching for many reasons (Giglio, Diamante & Urban, 1998; Stern, 2004). In some cases, superiors may identify an executive as being at risk for derailment; in these cases the organization may provide the opportunity for coaching. In other cases, an organization may create a programme for all of their senior leaders, 'high potential' middle managers, or others to enhance their personal development as leaders. In either instance, knowledge of potential dysfunctional interpersonal patterns is critical for coaching success. In the case of the 'derailing executive,' the flawed interpersonal style may itself be the reason for referral. For those referred for assistance in enhancing existing skills (in order to help the high potential manager move more effectively up the corporate hierarchy), assessment of potential derailing characteristics allows the coach to offer 'preventive maintenance' that will reduce the likelihood of problems emerging in the future.

**The nature of dysfunctional dispositions**

Dysfunctional dispositions are part of everyone's personality. We prefer to think of 'personality' in terms of a person's 'reputation' among those in his or her social environment. Personality trait descriptors (e.g. conscientious, flamboyant, volatile, confident, etc.) summarize how a person is seen by others. The 'strength' of any personality characteristic reflects the likelihood that a person will behave (and be perceived) in a certain way during social interaction. The widely accepted 'Five-Factor Model' (FFM) of personality (Goldberg, 1981; John, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1987; Wiggins, 1979) identifies primarily positive characteristics, and assessments based on this model predict success in a wide variety of employment contexts (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Bono & Judge, 2004; Hogan & Holland, 2003; R. Hogan, 2007; R. Hogan & Hogan, 2007; R. Hogan, Hogan & Roberts, 1996; Judge et al., 2002; Mount, Barrick & Stewart, 1998; Tett, Jackson & Rothstein, 1991). The prediction of occupational performance improves when the dimensions of the FFM are aligned with the competencies judged to be important for a specific job (Anderson et al., 2006; Campbell, 1990; J. Hogan & Holland, 2003; Hough, 1992; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000).

Assessments derived from the FFM reveal what might be described as the 'bright side' of personality. Dysfunctional dispositions, in contrast, reflect the 'dark side' (cf. Conger, 1990; R. Hogan & Hogan, 2001). These behavioural characteristics degrade executive performance and interfere with the individual's capacity to capitalize on the strengths revealed through FFM assessments. The past 20 years have produced a growing interest in these dark side characteristics, particularly for people in leadership roles (Furnham & Taylor, 2004; Goldman, 2006; Judge, LePine & Rich, 2006; Khoo & Burch, 2008; McCartney & Campbell, 2005; Moscoso & Salgado, 2004; Najjar, Holland & Van Landuyt, 2004). These studies have repeatedly found that managers who derail are as technically skilled as those who do not.

Instead, managerial incompetence is primarily associated with 'personality defects,' troubled interpersonal relationships, inability to build a team, lack of follow-through, and difficulty making strategic transitions (cf. Lombardo, Ruderman & McCauley, 1988; McCauley & Lombardo, 1990).

Flawed interpersonal behaviours reflect the influence of underlying mental models or 'schemas.' Schemas are organized knowledge structures through which we encode our perceptions of social interaction, allowing us to make sense of our own behaviour and the behaviour of others (Fong & Markus, 1982; Kihlstrom & Klein, 1994; Markus, 1977; Sedikides, 1993; Young, Klosko & Weishaar, 2003). Personal schemas reflect our basic beliefs about ourselves and the world – beliefs that are based on early life experiences. Schemas function automatically outside conscious awareness, serving as perceptual 'filters' that cause individuals to interpret social information in ways that fit schema-relevant expectations (Baldwin, 1992). Thus, schemas tend to be self-perpetuating. For example, individuals who were frequently criticized early in life may develop belief structures – schemas – that they are likely to be criticized in current interpersonal encounters. These people may even interpret innocuous feedback as critical, and they may become overly perfectionistic or accommodating to minimize the risk of anything they might construe as criticism from others.

Several variables affect the likelihood that dysfunctional behaviour will emerge in any given social or leadership context. First, the probability of dysfunctional behaviour reflects the strength of the relevant underlying schema; certain ineffective interpersonal patterns are simply more likely for some people than for others because the relevant underlying schema exerts a more pervasive influence on overt behaviour. Second, situational factors will affect the emergence of dysfunctional behaviour. Most people can manage dysfunctional tendencies most of the time. But stress, work over-

load, fatigue, high emotion, and lack of social vigilance can increase the probability of maladaptive behaviour. Furthermore, dysfunctional behaviour is more likely to appear in situations that are ambiguous (Green & Sedikides, 2001; Koch, 2003), where leaders have too little structure and too much discretion (Kaiser & Hogan, 2007), or that resemble the situations that produced the relevant schema in the first place. Finally, organizational culture can potentiate dysfunctional behaviour (Balthazard, Cooke & Potter, 2006; VanFleet & Griffin, 2006). Thus, personality, situational, and organizational influences interact to influence the emergence of dysfunctional behaviour in any given performance or interpersonal context (cf. Tett & Barnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000).

Assessment of the dysfunctional dispositions that commonly appear in interpersonal relationships – performance risks – allows us to predict the likelihood that such risks will impair an executive's success. To facilitate such predictions R. Hogan and Hogan (1997; see also R. Hogan & Hogan, 2001) created an inventory (the Hogan Development Survey; HDS) that assesses 11 of these characteristics. Constructs included in the HDS were identified through an exhaustive review of material ranging from research on managerial derailment to the 'personality disorders' section of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition (American Psychiatric Association, 1994; see Hogan & Hogan, 1997, 2001, for a description of the links between certain personality disorders and the scales comprising the HDS). Hogan and Hogan (1997) designed the HDS to address common interpersonal themes in the work context that can undermine an individual's effectiveness. Each theme is associated with an underlying cognitive schema that facilitates understanding of the expectations, attributions, and mental models that underlie interpersonal strategies that ultimately prove counterproductive. Listed below are the 11 constructs comprising the

HDS and a brief description of the schemas associated with each pattern of dysfunctional interpersonal behaviour:

*Excitable.* High Excitable individuals are emotionally volatile and easily disappointed in projects, people, or organizations. They alienate employees through unpredictable displays of anger or frustration. These executives seek understanding and respect, but conditions early in life led them to believe that others will ultimately disappoint or exploit them. As a result, they are constantly vigilant for signs of possible rejection, giving up easily and ready to strike out emotionally or withdraw from those whom they expect will let them down. Strong displays of emotion allow the person an illusion of control while simultaneously keeping others at an emotional distance where they are ultimately less threatening.

*Skeptical.* High Skeptical executives mistrust others' motives and doubt their intentions. They expect mistreatment; as a result, they are quick to find it. In such situations, they may recoil in an angry or combative manner to gain control and distance themselves from others. In the workplace, they are often shrewd, politically sensitive, and difficult to fool. However, their cynicism leads them to distrust authority and to fear that subordinates will attempt to circumvent them. These beliefs underlie a contentious interpersonal style characterized by irritability, argumentativeness, and insensitivity to criticism.

*Cautious.* High Cautious individuals fear criticism and are quick to feel rejected. They are careful, conservative, and worried about making mistakes. They attribute unsuccessful experiences to an inherent defect that sets them apart from others. They avoid giving other people the opportunity to see their deficiencies. Even positive feedback can be distorted or discounted. While no one enjoys criticism, these individuals cannot tolerate the unpleasant feelings associated with making a mistake; as a result, they seek to avoid unpredictable events such as social interactions and decision making.

*Reserved.* High Reserved leaders prefer social isolation. They dislike working in teams or meeting new people. Others find them difficult because they tend to be withdrawn and uncommunicative. They lack social sensitivity – the capacity to notice and respond effectively to the needs and feelings of others. They believe that life is best lived on a purely rational basis. As a result, they are typically impervious to both praise and criticism and rarely offer such feedback to others. They prefer that others perceive them as tough, resilient, and self-sufficient.

*Leisurely.* As a result of early socialization experiences, the high Leisurely leader avoids direct expressions of annoyance and frustration. He or she expresses such feelings in indirect ways. Persons in positions of authority are typically perceived as either incompetent or unfair. In reaction, the high Leisurely person believes in the right to pursue a personal agenda at his or her own pace. He or she envies those who are successful but at the same time resents them and maintains an illusion of self-sufficiency and self-respect by covertly resisting expectations.

*Bold.* High Bold individuals believe they are unique or exceptional in some way. The high Bold executive was often the ‘golden child’ of the family, lacking the boundaries and discipline that help children learn and respect their own and others’ limits. This individual believes that he or she should not have to accept subordinate positions and should be exempt from difficult or dull tasks. The high Bold leader is sublimely insensitive to the impact of his or her behaviour on others, believing that subordinates should eagerly contribute to the leader’s personal progress.

*Colourful.* High Colourful persons are naturally extraverted and gregarious. However, they often mistake attention for accomplishment. Historically, attention and affirmation were predicated upon charm, appearance, and the capacity to entertain. Far less attention was paid to competence, persistence, and achievement. These individ-

uals covertly doubt their real abilities and fear that others will notice their ‘weaknesses.’ Under stress, the high need for approval leads to exhibitionistic and ‘enter-taining’ behaviours in place of real productivity.

*Imaginative.* The high Imaginative person shares with the high Reserved individual an insensitivity to social cues. As the Reserved person withdraws, however, the high Imaginative leader relishes social interaction as an arena for sharing novel ideas, opinions, and styles. High Imaginative individuals believe in their own uniqueness and a need to emphasize creativity over practicality. They value inner experience to define reality, not what others might consider rational or objective. Viewing themselves as special, they are typically immune to criticism and rejection.

*Diligent.* High Diligent individuals grew up in environments that valued high levels of performance, criticizing work that was judged to be substandard in some way. As a result, these individuals believe that only two options are possible in any performance situation: perfection and failure. There is no room for ‘shades of gray.’ Indeed, they often have difficulty judging the realistic importance of any given task. They distrust autonomous thinking; as a result, they value rules, standards, and social custom to define the appropriate response in a performance situation.

*Dutiful.* High Dutiful leaders enjoyed a nurturant environment early in life; however, caregivers failed to ‘pull back’ as the child became more capable of self-sufficiency. Lacking mastery experiences, this individual did not develop a sense of competence and self-efficacy, continuing to believe that he or she must rely on others for important decisions. The unpredictable or unknown is avoided, as the high Dutiful person doubts his or her capacity to cope successfully with novel challenges or situations. Belief in the self as ‘weak’ impairs this executive’s capacity to think independently.

### **'Dark Side' characteristics and coaching**

Personality predicts leadership effectiveness. Knowledge of an executive's personality should facilitate coaching efforts and the ultimate success of a leadership development programme. It is somewhat surprising, therefore, that very little attention has been given to the links between personality and coaching. Two recent papers are exceptions. Stewart et al. (2008) assessed the relationship between an executive's scores on a five-factor personality measure and 'transfer of learning' from the coaching environment to the workplace. Coaching appeared to be most effective for executives scoring high in emotional stability, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, and conscientiousness was a robust predictor of the executive's use of newly developed skills in his or her day-to-day managerial activities. In a similar vein, McCormick and Burch (2008) offered a taxonomy of coaching targets linked specifically to the executive's scores on assessments derived from the five-factor model. For example, McCormick and Burch (2008) recommend that executives scoring low on Extraversion be encouraged to work to remember people's names, learn conversation skills, create enthusiasm and excitement within their teams, etc.

Many authors have suggested that a variety of 'intrapersonal' factors may degrade managerial performance and should, therefore, be addressed in the context of executive coaching. Kaiser and Kaplan (2006) and Johnson (2008), for example, argue that dysfunctional interpersonal behaviours frequently reflect distorted beliefs and flawed 'mental models' that an executive may have about the self and others in the environment. Kaiser and Kaplan (2006) suggest that effective coaches must be prepared to confront the subtle fears of failure, inadequacy, and rejection that can cloud the executive's judgment and impair interactions with subordinates and peers. This viewpoint echoes Kilburg's (2000, 2004) emphasis on the value of psychodynamic constructs in coaching. Indeed, the popular

concept of 'emotional intelligence' assumes that effective coaching allows executives to transcend flawed views of the self and others to create a management style marked by self-awareness, empathy, and interpersonal sensitivity (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1998).

Assessment of dysfunctional dispositions enhances the precision and potential effectiveness of coaching in at least three ways. First, the relationship between the coach and the executive is an interpersonal relationship that the coachee is likely to find somewhat stressful. As such, dysfunctional interpersonal strategies tend to emerge in the relationship. Knowledge of the executive's potential responses allows the coach to anticipate problems and craft the relationship accordingly. Second, enhanced 'self-awareness' is an essential precursor to meaningful change. The results of a 'dark side' assessment can help the executive make sense of any negative feedback received from others (e.g. the results of a 360-degree assessment). Third, being aware of the executive's typical dysfunctional interpersonal patterns will allow the coach to choose specific targets for developmental intervention and identify the intervention strategies most likely to be effective. We examine each of these domains in more detail.

### **Crafting the coaching relationship**

The quality of the relationship between the coach and the executive is critical for the ultimate success of the coaching effort. First and foremost, the coach must create an atmosphere of trust so that the executive can risk being honest about his or her concerns, perceptions of others in the organization, and expectations for coaching itself. Second, the coach must be perceived as an expert in facilitating change and knowledgeable about business processes, the status of the executive's organization, and the nature of effective leadership. Finally, the coach must be able to respond empathically to coachees, allowing them to feel respected and under-

stood even as they develop new self-perceptions, understand how others perceive them, and learn how to lead more effectively. Kemp (2008) notes that, although the coaching relationship is important for the success of developmental efforts, little attention has been directed to this aspect of coaching. The relationship between the coach and the executive is a 'real relationship.' If the effectiveness of coaching is influenced by the quality of the relationship, then it is important to consider the qualities that the coach and the executive bring to the interaction.

As we suggested above, people organize their interpersonal experiences in terms of schemas. These schemas influence perceptions, information processing, attributions about the causes of events, etc. It makes sense, then, to assume that the executive will bring to the coaching process a set of beliefs and expectations that will influence his or her reactions to the coach and, ultimately, readiness for change. These expectations may be shaped by a number of factors: the context in which the executive was referred for coaching, the attitudes communicated (either implicitly or explicitly) by senior management about the value of coaching, and the extent to which others in the organization are concurrently receiving coaching (Gilpin-Jackson & Bushe, 2006; Ruvolo, Petersen & LeBoeuf, 2004). But the executive also brings to coaching the same schemas and interpersonal strategies that influence his or her other relationships. To the extent that these schemas are associated with dysfunctional interpersonal strategies, these strategies are likely to emerge in the coaching relationship as well. Awareness of this allows the coach to anticipate roadblocks to the development of a productive relationship and ways the executive is likely to 'push back' against developmental recommendations. The coach can then craft the relationship to reduce the influence of these factors.

Consider, for example, an executive with a high score on the Excitable scale of the

Hogan Development Survey, a 'dark side' measure. This executive seeks affirmation but expects disappointment, and occasionally uses emotional displays to create distance from others. He or she may initially respond to coaching with enthusiasm, leading the coach to be optimistic about his/her readiness for change. But the executive is also likely to be easily discouraged with coaching, perhaps even responding angrily to negative feedback or to the coaching process itself. In contrast, an executive scoring high on the HDS Mischievous scale is likely to be charming and overtly responsive to the coach's efforts. But high Mischievous individuals have difficulty taking responsibility for their behaviour and tend to ignore the expectations that others hold for them. Such people often perceive coaching as irrelevant and show little follow-through or 'transfer of learning' into the day-to-day work environment. In both examples, knowledge of the executive's scores on scales tapping 'flawed interpersonal strategies' will allow the coach to predict problems and plan the coaching effort accordingly. For the high Excitable individual, the coach could predict disillusionment early in the relationship, offer heightened empathy in presenting feedback, and take steps to ensure that commitment to the process is maintained. For the high Mischievous coachee, the coach could remain constructively skeptical of the executive's expressed enthusiasm, building into the coaching process multiple 'accountability checks.'

The flawed interpersonal strategies that may be problematic (or potentially problematic) in the executive's work environment are likely to recapitulate in the coaching relationship. As the old saying goes, 'forewarned is forearmed.' Assessment of 'dark side' characteristics prior to or early in the coaching process allows the coach to be sensitive to these self-defeating behaviours and plan accordingly to minimize the extent to which they can interfere with effective coaching.

### **Enhancing strategic self-awareness**

Much of our behaviour is automatic and repetitive: we tend to do what has seemed to work in the past. It is the novel, the unexpected, and the discomfiting that motivate self-reflection and change. Correspondingly, expanded self-awareness is a cornerstone of most coaching interventions. R. Hogan and Benson (in press) argue that meaningful self-awareness (which they label 'strategic' self-awareness) requires, first, understanding one's strengths and limitations and, second, understanding how they compare with those of others. Hogan and Benson note that introspection alone cannot meaningfully enhance strategic self-awareness; rather, such awareness requires performance-based feedback derived from structured assessment. In other words, executives need feedback on their habitual ways of dealing with people. Armed with this information, leaders can devise plans to expand their capabilities (add new skills), expand their capacity (improve existing skills), or compensate for shortcomings. Information that focuses only on the positive fails to address genuine limitations – performance improves only when people know what they are doing wrong, and even strengths can turn into problems after a point (Kaplan & Kaiser, in press).

Most coaching includes some type of performance evaluation highlighting the executive's strengths and weaknesses. Often these evaluations are in the form of 360-degree ratings derived from assessments offered by higher-level executives, peers, and subordinates. Multisource feedback ratings correlate well with other measures of leadership effectiveness (Smither, London & Reilly, 2005); indeed, Shipper and Wilson (1991) found that subordinate's ratings of a leader's performance are more highly associated with team effectiveness than either peer or superior ratings. Thus, ratings offered by those who work for the executive may be critically important in facilitating strategic self-awareness and identifying areas for potential change. But feedback derived from others' perceptions is typically insufficient in itself to

motivate lasting change in leader behaviour (Craig & Hannum, 2006; Gregory, Levy & Jeffers, 2008; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; London & Smither, 2002). Executives at risk for derailment are unlikely to benefit from feedback alone, as they are typically self-absorbed, unwilling to take responsibility, and reluctant to learn from their mistakes (J. Hogan, Hogan & Kaiser, in press).

This, of course, is where coaching can be particularly important. Armed with both multirater and personality assessment data, the coach can assist the executive in making sense of the perceptions of both subordinates and others. Consider, for example, an executive who is referred for coaching because the team's productivity is declining and staff morale is low. Multirater assessment reveals that subordinates view the executive as too forceful and inadequately facilitative. Assessment of 'dark side' characteristics can help pinpoint the behaviours that contribute to negative staff perceptions. For example, if the leader scores high on the Reserved scale of the HDS, we can conclude that the executive tends to withdraw, to appear tough and cold, and to lack empathy for staff concerns. In contrast, if the executive scores high on the Bold scale, it is likely that he or she is self-centered, fails to accept responsibility for mistakes, and sees staff as a tool to further his or her career progress. To the degree that the coach can help the executive make sense of the subordinates' ratings, this will increase the client's strategic self-awareness.

### **Identifying targets and strategies for development**

A cursory review of the executive coaching literature reveals a wide variety of developmental interventions. Coaching strategies range from deep-muscle relaxation to asking colleagues for ongoing feedback to assertiveness training to instruction in strategic problem solving. Riggio and Lee (2007) provide an extensive review of techniques to help executives develop the competencies critical for effective leadership. The questions, of course, are what techniques to



employ, where to begin, and how. In many cases, the answers to these questions will be shaped by the context of coaching, the agreements reached between the client organization and the coach, etc. In other cases, the coach will have more latitude in identifying both the targets for coaching and the intervention strategies employed.

There is considerable debate in the literature on the difference between coaching and psychotherapy: is the coach a counsellor or a technical consultant on matters of behaviour change (Hart, Blattner & Leipsic, 2001; Joo, 2005; Witherspoon & White, 1996)? Although there are differences between coaching and therapy (Gray, 2006; Levinson, 1996), effective coaches move along the continuum between them to deal with the needs of the executive and his/her organization. Further, the coach has a responsibility to identify and intervene with the factors most likely to enhance the executive's leadership – despite what he, she, or the organization think the executive's needs are. Any development target will be the product of several different causal processes. Coaching tends to emphasize proximal rather than distal causes (which are often the focus of traditional psychotherapy). Even so, a development issue can be caused by factors ranging from insufficient social skills to faulty cognitive schemas. The distinction is important: skills development approaches will fail if the problems are a result of deficits in intrapersonal self-regulation or flawed interpersonal strategies. Coaching is not simply 'a technology followed by a formula' (Schein, 2003, p.80).

Assessment provides the key for deciding between the 'what' and 'how' of executive development. Consider an executive whose multirater feedback indicates insufficient 'forceful' leadership. This person has difficulty being appropriately assertive, setting clear expectations, and holding staff accountable for their performance. Senior management fears that this talented executive may derail if she cannot find a balance between enabling and forceful leadership.

The coach might design a programme of role-playing, behaviour rehearsal, and graduated practice to help the executive become more appropriately assertive. This is a well researched and widely accepted behavioural intervention for unassertive individuals. But what if assessment of dysfunctional interpersonal dispositions reveals this executive be highly Cautious? In this case the executive would be influenced by fear of failure, aversion to risk, and expectations of criticism. Although behavioural techniques can sometimes 'work backward' to modify existing schemas, it is usually more effective to address the schema directly using well established cognitive techniques (cf. Ducharme, 2004; Grieger & Fralick, 2007; Young et al., 2003). When the executive becomes aware of his/her possible mistakes and flawed behaviour, behavioural interventions are likely to be significantly more effective.

Thus, if a 'dark side' assessment indicates that potential derailing patterns are 'within normal limits' a coach may use directive interventions targeted to improving existing skills or the acquisition of new ones. In this case, the coach may be functioning as a 'technical consultant.' But if the assessment reveals the influence of distorted cognitive schemas, these will need to be addressed before behavioural interventions will be productive. In this case, the distinction between coach and counselor blurs considerably.

## **Conclusion**

Coaching is intended to help executives become more effective leaders. Ineffective leadership is more common than many believe, and bad leaders not only reduce the productivity and profitability of the business units for which they are responsible, they also create misery, anxiety, and hostility among those who report to them. Personality predicts both effective and ineffective leadership. Dysfunctional characteristics – flawed interpersonal strategies that can derail an executive's career – are associated with specific cognitive schemas that cause the behaviour of self and others to be

perceived in maladaptive and unrealistic ways. Assessment of these 'dark side' characteristics facilitates coaching by enhancing the coach's ability to develop the coaching relationship according to the personality of the executive, help the leader make sense of interpersonal experiences and multirater feedback, and target developmental interventions to the specific needs and characteristics of the executive.

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