

Coaching to the Head Winds and Tail Winds

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In a recent set of studies regarding the way people think about the obstacles and opportunities they face, Thomas Gilovich and his colleagues have offered an insightful metaphor regarding the extent to which we focus on the tail winds that move us forward toward desired goals and the head winds that push against us and slow down or hinder our accomplishment of desired goals. Perhaps of greatest importance is the finding that most of us concentrate on the head winds. We feel we are more disadvantaged than other people (including our own brothers and sisters). Other departments in our organization hold an advantage over our own department. Even our favorite sports team has a scheduling disadvantages compared to other teams!

Following are several perspectives that we might encourage our coaching clients to take that can help balance off a focus on head and tail winds. I then offer several basic coaching questions that encourage an appreciation of both head and tail winds.

Encouraging a Balanced Perspective

- (1) Be grateful (appreciative) of the often-unacknowledged tail winds (they are “at our backs” and therefore often not recognized). Or they are under us (supporting us) – the wind beneath my wings.
- (2) Don’t concentrate only on the head winds – which are much more obvious to us (since we are continually encountering them) HOWEVER
- (3) Conduct pre-mortem analyses in which you anticipate head winds that are much stronger or coming in different or multiple directions than you have not anticipated – what is the effective strategy to address the challenge of these head winds?

Coaching Questions that Encourage Appreciation of Both Head and Tail Winds

- (1) Tail Winds: What during the past year has most contributed to your success?
 - a. Something YOU have said or done?
 - b. Something SOME ONE ELSE or SOME THING ELSE has said or done or presented to you?
 - c. How do you increase the possibility that these tail winds will continue to contribute to your success during the coming year?
- (2) Head Winds: What during the past year has made it difficult for you to be successful
 - a. Something YOU have said or done?
 - b. Something SOME ONE ELSE or SOME THING ELSE has said or done or presented to you?
 - c. How do you decrease (or block) the possibility that these tail winds will continue to contribute to your success during the coming year.
- (3) Head Winds to Tail Winds: What during the coming year can you do that contributes to your success?
 - a. Adding new internal or external tail winds
 - b. Finding ways to shift directions a bit so that the head winds are not so direct or strong.