

A Developmental Perspective in Coaching

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The Hudson Institute of Santa Barbara is among a small cadre of coach training and learning organizations in North America emerging in the late 80's and early 90's, each with roots in specific fields of study and applied theoretical orientations. Like others, the Hudson Institute began building its coach training and education programs when the term 'coaching' was largely understood in the sports arena and the nascent field of coaching was frontier territory at the cross-section of leadership and organizational development, human development, behavioral change, consulting psychology and various philosophical domains. As the profession matures, the author and other members of the Hudson Institute are able to appreciate the diversity and richness of multidimensional roots and the value of a broad pool of theoretical orientations informing this burgeoning field of coaching. This introductory article reflects that diversity and richness.

Coaching has emerged at a unique time in history; few new professions have been born into such a change-dominated world. In the past, professionals have always functioned with a set of basic skills and concepts that they use repeatedly throughout their careers (medicine, law, finance). Coaching is radically different in that it has emerged as a field that, as its central function, facilitates change and development. For this reason alone it's imperative that our profession has a coherent and explicit understanding of how change happens and how we support and leverage continuous change at the intersection of development.

At the Hudson Institute, our primary theoretical roots are in adult development, human systems thinking and change theory. Development is an ongoing process for the individual that is inextricably embedded in all levels of human systems, ranging from the internal system of self to the broader systems of teams, organizations, and extending beyond into cultures and today's global forces. Development throughout our adult years as leaders, managers and individuals is at the heart of growth and change in all facets of our humanness and at all levels of human systems.

Our foundation in this broad domain began well before the field of coaching emerged. Co-founder Frederic Hudson served as the founding president of The Fielding Graduate University in the 70's and 80's, a learning organization whose mission was in providing graduate degrees to midlife adults through an

innovative, self-directed learning model that embraced the intersection of change and development in the learning paradigm.

Many of these concepts and perspectives continue to be evidenced in our work at the Hudson Institute today. At Fielding, Hudson gathered together a group of senior mentors, guides and colleagues dedicated to the understanding of change management, human development and adult development and learning in order to successfully pioneer an innovative approach to adult learning. The list included Malcolm Knowles, father of adult learning; Robert Tannenbaum, UCLA professor, organizational guru, author of several books on change inside organizations; Edgar Schien and his well known process consultation model; Richard Beckhard, OD guru and author; Marjorie Lowenthal Fiske, well known developmentalist and researcher on intentionality; Fred Jacobs, founder of Leslie College and innovator in adult learning; Robert Goulding, MD, founder of Redecision psychotherapy; Art Chickering, PhD, professor and author who taught us that learning changes as we develop; social scientist, Nevitt Sanford, and so many more influencers – Vivian McCoy, Carol Gilligan, Daniel Levinson, along with the earlier work of many theorists and researchers including Robert Kegan, Jean Piaget, and Abraham Maslow.

Development throughout the course of our lives as individuals, systems, and organizations has been researched and understood through the many lenses of this stellar list and far more. From the seminal concept of individuation articulated from the perspectives of Nietzsche, Freud, Jung and more, to Erikson's and Levinson's age and stage theories, to Piaget's and Kegan's conception of levels of development, Corey's work on team and group development, and Flamholtz's work on the developmental trajectory of an organization – all of these works provide us with an important window into the developmental process of the human journey in the context of our many human systems.

Maslow developed the hierarchy of needs to accentuate the developmental nature of our wish to strive for more. Erikson taught us about the layers of identity we develop over the life course. Kegan drew our attention to understanding the implications of stages of adult development relative to individuation, while Gilligan focused attention on the gender differences in our developmental journey. Psychology teaches us a healthy respect for the power of the past when we are working to make changes, and the subfield of positive psychology illuminates areas of particular relevance to coaching in the leadership domains—including emotional intelligence, optimism, and engagement factors. Systems theory illuminates for us the power of homeostasis in a system of any size and the challenge we have as coaches to fully appreciate and work to uncover the natural underlying resistance to change. Charles Handy teaches us about the paradox involved

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Learning theory includes the contributions of David Kolb, Chris Argyris, Malcolm Knowles and others, and this arena teaches us how learning – ranging from deep transformative learning to the smaller behavioral shifts – occurs and articulates the necessary ingredients that must be in place for learning to be optimal. As coaches, we know that learning is one of the most vital elements in developing, growing and changing during our adult years. Finally, philosophy always continues to be a source of wisdom, and contemporary postmodern work of Fernando Flores, Ken Wilbur and others builds on these philosophical roots while seeking to articulate an overarching theory of development that transcends all pre-existing conceptualizations combining the best of Eastern and Western thinking.

At the Hudson Institute we have continued to study developmental patterns in our adult journey and we've come to believe it's time for a fundamental change of consciousness, from linear to cyclical notions of how life works at all levels of human systems. For decades, the field of adult development focused almost solely on a linear, age and stage approach to understanding our adult journey; yet in today's fast paced world, filled with fewer rules and social predictability, it's not as relevant to map our development as individuals, leaders and organizations to ages, predictable stages, and the social constraints and social forces of the past.

At one time in history the sigmoid curve seemed to do a pretty good job of summing up the story of life as individuals and as businesses – we begin the journey slowly, experimenting, vacillating and wavering along the way; we wax and then we slow down and inevitably decline and diminish. Today it's not quite that simple, and whether we turn to the well-known developmental and longitudinal work of Erik Erikson or the organizational life cycle articulated by Eric Flamholtz, this thoroughly predictable linear pattern we could 'count on' in the late-industrial age, is not as workable a blueprint for our development anymore. Life is literally changing too rapidly to hold on to a predictable map with a one way direction. As Hudson (1999a, p. 31) observes, "Ever since the industrial revolution, linear thinking has dominated our consciousness with its basic notions of progress, perfectionism, success, happiness, and planned change. A linear perspective portrays life as a series of advances from simple to complex, from lower to higher, and from good to better."

Today, change happens at lightning speed within the individual system and the largest of organizations; our challenge is not just managing and surviving change, it's learning to live with it,

leverage it, and feel fully engaged and alive. As we orient our lives to this time in history, we need to shift away from a linear paradigm toward a cyclical one and shift our thinking from progress to process.

At the Hudson Institute we advocate a holistic model of development and change – one that encompasses and accounts for the context in which we live while simultaneously acknowledging our individual journey in life. Whether we are coaching a leader at the peak of her career or an early career person looking to define her own path, or a successful mid-career leader who is burned out and bored with the current scenario at hand, it's essential that we, as coaches, understand the developmental terrain in all contexts.

Several important characteristics are inherent in a holistic and cyclical view of adult life. First, the cyclical view portrays life as a complex, pluralistic, multivariate flow, with ongoing cycles in nature, societies, and people. Familial systems, companies and nations are all part of a larger, often chaotic flow that can be influenced and shaped but not completely controlled. Second, the cyclical paradigm assumes life 'develops' through cycles of change and continuity rather than in progressive, linear, straight lines. It concentrates on understanding both what persists throughout our lives and what necessarily changes. Each time we relinquish an old stage of life, we differentiate one more time, and a new level of development and individuation emerges for us. Third, the cyclical picture honors the polarities in life and in our organizations – the up times and difficult times are incorporated into our understanding of the very undulating rhythm of opportunities and obstacles. Fourth, continuous learning is essential to the constant retooling of our multilayered human systems.

We have been informed by this view of adult life during our many years of practice, writing, model building and research. This broad developmental perspective and approach has guided our work and understanding of the coaching paradigm and the change process. Over time we developed a model for understanding and normalizing the ongoing cycle of change that occurs at an increasingly rapid pace in our lives today. This model provides us with a normative and development framework for conceptualizing where an individual or system might be at any point in life's journey.

THE CYCLE OF RENEWAL

Change creates the crucible for development, and change can be triggered by internal or external forces and events and circumstances in our lives. It may be a promotion, a firing, a major shift in roles with new demands at hand. It may be a performance review that requires some adjustments, a promotion that requires a move to another continent, a first career position or the final capstone, a death or a challenging illness at home. All

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of these changes catch us off guard and the bigger the surprise, the greater the opportunity and invitation for our own development. We've built a model we term "The Cycle of Renewal" (see Figure 1 below) to provide a framework for viewing a cyclical and normative cycle of ongoing change that intersects with the human systems at play at any point in the adult journey. Unlike the older linear models tied to specific ages and stages, we view development throughout the adult years as continuous and growthful. This same cyclical change process occurs in the individual and larger systems – so it's equally applicable to individuals, teams and organizations.

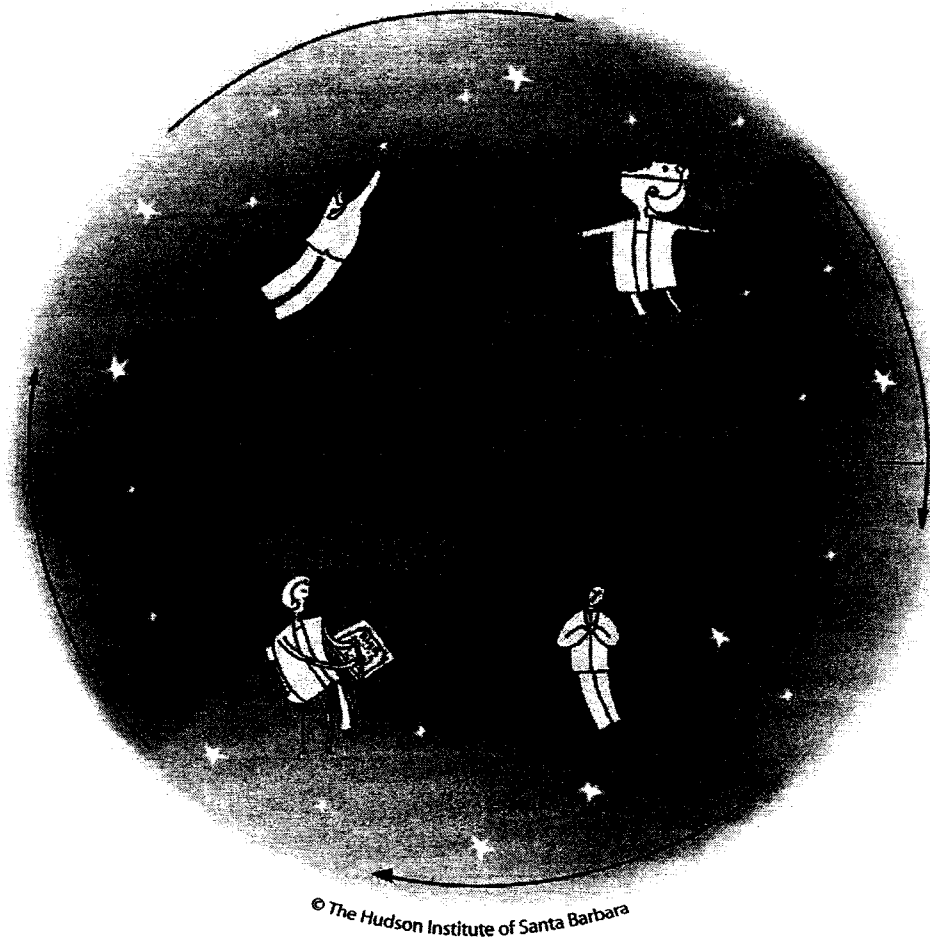


Figure 1. The Cycle of Renewal

A brief walk through the cycle begins in the quadrant labeled "Out of Sync" – familiar territory to all of us. We find ourselves here when we have a vague sense of *ennui* and as we move further down the arc, our sense of discontent grows in intensity. It might be the team that has accomplished a big goal and the carrot is gone, the glory is over; the leader who finds herself promoted

into a position that suits her pocketbook and status but not her heart, skills and dreams; or the 55 year old who thought the job was secure and lived accordingly only to find it all go up in smoke overnight. In all of these situations we feel discouraged. There is a sense of hopelessness – big or small, a feeling of helplessness, and a languishing in that doldrums place with no wind to help move us in one direction or another.

We have only a handful of choices when we find ourselves in this place. Of course, we can dig in our heels, get angry, and refuse to take action. Non-action typically results in more of the same – and eventually even this stance is impossible to maintain. In order to move out of this quadrant we need to make some changes – either small adjustments (a mini-transition) or deeper changes that result in real developmental shifts of the transformative kind. We tend to make the decision about whether to make a small adjustment and keep moving ahead or take the longer road based on how big the change is with which we are faced. Big endings and beginnings offer (and just as often, force) us to make some major changes in our lives or larger systems.

BEYOND THE SUCCESSION PLAN

Let's consider Steve's situation – he had been leading a large health care organization with great success for the past fifteen years. He had planned for his succession, and he and the board were in agreement about the timing and the important next steps. Yet, Steve had made no plans for the shift and instead worked at his usual break-neck speed right up through his final day on the job. A month later when he had assumed he would be enjoying his new sense of freedom, he found himself instead in a very lonely and dark place – no more tight schedule and constant demands, no more global travel, no more admin at his side, no more title and identity; and most of all he was completely surprised by his own sense of loss and unexpected reaction to this new place. The change for Steve was enormous – no amount of small adjustments would bring him back to equilibrium. Steve was faced with peeling away an identity, a mask of sorts, and uncovering a new layer of self and identity – 'repurposing'.

As organizations and individuals we spend very little time in this "Repurposing" quadrant and it's likely as individuals we'll only move into this transformative space a handful of times in our lives. Yet, each time we find ourselves here – whether it's a loss or a new beginning, we inevitably face parts of 'self' that we haven't known much about. For Steve, he had been a very successful leader, but he had paid the price of single-mindedness and now the one string guitar wasn't enough. He had to do the hard work of creating a new layer/dimension of self, and this is not a comfortable place. It requires self reflection of significant dimensions, it requires letting go of old identities, it requires some grieving, and it all takes time – more time that we'd like.

When we've traveled the quadrant of Repurposing we say goodbye to what we no longer need on the journey ahead. For Steve the work seemed enormous – he was genuinely surprised by how much his role as head of an organization defined who he was, what he did, and how others responded to him. Creating a new sense of Steve without his organization took time, space, self reflection, and he found some solace in writing as well. Finally, after nearly a year of sabbatical-like living, Steve was ready to move forward, to venture into new territory and try on some new ways of being. This is the quadrant we term "Getting Ready" – the territory that requires new thinking, experimenting, and exploring new ways of being. At some points in the journey it's likely to include forms of learning – maybe an advanced degree or more training. At other times, as in Steve's case, it's a time to harvest all of life's skills and talents and test new ventures with fewer stakes and plenty of pleasure. We are a 'doer-addicted' culture and it's our tendency to jump on the first experiment we try and often miss out on the value of real experimenting at this juncture.

Steve found himself tempted to try out the first idea that stumbled upon him – a call from a well-respected nonprofit agency in his community. But with the help of his coach, he stepped back and allowed himself to take a broader look at his options before settling on his next steps. Ultimately Steve decided to test out a dream he had many years ago to start a small business enterprise of his own. Once he moved into this new decisional place he was in the first quadrant we term "Go for It" – that place where we feel most alive, most aligned with our sense of what's most important at this time in life. Steve's stay in this place could be a long while, and it will inevitably lead him to that "Out of Sync" place a few times and require some adjustments in order to maximize this chapter. Then at some point it won't be enough anymore or some major external change will rip him out of this chapter and require another longer journey through "Repurposing".

A LEADERSHIP PASSAGE

Jill's story is quite different. It begins when at age 42 she moved into a leadership role following the sudden death of a colleague. She was honored to have the position offered to her and willingly agreed to accept it, but once in the position she was overcome with challenges coming both from her leadership team and from her own personal sense of inadequate capacity to do the job. What's more, she found herself questioning her decision and wisdom of the big leap she had signed on for. Her new role demanded toughness and an in-the-moment decision making style that was well outside her comfort zone. And in the language of the Cycle of Renewal, Jill had been happily engaged in her old role and likely enjoying a long stay in the "Go for It" quadrant until this big change came along, catapulting her into that "Out of Sync" place where things don't feel 'right' and there's a

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sense of fear about what's to come. Jill could have refused the promotion and dodged these challenges. Instead, she willingly took it on, and her success required some significant shifts in her perception of self and concomitant capacities.

In the end, Jill succeeded, and she would be the first to say she's a far better leader. She has developed new capacities and confidence that simply didn't exist at the same levels before this change transpired. Jill is more alive and engaged than ever – no longer second-guessing decisions, taking remarks too personally, or deliberating on strategies too long. Jill's journey required what we term a "Mini-Transition" – a series of adjustments that enabled her to operate effectively at a new level of leadership in her organization. Her identity hasn't fundamentally changed. She's simply deepened her skills in order to be fully equipped to step into this new role.

LEVELS OF CHANGE: TRANSFORMATIONAL AND ADAPTIVE

Steve's journey was likely transformational for him – it required letting go of an old identity, coming to terms with a new time in his life and creating a new way of being in the world – all the work of the lower half of the circle on the Cycle of Renewal uncovering a new level of differentiation and a new stage in the adult journey. Jill's journey included a series of smaller changes that didn't require an 'overhaul' of self but instead an increased capacity in her leadership role – the work of the upper half of the circle.

Life today breeds endless change and our ability to map the way, understanding an ongoing and normative change process that is always present in our lives allows us to make far more intentional choices. Simply put, change is a ubiquitous force in today's world. Leaders and organizations have only a handful of choices in this new terrain – to react, resist, or leverage the inevitable change as an opportunity for development – allowing us to reinvent ourselves and our systems as we remain engaged, agile and vibrant.

The central function of coaching is facilitating development in individuals and systems. Leveraging change to foster development is the domain of coaching in today's change-dominated world.

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