

Bottom Line to Top Line

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perspective



The Top Line

Business coaching leaves the bottom line and heads for greater purpose and fulfillment

A few years ago, a gentleman stumbled upon our accredited coach training website and was intrigued and confused. He wondered why I prefer to train people who have a spiritual foundation. His email bluntly said, "What does spirituality have to do with executive coaching? People hire us to improve the bottom-line." None of his coaching colleagues could answer his question either.

Businesses Hire Coaches to Improve the Bottom Line

In over two decades of coaching experience I have found most business and executive coaches pay attention to the product or tangible result clients want, such as greater achievement, increased productivity and improved performance. Those are referred to as the bottom line and are measurable. These outcomes are the attention-getters reported by research and the media as reasons to engage in coaching.

What Might Be Better than an Increase in Productivity?

Numerous newspaper and journal interviewers have point-blank refused to write about the importance of human spirituality in business coaching, even though I reply to their questions extolling the value of this unorthodox focus. I believe that business results such as prosperity and longevity stem from attention to factors other than increases in productivity. Patricia Aburdene, author of *Megatrends 2010*, lists two of the seven major social trends dealing with spirituality: the Power of Spirituality and Spirituality in Business.

The Context for Client Responses

A bottom-line perspective deals with actions and responses, both external variables. From the field of psychology, we know that stimulus yields response. We would not have responses unless they were catalyzed by stimuli. In coaching what do we know about the stimuli that elicit clients' responses? We do not receive much information about stimuli so we partner with clients to explore what we cannot see or hear directly. These are clients' values, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, thoughts, meaning and spiritual perspectives. I have found that personal qualities

(qualities of being) such as meaningfulness, satisfaction, fulfillment, peace and balance are the reasons clients strive to achieve in the external world. These are the context for client responses.

Life Purpose Parallels Business Mission

One of my executive clients, a competitive medical entrepreneur, wanted to double the size and income in his medical practice and sought the help of a coach to do so. When he raised skeptical eyebrows hearing that I always began coaching by guiding clients to learn their life purpose, I thought I had lost him; yet he continued to listen. So, I explained the parallel between his business mission statement and his life purpose, also known as a personal mission statement. He began to understand that he would be able to use his life purpose as a context for his choices and personal resource allocations, time, energy and money, just as he used his business mission statement to allocate resources and make strategic decisions in his medical practice.

By the end of the first meeting he reconnected with his life purpose and was pleased to recognize the alignment between his business mission and personal mission statements, as well as his personal and business values.

Internal Results and External Results

Exploring his coaching results came next. All were external results such as increased productivity, expanded marketing and office efficiency. All bottom-line results. I asked him, "What would it bring you when you succeed?" "More money," he blurted out without skipping a beat. "And what would *that* bring you?" I persisted. His answer was more thoughtful this time. "A larger presence in the community, greater prominence and visibility."

Once again I asked, "And what would that bring you if you had a larger presence and greater prominence?" This time his words imprinted a surprised look on his face. "I can be of service to more people, help more folks in the community be healthier." I could tell he knew I was going for one more time. "And what will that bring you?" His entire presence softened and he smiled a smile from deep inside, "Great satisfaction and humility." Now the switch: "You were focused on making more money (bottom line) and now you are speaking about gaining satisfaction and more humility (top line)." Eyes wide open, he beamed.

The external world sees increased marketing, office efficiency and money (the bottom line). What we don't see, the top line, are the forces that bring meaning and purposefulness, satisfaction and humility. The top line includes life purpose, values and qualities of being.

The Top Line

I challenge you to try this out with anything external you desire. Experiment with yourself, your clients and everyone by asking, "What will that bring me?" until you get to your top line.

What remains with our clients? Do we want clients to remember extra money earned, more brilliant marketing plans, or new ways of organizing the paperwork flow? Or do we want them to recall the top line such as greater meaningfulness, purposefulness, fulfillment and satisfaction?

I choose the top line when I coach in business. How about you? •

Source: Aburdene, Patricia. *Megatrends 2010: The Rise of Conscious Capitalism*. Hampton Roads Publishing, 2007.