Interludes: The Art and Tactics of Micro Coaching

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Broad-based, macro-strategies are often aligned in the field of professional coaching with the kind of client being served. A typical distinction is drawn between coaching being done with clients working in an organizational setting and coaching being done with personal clients. The former "type" of coaching is frequently referred to as executive coaching (though organizational coaching is often done with clients who are not operating at the executive level). The second "type" of coaching is often referred to as personal coaching or life coaching. It is assumed that the role played by the person being coached and the source of funding for this coaching endeavor are critical in the formulation of macro coaching strategies. An alternative categorization is based on the nature of the coaching function being serviced, with macro strategies being aligned with improving decision-making processes, improving behavioral performance, or enhancing clarity regarding a client's aspirations (Bergquist and Mura, 2011).

Regardless of the perspective taken regarding macro-coaching strategies, certain micro-coaching tactics can be engaged regardless of the coaching strategy being deployed. There are "coach-ful" interludes in any session when specific micro-coaching processes can be introduced that help to move the coaching session forward. These interludes hold the potential of introducing small interventions that can have a major impact. These micro-coaching tools are based on the basic assumption that small things and small changes often should be the focus of a coaching session. As Paul Watzlawick (1986, p. 92) concluded many years ago: "the great lies dormant in the small; therefore we should respect and protect the small." As Watzlawick notes, the big "ultra-solutions" often backfire and allow for no minor corrections. They tend to be win-loss (this solution is correct and other solutions are wrong). Small solutions tend to be correctable and allow for collaboration and a win-win pathway to the use of and testing of multiple small solutions.

Furthermore, these small things and small changes are best introduced in an Interlude (a small space and short time of safety). The Interlude should be filled with small things that generate insights and small changes that can serve as a fulcrum for much bigger changes. Finally, the interlude should be designed to enhance, for a moment, something called second-order learning and something called second-order change. It is in micro-coaching interludes that our clients can glimpse something quite different from what they currently think is "reality" and glimpse a quite different way of being in the world.

At this point, a cautionary note is in order. While it is of great value to set up small steps that can be easily modified, it is also essential to have an overall strategy in mind, alongside desired outcomes (that can be adjusted over time); otherwise, there is the potential of "incrementalism" (Michael1973) to gain traction, leading to what is often called "mission creep." Small steps are taken that gradually lead an institution in the wrong direction or leave it "wandering in the wilderness." It becomes "safer" for the leaders of an organization or government to supply the day-to-day tactics, without ever addressing the bigger strategic issues. Tragically, we saw incrementalism in full operation during the Vietnam War. As documented by David Halberstam (1993), small decisions kept being made by the White House that led to gradual expansion into a full-scale and extended war. There is reason to believe that something similar has been occurring over the past decade or two regarding American foreign policy, particularly as related to the defense or invasion of other countries.

From a parallel perspective, micro-coaching must be complemented by macro-coaching. The small things must be introduced within a broader coaching strategy that both the coach and client can accept and clearly articulate. The Interludes of safety and insight must be interspersed with general sessions concerning the overall purpose of the coaching engagement and a review of progress to date of the coaching work being done. Given this setting of micro-

coaching in a more general macro context, I offer eight micro-coaching tactics (actually a cluster of tactics). They can be effectively engaged during a coaching interlude that is saturated with safety and inundated with insight-filled images and actions. I begin with something called "habit stacking."

1. Changing One's Behavior: Habit Stacking

S. J. Scott (2023) has helped to introduce a process called "habit stacking" that could be of value for those wishing to introduce micro-coaching. While you should read his essay or buy his book, the steps he has identified are readily replicated by a skillful coach. Essentially, habit stacking is a process of stacking a new routine on top of an existing habit. If we meditate every day, then perhaps we can add drinking those two glasses of water or doing the 5 minutes of walking on the treadmill. If we are now engaged in the regular routine of calling our son at college each day, then perhaps we can add to that a brief call with our aging mother. It is all about stacking one habit we would like to engage on top of an existing habit that we always remember to do.

Scott added some useful advice on top of this simple micro-strategy of habit stacking.

Step 1: Start with a Five-Minute Block

The simplest way to stick with a new habit is to make it "stupidly simple" to complete. Scott offers an example: If you want to write every day, then you create a goal of writing just one paragraph per day. Sure, you can do more than that, but as long as you've written this paragraph, then you can consider this a complete task for the day." As someone who is a very active writer, I often think of writing as a muscle. It must be "exercised" each day, or it atrophies. When I have not been writing for several weeks, I find it hard to start up again. This is no doubt the case with many other habits: we have to frequently engage these habits or they become difficult to perform.

Scott's process of "habit stacking" is, in essence, a clustering (stacking) of micro-behaviors that are self-rewarding. We find the right time and right place to do the small "right thing." This is often a time and place when we can actually perform or even combine several positive habits. For me, this is often my work with a thoughtful and caring physical therapist, who gently encourages me not only to engage in some brief micro-exercises, but also engage in some postural moves that help to reduce or remove muscular tension and even headaches.

Scott offers the following summary of what he is proposing: "The core idea is to set a simple goal that overcomes inertia. Then usually, once you get started, you'll do more of the task than you originally planned. . . The most important factor is consistency. That's why you should start with five minutes, picking one or two habits, and then add more as this routine becomes an automatic action."

Step 2: Focus on Small Wins

For Scott, the emphasis is always placed on "small" and incremental. The big task is to be avoided. For me, the challenge of doing 30 minutes of exercise each day leaves me doing no exercise. The full meal of nutritious, tasteless food leads me to kick back in revolt by eating nothing but high-fat, tasty meals. We might provide a label for this reactivity and resistance. It is "psychological retribution. "We find that the "threat" of heavy exercise or tasteless meals is itself a negative force in our life that must be balanced by something pleasant. While we should be rewarding ourselves with a small dish of ice cream after eating our broccoli and kale, we are instead rewarding ourselves with ice cream just because we were "forced" to think about eating broccoli and kale.

It is not only smart to start with a small win regarding taste by first eating a vegetable with some sauce on it, there is also the value of engaging in behavior that initially requires minimal effort. My physical therapist, for instance, encourages me to try five minutes on my tread mill or a 3-minute walk with my wife and puppy. As Scott

recommends, we should "build our routine around habits that don't require a lot of effort." While "psychological retribution" forces us to stop in our tracks and give second and third thoughts to undertaking a challenging task, the tasks that yield small wins, such as the 5 minutes on a treadmill, will build "emotional momentum" because they're easy to remember and complete. "You want to get started with these 'no-brainer' activities because they will eliminate the likelihood that you'll skip a day due to a feeling of overwhelm or general busyness" – or face psychological retribution.

Step 3: Pick a Time and Location

Scott notes that: "Every stack should be anchored to a trigger related to a location, time of day, or combination of both." There are the morning rituals and the rituals (habits) we engage when preparing for bed. The key feature of habit stacking seems to be that we don't just engage a routine at the two ends of our day, but that we find times and locations during the middle of the day for the engagement of healthy habits, such as meditation or exercise. We can also review daily goals at a time of day when we often drift off into daydreaming or aimless behavior. Scott offers his own suggestion: "At work, in the morning: You just got to the office, so instead of checking your email or social media (like most people do), maximize the first few hours by creating an environment that allows you to focus on your high-level tasks. . . . At work, on your lunch break: The middle of the day is a great time to complete a stack. You've just worked for a few hours, so you'll probably feel a decrease in energy."

As Scott mentions, the small win-able habits could include meditating, taking a brisk walk, getting in a seven-minute workout (or five-minute workout in my case), calling an accountability partner, or completing a mini-flow activity (such as I describe later in this essay). The point I would emphasize is location. When we are in the "right place" then we do the "right stuff." For instance, I am much more "in the mood" to work for at least five minutes on a treadmill when I am meeting with my physical therapist and using her treadmill (preceded by her work on my aging limbs).

In many cases, we are looking for a Sanctuary for stacking up our habits. This sanctuary could be a gym, our den, a trail through our nearby woods – or the office of a physical therapist. As I have often noted in my writing (e.g. Bergquist, xxx), a sanctuary is a place where we can re-store our health, our spirit, or our soul. It is also a place where we can learn micro (yet often profound) things about ourselves (including our ability to find small winds).

While the physical therapist is of great value to me in promoting the stacking of habits, it is also the service provided by a thoughtful and caring coach that can be of great value. The coach can provide a sanctuary, where we, as clients, can learn how to habit stack. We can be nurtured by engaging with our coach in identifying procedures, such as Scott has identified, that can lead us to begin engaging on a regular basis in habits that are helpful, heathy and growth-producing. Our coach can also lead us to decide that a professional (such as a gifted physical therapist) and a location (such as a physical therapy office) can be a sanctuary for effective habit stacking.

Step 4: Anchor Your Stack to a Trigger

It is clear to Scott that the Trigger is critical. I want to step outside Scott's sphere for a moment and introduce a bit of neuropsychology that relates to his focus on habits and triggers. Basically, we now know that two primary memory systems are operating in our head, heart, and muscles at any one point. One of these systems is known as *Procedural Memory*. This is the memory system where all of our routines are stored. Often not in our conscious awareness, this memory system guides our driving of an automobile (or riding of a bicycle), driving of a golf ball (if we are skillful as a golfer), and even producing our ongoing interpersonal chatter ("How are you?" "How was your day?"). The *Habits* that Scott wants us to stack up are based on procedural memory.

The second memory system is known as *Expository Memory*. This is the system we engage when "thinking about things." Our critical conversations, conflict-management, problem-solving, and decision-making are operated through this second cognitively based system. Scott's Trigger is activated not through the Procedural Memory system but instead through the Expository Memory system. This is the clever strategy employed by Scott. He is linking a conscious Expository act (trigger) to an unconsciously held Procedural unit of memory (habit).

Scott specifically recommends that the conscious act of triggering be linked to another set of non-cognitive functions, these being the five senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, or taste). These act as a reminder to complete a specific action. Much like an alarm set on a clock or cell phone, the sensory link can remind us of a specific habit. For instance, as a micro-coach, we can help our client identify a specific location that reminds them of a specific habit they need to engage. For instance, it might be when entering our den, that we remember to do some box-breathing. We could instead engage the sense of taste. Every time we take a swallow of orange juice, we are reminded that we should also take our pills—and wash them down with the OJ.

While some of the triggers we can engage are external in origin (the proverbial alarm clock), they can also be internal. We learn to engage a specific habit (such as taking a five-minute break from work at our computer) not just when our shoulder or back aches a bit (external trigger), but also when we are feeling a bit depressed (internal trigger). Scott offers an important point: "It's important to understand the difference between these two triggers—not only because it'll help you build powerful habit stacks, but also because it will help you overcome bad habits that might be limiting your personal growth."

It is all back to the matter of rewards we give ourselves in place of embracing new behaviors when we are threatened. We engage psychological retribution, or we seek out a dopamine rush to counter the painful adrenaline rush that comes with the fight/flight threat. We are threatened with the challenge of making too big a change in behavior, or we are rewarded by embracing and frequently enacting a stack of small, positive habits. The Interlude that we establish and the micro-coaching tactics we deploy can make all the differences.

2. Changing One's Relationship with Another Person: the Bid

John Gottman (2015, p. 88) offers an observation about the valuable role played by specific micro-actions taken by people when they wish to sustain a relationship with another person. He bases his recommendation on extensive work with couples:

> Hollywood has distorted our notions of romance and what makes passion sizzle. Watching Humphrey Bogart gather teary- eyed Ingrid Bergman into his arms may make your heart pound, but real-life romance is fueled by far more humdrum scenes. It is kept alive each time you let your spouse know he or she is valued during the grind of everyday life. In marriage, couples are always making what I call "bids" for each other's attention, affection, humor, or support.

Gottman's notion about offering a "bid" is quite insightful—and relevant to all relationships. Gottman (2015, p. 88) described the bid in more detail:

> Bids can be as minor as asking for a back-rub or as significant as seeking help in carrying the burden when an aging parent is ill. The partner responds to each bid either by turning toward the spouse or turning away. A tendency to tum toward your partner is the basis of trust, emotional connection, passion, and a satisfying sex life. Comical as it may sound, romance is strengthened in the supermarket aisle when your partner asks, "Are we out of butter?" and you answer, "I don't know. Let me go get some just in case," instead of shrugging «pathetically. It grows when you know your spouse is having a bad day at work and you take a few

seconds out of your schedule to send him an encouraging text. In all of these instances, partners are making a choice to turn toward each other rather than away.

At a more fundamental level, this process of bidding seems to be founded on what Gottman (2015, p. 21) identifies as the Deep Friendship that is to be found in most happy, enduring relationships:

> By this ["deep friendship"] I mean a mutual respect for and enjoyment of each other's company. These [happy] couples tend to know each other intimately—they are well versed in each other's likes, dislikes, personality quirks, hopes and dreams. They have an abiding regard for each other and express this fondness not just in the big ways but through small gestures [bids] day in and day out.

The deep friendship can yield many Caring Interludes during which bids can be offered and enjoyed.

Arlene and Kevin

I found ample evidence for Gottman's observations and recommendations in the study of couples that I conducted over several decades with students in my graduate school. A report on this study was presented in my book called *Love Lingers Here* (Bergquist, 2023). One of the couples we interviewed, Arlene and Kevin, spoke, like many enduring couples, of being each other's best friend. After going through several difficult years of struggle, Arlene and Kevin now look forward to "simply palling around together." A typical day for these two people usually centers around work and school. They both get up early to commute to their jobs. Neither of them is a morning person, so they don't talk for the first hour or so. They make up for the lack of nonverbal communication by spending half an hour or so in bed each morning just snuggling and cuddling. They are offering each other Gottman's "bid."

To ensure that they also have time for each other, designate each Friday as "date night." A big evening of "bids." They take turns planning activities for the evening, which usually include dinner of some sort, and a movie or a walk along the beach. During the past few years, Arlene has come around to Kevin's way of thinking. Now, they both consider themselves to be "romantics at heart." Kevin has also come around to Arlene's way of thinking—they realize that sometimes romance needs to be helped along with a little planning when two people have full lives.

Kevin and Arlene see date night as their special time together and reserve the night just for themselves. The weekends are usually spent with a handful of their closest friends. They both like to entertain, so it's not unusual for them to have friends over for pizza and a game. It can be very disillusioning for a couple when romance has left the relationship. Arlene and Kevin seem to understand the importance that romance plays in a healthy relationship. They have been very thoughtful and active in ensuring that this element is nurtured.

Gene and Margie

Another of the couples we interviewed makes a point of having coffee together each morning before he leaves for work. Margie then takes their daughter to childcare and usually picks her up after work, though there is flexibility when her schedule changes temporarily. They both have long commutes, so dinner is not elaborate. They are both devoted to their daughter and spend time with her in the evening before going to bed around 9:30 pm. In such a busy life, there is little time for elaborate ritual or even so-called "quality time" together, for the quality time is spent with their young daughter.

A small ritual (coffee together in the morning) soon is invested with considerable significance as the one act that is shared by Gene and Maggie virtually every morning. Even Gene and Margie may not be aware of the significance of this one shared act in their busy, independent lives. The meaning of this small, daily ritual may only become apparent when they discuss it with an interviewer. Alternatively, its importance may only become apparent when one partner

abandons it for some reason. Then all hell breaks loose. Both partners are likely to be surprised by the emotions attached to the ritual. There often is a pressing need to restore this simple daily event or risk losing the relationship!

I have found in my own coaching over the years that the identification of Caring Interludes and Bids is important when not just working with couples who are intimate with one another, but also with men and women who are working together each day (often spending more time together than each does with their own lifetime partner). While I did not know about Gottman's bids until writing my book on couples, I somehow knew intuitively that small micro-acts help to preserve and enrich relationships. Like Gene and Margie, it might be a couple of coffees shared at the start of a workday, or the delivery of this cup of coffee each morning by one worker to another. This is a bid from one employee to another employee or a bid that is shared.

There are also workplace bids that resemble those engaged by Arlene and Kevin. While they might not be designated as "date nights," two co-workers might create an Interlude, spending a half-hour or hour together once a week after work, having a soft drink or beer together at a nearby restaurant or pub. The bid can be "picking up the check," or offering a salute (wish of good health) to the other person by raising the glass of beer or soft drink. I often find people whom I coach coming to awareness regarding the importance of a bid they share with a colleague at work. They find a moment (Interlude) during the day to share a word of appreciation upon completion of a task. They might bring out balloons and even a bit of cheering with other co-workers when a major project is completed. While this appreciation and celebration might simply be considered the "right" thing to do, it is often valuable in a coaching session to consider the impact of these Caring Interludes and small and large bids on not just the high-quality relationship that is created and maintained, but also the ways this quality helps to produce greater workplace productivity.

3. Changing the Level of Enjoyment in One's Life: Micro-Flow

Many years ago, Mihali Csikszentmihalyi, an astute observer of human behavior, proposed that all humans are motivated by finding a balance (a threshold) between anxiety on the one hand, and boredom on the other hand. We can also see and feel the impact of Energy when we are engaged in activities that reside in the threshold between anxiety (overwhelming challenge) and boredom (lack of challenge). This threshold, called *Flow*, often operates as an Interlude that sets the stage for a highly effective use of energy.

The threshold of Flow is also the threshold of learning (between demand for accommodation/challenge) and demand for assimilation (support). Csikszentmihalyi (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) suggests that it can be found in conjunction with many life activities, ranging from climbing a mountain to dancing at a disco or solving a complex engineering problem. Csikszentmihalyi also points to much smaller micro-flows that occur throughout our daily lives. A micro-flow might occur when finding the right piece to fill a space in a puzzle, determining the best angle for preparing a still-life floral painting, or discovering the best word to complete the sentence in an essay you are authoring.

We can help our client identify Interludes of Flow and gratifying micro-flows in their own life. What small challenges do they take on that provide some challenge, but also frequent gratification? Could it be the checking off of completed tasks at the end of a day at the office? Perhaps it is downloading a new app that can make daily planning of tasks a bit easier. Might it be the crossword or jigsaw puzzle they work on at home after a stressful day at the office? Might it instead be the poem they are seeking to craft during breaks in their workday? Perhaps micro-flow is found in needlepoint, crochet, or weaving, which they enjoy every weekend. Or the tinkering they do on their old Chevy in the garage, for which they set aside special time on Sunday afternoon. The key point is that this activity provides some challenge and some prospect of success. Furthermore, as a micro-flow, it requires a minimal diversion from one's daily operations—just a moment or a couple of hours of micro-flow, without having to leave home or leave work.

This micro-flow activity might not even be considered an "important" part of one's life. It might take a coaching session to reveal that this activity is actually quite important in the life of one's client.

4. Changing One's Relation with the Natural World: Awe

Dacher Keltner (2023, p. 13) writes about inspiring natural Awe. Micro-awe is to be found in a coaching session while walking through a forest or visiting an art gallery together. I was coaching someone who came to my home in Maine. We walked out to the rocky shore of the Atlantic Ocean (Land's End) and did some powerful coaching at this awe-some location. The Awe provides an Interlude for the generation of both content and affective state. For instance, at the content level, I might ask my coaching client to consider: "How does the power of this wave or this surge of water relate to a moment in your own life when you felt powerful?" "These trees are all interconnected and support one another through good and bad times. How might you build and maintain a similarly supportive 'human forest' in your organization?"

At the affective level, I might ask my client to take a deep breath (high levels of oxygen at the edge of the ocean or in a deep forest) and relax. We find a painting or statue that impacts my client. And then we pause to see what this impact produces (coming from my client's unconscious life). I know, personally, that the Winged Victory of Samothrace, located at the Louvre in Paris, had a strong emotional impact on me, as did the nave of the cathedral in Salisbury, England, and the labyrinth located in the nave at San Francisco's Grace Cathedral. I found many important images and themes emerging during my time at the Louvre and both the Salisbury and Grace Cathedrals. I wish I were accompanied by a coach on these three occasions. We could have sat outside this museum and majestic religious structure to process what had occurred inside these facilities. The micro-awe becomes the basis for effective micro-coaching.

5. From Turbulence to Learning: The Intersection of Flow and Awe

Life on the white-water river that seems to align with our daily life experiences of the mid-21st Century can be both enthralling and terrifying. This white-water environment can provide an Interlude that is either overwhelming or filled with challenging but safe insight. As Peter Vaill has noted, a turbulent white-water environment is filled with surprises, novel problems, and ill-structured issues (messes) (Vaill, 1996, pp. 10-12). Costly and annoying issues emerge and are often recurrent (Vaill, 1996, pp.12-14). Confusion abounds (Vaill, 1996, p. 178):

> Another word for permanent white water is confusion--the problem of what to believe; whom to trust; what events, technologies, groups and organizations, and laws and traditions can serve as anchors of meaning. In the modem world, meaninglessness derives not only from an absence of sources of meaning but, ironically, also from a surfeit, a cacophony of competing meanings as offered by this or that guru, this or that "total system," this or that self-improvement program. The incredible variety of competing sources of potential meaning acts back on our consciousness, adding to the confusion we feel. We often hear criticism that people tend to go from one "solution" to another, to jump from bandwagon to bandwagon without ever touching solid ground.

As Vaill noted, this white-water Interlude can be filled with competing meanings and priorities. As a micro-coach, we can suggest that this Interlude is conducive to new learning when viewed from a specific perspective. There is a wonderful opportunity for significant learning to take place; however, a particular type and process of learning must take place (Vaill, 1996, pp. 19-20):

> Permanent white water puts organizations and their members in the position of continually doing things they have little experience with or have never done before at all. The feeling of 'playing a whole new ball game'

thoroughly pervade organizational life. . . . *This means that beyond all of the other new skills and attitudes that permanent white water requires, people have to be (or become) extremely effective learners.*

A turbulent Interlude opens up opportunities along with challenges. Whitewater environments are not only overflowing with experiences of Awe. They abundantly offer the possibility of achieving a remarkable psychological state of Flow. It is when Awe and Flow come together that we can engage in truly exceptional learning.

Stages of Learning

Many years ago, the noted social psychologist Kurt Lewin described significant learning as taking place in three stages: unfreezing, learning/change, and refreezing (Lippitt, Watson, and Westley, 1958). These three stages directly apply to learning that can take place in a world of turbulence and white water. We must first unfreeze our existing view of the world. This means facing conditions that challenge or disturb our current way of thinking and feeling. Peter Vaill would suggest that unfreezing challenges our existing sense of being in the world. At the very least, unfreezing alters our baseline and predictions. It disrupts habitual fast thinking. Without unfreezing, we are not truly open to new learning.

The second stage of learning and change is where something new is acquired that alters our way of thinking and feeling to some degree. It requires establishing a new baseline, new predictions, and (ultimately)new behaviors. Kahneman's (Kahneman, 2011) slow thinking and Donald Schön's reflective practice (Schön,1983) are required. The third stage involves solidifying our commitment to and application of the new learning. Stage three learning leads us out of a thoughtful and reflective state of relativism to William Perry's (Perry,1970) commitment occurring in the midst of relativism. We reset our baselines and revise our predictions. While many of our old ways of doing things are still relevant and fast (habitual) ways of thinking can still be engaged, there is a new direction in which we wish to move. Some new goals are envisioned.

I propose that Lewin's three stages of learning are engaged while navigating white water. Most importantly, learning in the turbulent Interlude is best established and reinforced in a setting that nourishes interpersonal collaboration. We retain and use what we have learned when we are joined on our boat by "fellow travelers" who are "co-learners" and "co-leaders." I wish to expand on these three basic proposals.

Apprehension

I align unfreezing with the apprehensions that inevitably accompany our standing on the shore of a whitewater river. We anticipate that we will soon enter this river in a kayak (or some less appropriate vessel). Two psychic forces confront us when standing on the shore of this river. The first force is *Awe*. We look out at the turbulent waters of this river and find this turbulence to be awe-full: beautiful, surprising, treacherous, powerful.

As I have noted, Keltner (2023, p. 13) writes about this inspiring natural Awe. It is to be found not only when standing on the shore of a raging river but also when witnessing an earthquake, thunderstorm, or wildfire. Or we stand passively on the shore of a high-surf ocean. We deeply admire what we see in front of us. Yet we also fear the sights and sounds of the pounding Surf, especially if we are about to enter this awe-full ocean on our surfboard.

The second force is located at the other end of the spectrum from Awe. This second force is the prospect of *Flow*. As I have noted, we experience the exceptional and uplifting experience of Flow under conditions of challenge matched with sufficient support and capacity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). We can anticipate the experience of Flow if we know that we can be successfully challenged in navigating this whitewater environment—or the thundering Surf into which we charge with our board. Our body is energized. Adrenaline kicks in, and we experience the urge of fight (one of the three primary stress responses). We can do it!

Or can we? Is the river too strong for us? Is the Surf too high? Do we lack the knowledge, experience, or strength to guide our boat through the swirling water and down the raging river? Will we be swallowed up in the mountainous waves? Fear sets in. Adrenaline is now energizing one of the other two stress responses. We want to run away or remain frozen. We are apprehensive. We are torn between the urge to fight, flight, or freeze.

Appreciation

An alternative perspective can be taken regarding the turbulent Interlude. We can breathe in the oxygenated air that accompanies turbulent water. We can savor the richly textured sounds of the tumbling water. We become satiated with the Awe rather than remaining fearful of the Awe-fulness. We can follow the flow of the river or the flow of the waves and envision finding Flow inside us while navigating the river or high-surf ocean. We can view this as an opportunity to learn rather than as a potential failure. This is a teachable moment if we dwell on the positive prospects rather than the negative possibilities.

This decision point regarding appreciation versus apprehension seems to be aligned with what Peter Vaill (1996, p. 75) identifies as "feeling learning":

> Feeling-learning is one of the most important modes of learning as a way of being because the pace, pressure, and complexity of permanent white water can leave us distracted, anxious, and breathless. Millions of us go through years of intensive learning in the institutional learning mode without ever getting much help in feeling and internalizing what we are learning and what we know.

Vaill (1996, p. 75) does not believe that traditional institutions of higher learning provide this type of learning:

> The institutional learning model tends to omit all the deeper modes of learning and knowing and the help we need with these, not because the philosophy of institutional learning denies the existence of the deeper modes so much as it lacks methods for conducting learning at this level. Learning as a way of being is learning by a whole person, and that means feeling the learning as well as possessing it intellectually.

Feeling-learning is one of the most important factors in retaining what is learned in the Turbulent Interlude. Maybe the reason information we "cram" is retained only for a short period is that we do not develop our feelings for the material but try only to remember it on a technical level. Feeling learning also enormously enriches the learning experience. Even institutional learning expresses this in one of its favorite cliches, the "love of learning." The love of learning is real. And it is essential. It would seem that converting apprehension to appreciation, savoring Awe, and anticipating Flow are moments of feeling-learning. We don't even have to launch our kayak or hop on our surfboard to begin the process of learning. At the moment we decide to engage the turbulent environment of the river or ocean, important lessons are available regarding our courage, resilience, and potential risk-aversion.

There is additional learning. Peter Vaill mentions several kinds of learning occurring in the whitewater world. In setting the frame for presenting these forms of learning, I turn to the fundamental insights regarding learning offered by Jean Piaget, the noted Swiss biologist and observant child psychologist. Piaget (2001) distinguishes between the assimilating and accommodating dimensions of all significant learning.

Assimilation

Piaget proposed two sides to every coin of significant learning. One side of the coin is *Assimilation*. As a learner, I must have an existing frame of reference for any new experience. Without this frame, I will not be able to make any meaning of the new experience or will label it and absorb it inaccurately. The other side of the coin is *Accommodation*. I must somehow adjust what I now know or believe, given the new experience. If nothing changes, then nothing is learned.

When turning apprehension about the whitewater world into an opportunity for new learning, I must first do some assimilating. I must find a way to move beyond just Awe regarding the turbulent world face. I must somehow make this world of whitewater make some "sense." There are three actions I might take. First, I can appreciate what I already know and what I have done in other whitewater worlds. Second, I can remain clear, as Vail (1996, pp. 187-188), proposes, about mission and purpose.

Why have I chosen to linger in this turbulent Interlude. Why am I on the river? Why the ocean? And why am I seeking to learn something new? Why am I traveling on the river or leaping into the sea? I am leaving firm land "on behalf of" something of importance. I am reminded of the Tarot card of the Charioteer. He is traveling forward--yet carrying his chariot with him. At a more mundane level, it is like a snail carrying its shell while moving through its environment. My mission and purpose are the chariot and shell.

Third, I launch my kayak on the turbulent river or face my board toward the Surf knowing that I will make mistakes. I must frequently correct myself. The capacity to correct oneself is one of the reasons to embark on the journey in a kayak rather than a less "agile" canoe or skiff. Vaill (1996, p. 82) submits that a successful reflective learner will view the learning process as "continual experimentation rather than a system that gives the learner only one or two chances to 'get it right'.'" We must balance the challenge with adequate support (Sanford, 1980). Surfboards come with a line attached to the surfer. The board and surfer will often disengage one another in high Surf. No one is a perfect navigator of whitewater environments. A safe place proves valuable when engaging in Vaill's "continual experimentation." As a coach, we can help our clients find and maintain this safe place.

Accommodation

We must be open to doing things differently when faced with the prospect of making a mistake. The Interlude is safe only if we are allowed to make a mistake. As Peter Vaill (1996, p. 82) notes, this means that we must be aware that we are about to learn something new and try something different. An assumption is made in a learning organization that everyone will be engaged in ongoing growth through learning. Vaill (1996, p. 82) suggests that this means we should feel free "to ask for help without embarrassment of apology and [are] able to be non-resentfully dependent on someone who has more knowledge or expertise." Ultimately, effective accommodation doesn't just require safety. It requires our capacity and willingness to learn from and about the context and environment in which we operate. We are taught by the mistakes we make. We learn most about the world in which we work when we fail. This is especially the case when we are operating in a whitewater environment.

It is also important to recognize that we must never only engage in accommodation. We must retain our fundamental values and reasons for entering the whitewater. The chariot we ride and the shell we carry must never be abandoned. As Peter Vaill reminds us, we are always accommodating (and learning) on behalf of some enduring mission and purpose. Thus, we can blend accommodation and assimilation.

Abundant challenges face us in navigating a whitewater world. The challenge is a little easier to address when (to quote the Beatles) we "get a little help from our friends." These "friends" can be other people in our life. They can also be our coach. The friends and coach provide both support and ideas. In an environment of safety, it is critical that we find this support, alongside our willingness to take risks and disclose thoughts and feelings about our whitewater environment. As a coach, we can provide our client with an occasional micro-nudge in a certain direction or a micro-insight while our client is navigating their white-water environment.

6. Changing One's Perspective on a Specific Life Condition: Reframing

The Interlude is not only filled with Awe and Flow. It is also filled with reflective, expository thinking. However, it is important to note that when we are engaged in expository thinking, it is easy to get caught in a specific frame or

reference point. This is especially the case when we are anxious and when our Interlude has not fully provided us with safety. A state called "Einstellung" sets in when we are anxious. This is a form of cognition (thinking) that is highly rigid and narrow in scope. As a micro-coach, we can help to "break up" this rigid set through the use of something called Reframing.

First engaged by a group of psychotherapists located in Palo Alto, California, who were strongly influenced by the revolutionary work of Gregory Bateson, by the work on hypnosis by Milton Erikson, and by findings in neuroscience, the processes of reframing come in many different forms (Bandler and Grinder, 1083). Reframing specifically encourages a shift from first to second-order conceptualizations of a problem. It yields valuable insights (second-order learning), creative solutions, or even recognition that a problem does not in fact exist. A leader reframes an issue with the assistance of a coach by taking one of three approaches:

- Defining the goals associated with a specific problem in a new way.
- Describing the current context within which the problem exists in a new way.
- Identifying a new set of strategies for solving the problem.

Each of these approaches can be taken in a Reflective Interlude that is safe and that allows for the mistakes associated with re-thinking, re-conceiving and re-purposing. The Interlude is one that is conducive to one or more of these three reframing approaches.

The Reframing of Goals

In one magazine article, organizational coaching is described as a process that helps "managers, entrepreneurs and just plain folks . . . define and achieve their goals—career, personal or, most often, both." (Hamilton, 1996) While we would suggest that most coaches do much more than this, this statement does identify an important coaching model, namely, reflection on and then planning for the implementation of goals. In many instances, individuals and organizations tend to work hard to accomplish a specific, elusive goal (first order), rather than reconsidering whether or not this goal, in its present form, is actually important or worthwhile. This is where reframing can add new perspectives. Problems inevitably involve a discrepancy between the current and desired states of a system. Many problems can be at least partially solved by reconsidering the importance, relevance, or the very nature of the desired state.

We turn, by way of example, to a personnel problem facing Susan, who served as manager in a medium-sized high-tech firm. She is not satisfied with the work of her subordinate, Ralph. Susan firmly believes that Ralph needs to change his behavior, yet she also knows that she is sometimes perceived as a hard-driving manager who sets goals that are too high for her managers. Is she being accused of pushing too hard because she is a female? Perhaps her hard-driving reputation is nothing more than her commitment to the company. Or is she really setting goals too high? If she is being unrealistic in setting goals, then her problem with Ralph (and perhaps with other managers) might best be solved not by finding new ways of motivating her managers or by introducing new technologies (first-order change), but by helping her managers to re-examine their priorities and potentially re-adjust their production goals according to valid strategic imperatives (second-order change).

The conversation between Susan and her coach, Alicia, might go something like this:

> Susan: I can't seem to find an effective way of getting Ralph to meet the goals I have set for him. He keeps offering excuses rather than solutions and frequently pushes his problems up to me or down to his own subordinates. Yet I know Ralph is trying hard and that he has hired great people who work hard. He is particularly effective in motivating new employees. I wonder what I can do to make these goals a reality.

Alicia: It sounds like you have tried several different strategies. [Susan had already identified three different approaches she has taken in working with Ralph, ranging from incentive plans to suggesting a reorganization of his department.] Why is it important that you achieve these production goals?

Susan: Because we established these goals in our five-year plan for Ralph's department.

Alicia: Why is it important for you to accomplish the goals set in your five-year plan?

Susan: If I don't accomplish these goals, it will look bad for my division and—frankly—for me and my own future in this organization.

Alicia: How do you know that other people in this organization expect you and your division to meet these goals?

Susan: Well, the five-year plan says that we should . . . but actually I don't really know how important these goals are for our CEO or the other division directors. We rarely seem to talk about our five-year plan during our Executive Council meetings. It's often frustrating for me. I seem to be the only one who is interested in that crazy plan!

Alicia: So why are you so interested in that "crazy plan"?

Susan: You know, that's a good question. Sometimes I worry that I might be using the five-year plan as an excuse. Maybe I rely on these goals because I'm ambitious and look for any argument to get my managers motivated.

Alicia: So, you're a very ambitious person and this leads to increased productivity on the part of other members of your division—including Ralph. They want to help you achieve your ambitious goals. I wouldn't even be surprised to learn that they want to achieve these goals because of their loyalty to you, rather than because they are interested in the five-year plan. Is this possible?

Susan: Interesting. You know, I'm not sure.

Alicia: Maybe this is something you could find out.

Susan: Yeah. Let's talk a bit about how I could find this out.

Alicia: And you might also want to reflect on what your goals would really be if you didn't have to rely on the five-year plan. Or perhaps you might verify how relevant the 5-year plan really is to the CEO and the company's future. If it's critical, you might want to reflect on ways in which you could influence the other managers and your CEO to either take the five-year plan more seriously… or maybe replace or adjust it.

Susan: I would like to discuss this five-year plan issue at some time in the future. But right now . . . I would like to re-examine my own goals for this division in this new light and, in particular, the goals that have been identified for Ralph's department.

Susan and Alicia move on to explore other aspects of Susan's problem with Ralph. However, at this point, Alicia has already been valuable to Susan in helping her reflect on one aspect of her problem with Ralph. She has helped Susan established a Reflective Interlude. `Specifically, Alicia has helped Susan reframe a set of goals. What specifically are the approaches available to Alicia as a coach?

Goal Replacement. One goal can be replaced by a second goal that is more closely affiliated with an individual's or an organization's true interests. A coach like Alicia might ask her client questions like:

- What do you really want to see happen?
- What do you/your department really need?
- What is even more important than this goal?
- What would happen if you really took this goal seriously?
- What would you like the outcomes of this project to be?
- What would you like to celebrate three years from now if you were very successful in this unit of the organization?

When forced to clarify goals, a manager like Susan often can be more successful simply by directing her efforts more consistently toward the truly important goals of her division or organization. Other macro-coaching strategies that emphasize the clarification of one's purpose or broader goals also provide leaders with an opportunity to establish and monitor their goals. A micro-coaching process additionally encourages leaders to reflect on their actions and question their choices from a higher level of awareness (second-order change).

Espoused and Enacted Goals. A leader can also be encouraged by her coach to examine her current behavior and the behavior of other people in her department, division or organization against their respective goals. She engages in this micro-coaching process in order to consider whether or not the current, enacted behavior exemplifies the espoused goal or actually another, as yet unidentified, goal. A coach might ask his coaching colleague:

- If you are not moving very effectively toward your espoused goal, then perhaps this is not truly the goal toward which you are working. What might this goal be?
- If you were someone from Mars who came to your unit and observed what is being done and what people are talking about, what would you assume to be the goals and purposes of this part of the organization?
- How do you think members of your unit benefit from the way(s) in which your unit now operates?
- What are some of the unspoken truths about this goal around here?

Seemingly irrational or counterproductive actions often yield *secondary gains* for an individual or organization. (Bandler and Grinder, 1979) A work team that never meets its production quota may be meeting its real goal: controlling the operations of the company. All of the other production units of the company must adjust their work schedule around this slower unit. Similarly, the director of a social service agency may actually want to retain control over all aspects of the agency's operations. He attempts to keep the organization in a state of crisis to justify his active involvement in all parts of the organization.

If a client can identify these secondary gains/benefits and the goals that lie behind these goals, then she can identify other behaviors that more successfully meet these goals or that meet these goals without hindering the work of other people in the organization. This is an appreciative approach to addressing a seemingly intractable process. When setting up an Interlude of Appreciation, one first acknowledges the secondary gains, then looks to other strategies for achieving these gains. Given the

work team's interest in influencing the overall operations of the company, for instance, one can set up new structures in the organization that enable workers to influence production decisions without having to resort to surreptitious production slowdowns. Similarly, the director of the social service agency can be encouraged to employ alternative methods of being involved in all aspects of agency operations without having to resort to crisis management.

Sequencing and Timing of Goals. Alicia can use a third approach to coaching. This approach involves the re-sequencing of existing goals: one goal is no longer considered to conflict with another goal. Rather, it enables the other goal to be achieved. Two members of a management team, for instance, argue about whether the company should spend its money on a new marketing venture or on a major new research and development initiative. This Sequencing Interlude is established by asking an important question; Is the achievement of either of these goals likely to increase or decrease the achievement of the other goal. Rather than argue about the isolated importance of either of these goals, one can reflect on sequence and timing.

A coach might ask:
- Would the new marketing venture, if successful, increase the probability that a research and development initiative will be mounted and funded?
- Would a successful R&D project enhance the prospects of a new marketing push?

By reframing a conflict in terms of synergistic sequence rather than isolated importance, one can break up many logjams concerning program priorities.

Appealing to a Higher-Level Goal. One can also re-conceptualize a coaching issue by appealing to a higher-level goal. When established, this Higher Order Interlude enables an individual or organization to move from a first-order to second order conceptualization of a coaching issue—in particular a problem or dilemma. A coach might ask:

- You have identified X as a goal, while Ralph has identified Y. In what ways are these goals compatible? Is there an overarching goal about which you can both agree?
- What goal(s) can all members of your executive team agree on?

A coach engaging micro-tactics can often assist her client by focusing on meta-level outcomes, so that the client can negotiate differences with other members of her organization at a point of common agreement and need. (Bandler and Grinder, 1979, pp. 160-162) Two production teams, for instance, might disagree about approaches to quality control. A coach can help one or both leaders of these teams reframe their argument by first seeing if they can agree on a definition of quality standards. Then, given that definition, they can design a series of pilot tests to assess the effectiveness of each quality control procedure.

Managers may also experience internal conflict regarding priorities. Perhaps part of Ralph's problem concerns the number and diversity of goals that have been assigned to his department. He is confronted with what we described earlier as a rugged landscape. There are many peaks rather than there being one dominant peak. At another level, we might wonder if part of the problem resides not in the landscape but rather in Ralph's predisposition to dreaming. Is Ralph a bit of a dreamer because he is trying to escape from a set of conflicting priorities? Are his dreams nothing more than a mirror of the disparate or misaligned goals that have been placed on his department by other dreamers in his organization? He might become more effective as a manager if he is given a clearer and more strategically congruous set of goals. At the very least, Ralph and the people who

report to him will become more fully accountable for accomplishing departmental goals if these goals are thoughtful and explicitly aligned with one another.

The Reframing of Contexts

As in the case of goal reframing, there are several ways in which a masterful micro-coaching tactic can help her client reframe the context within which he is operating. When establishing a Contextual Interlude, the coach will first encourage her client to re-interpret the so-called facts associated with the context in a different way. Second, she encourages her client to shift his attention from one aspect of the context to another. Third, the coach engages a micro-coaching tactic. She helps her client re-punctuate the events that occur in a particular context, so that the cause and effects associated with each of these events are redefined. I will briefly describe each of these approaches.

Re-interpreting Facts. Any context can readily be interpreted and described in a variety of ways. A second-order change in the prevalent interpretation may have a profound impact on an individual or organization. One can reframe an interpretation of a context by choosing to focus on the strengths and resources inherent in the situation rather than focusing on its weaknesses and deficits. This appreciative perspective can be very effectively employed as a means to enable change. As Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch (1974) noted in their thoughtful analysis of the reframing process:

> To reframe . . . means to change the conceptual and/or emotional setting or viewpoint in relation to which a situation is experienced and to place it in another frame which fits the "facts" of the same concrete situation equally well or even better, and thereby changes its entire meaning . . . . What turns out to be changed as a result of reframing is the meaning attributed to the situation, and therefore its consequences, but not its concrete facts—or, as the philosopher Epictetus expressed it as early as the first century A. D.: "It is not the things themselves which trouble us, but the opinions that we have about these things."

A quite poignant example of the reframing of facts and its potential power is found in a story about Anti-Semitism. The Eighteenth-Century philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, who looked very "Jewish," was walking down a busy street in Berlin. He accidentally collided with a stout Prussian officer. "Swine!" bellows the officer. "Mendelssohn," replies the philosopher with a courteous bow. (Novak and Waldoks, 1981, p. 82) In this case, the potential recipient of an insult chose to reframe the context by first shifting the referent of the other person's insult back onto the person delivering the insult and then cushioning this shift with courtesy.

By reframing the context, Mendelssohn places the responsibility back on the insulter. The Prussian officer may choose to accept the reframe and consider the whole matter to be a misunderstanding that resulted in a sign of courtesy from the person being insulted (a variant on turning the other cheek). Alternatively, the Prussian officer can view the whole thing as a very unsuccessful attempt at delivering an insult that ended up with the other person winning the battle. The latter choice would probably be unacceptable to the proud Prussian, hence leaving him with no option other than the appreciative reframe. A remarkable interaction!

The self-fulfilling prophecy that Robert Rosenthal (1966) made famous (often called the "Pygmalion effect") further exemplifies this model. A distorting and destructive Diminution Interlude is established. A closed loop, self-fulfilling process is engaged. One person judges another person as stupid or unmotivated. They interact with the other person from that attitude. They talk down to them, withhold information, and offer no encouragement. As a result, the labeled person is likely to end up acting unmotivated and less competent. This occurs whether or not this person initially was so inclined. People inadvertently comply with negative expectations assigned to them because we treat them differently, depending on how we view them. The Diminishing Interlude is all-too-frequently dominant in contemporary organizational setting.

By contrast, if we are engaging an Appreciative Interlude, we choose to enter into an interpersonal relationship with a positive mindset. We interact with the other person from a strength-oriented perspective. Within this appreciative setting, the other person is likely to relate in a positive manner toward us and be as productive as they can. Though the Appreciative Interlude is closed looped, much like the Diminution Interlude, this Interlude produces constructive interpersonal perspectives and behaviors. The appreciated person has the greatest chance of fulfilling our positive expectations and validating our original frame of mind.

To help a manager notice what expectations he might hold (and no doubt act out) towards a colleague he perceives as under-performing, a coach might ask her client:

- Be honest with yourself: are you sharing information generously with this person, or sometimes withholding it?
- Are you available or unavailable to this colleague when they need your guidance?
- Do you appreciate their work product and encourage their good accomplishments, or are you primed to look for errors and disappointments?
- Do you give them feedback and coaching, or are you withholding your input, leaving them in the dark?
- Is your body language and tone of voice with them open and receptive, or curt, impatient or even punitive?

The work of Erich Fromm (1947) and Elias Porter (Porter, 1976; Phillips, 1991) suggests a different kind of strengths-related dynamics. On the one hand, we can view a person's strengths, and they, in turn, exhibit these strengths. We can focus on their weaknesses, and their weaknesses are manifest. On the other hand, we can redefine a person's interpersonal weaknesses as simply being his strengths used inappropriately or in excess. This person is highly articulate and forceful in their presentation of self. This is a strength. However, this forcefulness can lead to this person being a "bully" in a setting in which they should be less active and more supportive of other people. Conversely, a person who is quite thoughtful and reserved might be of little value if this results in their failure to contribute to an important conversation.

An Appreciative Interlude can be created where micro-coaching inquiry focuses on the appropriate use of the client's strengths. The first step in establishing this Appreciative Interview is to acknowledge that a weakness is also a strength that produces positive results for us under most conditions. The client must also acknowledge the secondary gains obtained from existing behavior patterns, much as in the case of reframing goals. Thus, rather than attempting to "eliminate a weakness," we need only modify the extent to which it is being used or the setting in which it is being used. This is a central feature in the engagement of masterful micro-coaching: focusing on a client's abilities and helping a client recognize and perhaps create the settings in which these strengths are fully and appropriately deployed.

The CEO of a non-profit, for instance, who is an excellent speaker and socializer, is ineffective in working with troubled members of her local community on a one-on-one basis. Her verbal skills help her in the first situation, but not in the second. She is rewarded for being verbally active when working with many people, but not when she is expected to be a quiet and sympathetic listener in attending to complaints from members of her community. She could try to improve her ability to work one-on-one. This would be a first-order change. A second-order reframing by this administrator could involve a shift in her job assignment. She could assign the responsibility for meeting with individual members of her community to other members of her staff, reserving more of her work with these constituencies for large team gatherings. Rather than focusing on her weaknesses, this administrator is encouraged by her coach to focus on her considerable skills in working with large teams and groups. In recognizing that these skills are distinctive and appropriate in most settings, she may become less nervous about being quiet enough in the one-on-one setting, and with the reduction in anxiety and in the frequency with which she works

with other people, she might eventually feel less need to be highly verbal. It is within an Appreciative Interlude, when a coaching client does not have to feel threatened, that she is most inclined to open up to alternative behaviors.

Alicia takes a similar approach in working with Susan. Susan can be encouraged to reframe the problem she is experiencing with her direct report, Ralph. Susan can be encouraged to focus on Ralph's strengths and on ways in which Ralph can more frequently be placed in settings where these strengths are effectively employed. Perhaps, he could be more actively involved in strategic planning, so that his tendency to dream becomes appropriate and helpful to the organization. Ralph might also be asked to assist with new employee orientation in the company, making use of his capacity to inspire and motivate. He might be assigned to further start-up operations or allowed to work autonomously on more projects. In order for any of these options to be explored, Susan must first be willing to reframe her perceptions of Ralph, focusing on his strengths, achievements, and potential, rather than his weaknesses or failures. This is the essence of an appreciative approach to micro-coaching.

Shifting Attention. This second way in which to reframe context requires a shift in attention—to another feature of the Contextual Interlude. The coach and client's attention is shifted to an area that has been denied, ignored, or forgotten. (Bandler and Grinder, 1983, p. 166) A seemingly naive outsider asks: Why isn't George at the meeting at 7:00 a.m.? Everyone knows that George has a drinking problem. The outsider brings up this issue. A coach often serves this same role. She asks the unaskable question about the forbidden topic. In this case, the unaskable question is: Why isn't George at the meeting? And what is this organization going to do about George's chronically unreliable scheduling? The coach couples the challenge of this difficult question with a supportive attitude. Her client soon realizes that he can reasonably discuss this issue while keeping George's welfare in mind. He begins to address the problem of George's alcoholism, as well as attendant problems, for the first time.

At other times, a topic is broached by a coach that previously was simply ignored or not recognized as distinctive and influential in the life of a person or organization. The culture of an organization, for instance, strongly influences the behavior of employees, yet is rarely given much direct attention. Dress codes reinforce status differences. The jargon used by various units in the organization not only defines status differences but also sensitive boundaries and barriers between certain teams. Attention to the dress and language of an individual or organizational unit, and open discussion about the impact of this dress or language, often leads to new cultural insights and changed behavior patterns. In the case of Ralph's performance as a manager, perhaps the culture of his department (or of the entire organization) encourages a split between the real and the espoused, and places people in conflicted roles with regard to living with short-term pressures without long-term clarity of purpose. This type of reframing of the existing reality is possible when a safe, insight-filled Contextual Interlude is established by the coach and client.

Re-punctuating Events. By shifting time perspectives and definitions of beginnings and endings, we can often gain a new perspective and a new set of solutions to complex, ongoing problems. This third approach to contextual reframing concerns the "punctuation" of specific events that occur within a specific context (Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch, 1974, pp. 54ff). Any series of interactions between two people, two units in an organization, or two organizations can be punctuated in a variety of ways, depending on the perspective of the person or persons doing the punctuating. A safe Contextual Interlude is established in which careful and candid examination of communication patterns can take place.

One party to a conflict, for instance, might identify the absence of the other party at a critical meeting as the point when the conflict started (hence the responsibility of the other party). The second party might punctuate this same series of events quite differently: He did not attend the meeting because of the first party's abusive behavior at a previous meeting. When did the conflict begin? Who is responsible? This all depends on how the continuous, interrelated stream of events is interpreted. Is Ralph a dreamer because other members of his department can't get off the ground and refuse to identify ambitious goals? Or

are other members of his department highly realistic because Ralph is always out there dreaming of some unattainable goal? Both are probably the case. It all depends on how the sequence of events is punctuated.

Any problem or conflict can be reframed by asking a client to consider alternative punctuation. As a coach, Alicia might ask Susan:

- What if you were to consider point B rather than point A to be the time when Ralph's performance difficulties began? Would the problem look any different from this vantage point?
- What if we were to go back two months and look at some of the earlier events that might have influenced your perceptions of Ralph's working relationships and managerial style? What might Ralph's problem look like if we were to focus just on the events of this past week?
- What would be Ralph's interpretation of the causes for the problems being experienced in his department right now?

A significant perceptual change can often occur through reframing long before overt change in behavior becomes readily apparent. In many instances, individuals and organizations move through periods of apparent stagnation or dormancy. They may actually be gradually re-examining and reframing their perceptions of the context within which they live and work. A major developmental spurt may follow this period of conceptual reorganization, leading an outsider to conclude that there are sequential stages of stabilization and change. All of this can occur without any Contextual Interlude being established. However, with the establishment of this Interlude and engagement of micro-coaching tactics, the reorganization can take place in a shorter period of time. Furthermore, without any articulate reflection on the interpersonal dynamics that have occurred, the stagnation or dormancy is likely to reappear.

The Reframing of Solutions

The field of creative problem-solving is filled with examples of reframed solutions. We have long known that specific Creative Interludes can be very successful. People generate new and quite different solutions to complex problems through the use of such longstanding think tank techniques as *brainstorming,* (Clark, 2011) *Synectics* (Prince, 1970), and *conceptual block-busting* (Adams, 2019). With regard to ways in which to change human behavior or organizational life, two stand out as being particularly effective.

One of these is paradoxical in nature and is usually labeled '*prescribing the symptoms*.' (Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson, 1967) The other is in many ways equally paradoxical, for it concerns the use of existing features of the system to create a new system. Both of these approaches begin, as do goal and contextual reframing, by acknowledging the power of existing conditions and the need to work appreciatively with and through these conditions rather than fighting against them.

It should also be noted that both of these approaches are controversial, for they often seem to require that a trick be played on the person or organization that is being changed. While goals and contexts are usually reframed with the full awareness of all participants, solution reframing often seems to take place without that awareness. On the other hand, solution reframing is particularly effective in helping people and organizations move out of situations in which they are "stuck"—for which there appears to be no adequate first-order solutions.

Prescribing the Symptom. We offer a classic example of this approach. It concerns a restless child who is unable to fall asleep. The more the child is encouraged to fall asleep, the harder she will try to relax. Paradoxically, she is less likely to relax given her concerted effort to fall asleep. Instead of encouraging the child to relax and fall asleep, an astute parent might instead encourage the child to stay awake: "See if you can stay awake for fifteen minutes!" When the child tries to stay awake and

attempts to keep her eyes open, she is likely to fall asleep. As adults, we often follow the same path. We tend to fall asleep in front of the television or at the theater. Later, we lie wide-awake in bed.

In an organizational setting, the always-late manager chooses to employ this same paradoxical model with the encouragement of his coach. Rather than arriving at a meeting fifteen minutes late (his usual practice), the manager is asked to work on showing up twenty minutes late. He has to wait five minutes before walking into the meeting, and in doing so realizes that he controls his own time. Next week, he shows up ten minutes late, then fifteen minutes late, then five minutes late, then ten minutes, and then five minutes early. Finally, he shows up on time. He discovers that he can, in fact, arrive on time.

Coaches establish safe Creativity Interludes and employ micro-coaching tactics that enable clients to more effectively deal with these types of difficult situations. Clients who hold negative (and potentially distorted) images of other individuals or units of the organization are encouraged by their coach to actually distort their images of the other person or unit even more. Their coach might also ask their colleague to distort their perceptions of the image that they think the other person or unit has of them. The client then reflects on the secondary gains he receives from these distorted images, as well as the evidence he holds regarding the validity of these images.

Organizational issues often only become clear when considered in their extreme form. With the support of his coach, a harried manager can often confront embarrassing distortions with a sense of humor and greater appreciation for the power of stereotypes and untested assumptions. Alicia might suggest this approach when coaching Susan regarding Ralph's tendency to dream while his department is confronted with serious problems. Rather than trying to get Ralph to become more realistic, Susan might actually ask Ralph to become even more visionary and might place him in roles that are highly visionary (such as chairing a task force on new ideas for the organization). These micro-coaching tactics might at first seem to be counterproductive; however, sometimes they ironically do the trick.

Susan (and Ralph) may discover that he soon grows weary of this one-dimensional role. After all, he does like to be realistic on occasion, particularly when completing a specific project about which he cares. Some people thrive under conditions of opposition and lose all motivation when they get exactly what they want. Alternatively, Alicia could suggest that Susan herself become more of a dreamer and less of a realist when working with Ralph. A colleague reports that she often copes with her visionary boss by out-dreaming him. When she becomes a dreamer, her boss suddenly becomes realistic, asking, "Do we have the money to complete this?" or "Are you sure this will work?" Susan might similarly outdream Ralph and thereby (paradoxically) move him into a more realistic role. Other members of Ralph's staff could use Susan as a role model and similarly take on more of a visionary role in their relationships with Ralph.

Using the Existing System. This second solutions-reframing approach is actually a hybrid of the other forms of reframing. (Bandler and Grinder, 1983, p. 171) The existing resources and dynamics of the system (individual or organization) that is being changed are framed in positive terms. Forces that are resistant to change, for instance, come to be seen as the bases for stability in the newly changed system. Many years ago, Seymour Sarason (1973) observed that revolutionary leaders must bring in managers from the old regime to help bring stability to the new government. His observation seems to still hold true. Kurt Lewin and his colleagues similarly noted that any planned change effort must be followed by *Refreezing*—a process that brings stability back to the system. (Lippitt, Watson and Westley, 1958) The Contextual Interlude is engaged for the purpose of re-conceiving the function served by specific elements of the current system.

People who resist a change can themselves become invaluable resources in promoting and planning for the change. Many resistors, for example, point to past history when declaring that a planned change will never be successful: "We tried that ten years ago, and it didn't work." Rather than arguing with or ignoring this person, one asks him to help plan for the new change initiative so that some of the mistakes that occurred ten years ago can be avoided. The skeptic can also be made the historian of the new project or can assist in the design of its evaluation. Alternatively, those who are usually the innovators and proponents

of new ideas—men and women like Ralph—can be placed in the role of program auditor or member of a panel that reviews new program proposals. This helps to shake up old roles and provides everyone with new perspectives on one another and the organization.

Coaches can help their clients reframe sources of resistance as assets in yet another way. Typically, policies and procedures are set up to thwart new enterprises. Yet these same policies and procedures that often make it difficult to start something new also make it difficult for anyone to stop the new venture once it is started. A large organization is often the perfect place to try a new idea. After all, it takes one to two months to find out that something new is being tried. It then takes another month or two to gain the attention of those in the bureaucracy who have the authority to do anything about this new venture—and another two to three months to work through the channels to block it. By this time, the new venture may have proven its worth and can make it on its own. As the popular adage from the 1960s goes: "It is easier to beg for *forgiveness* [after an action step has been taken] than to ask for *permission* [before the action step is taken]." This motto might be hung on the wall of any setting where a Contextual Interlude is being established.

Reframing: Potent and Problematic

These various reframing tools are not without their own problems and certainly should be used by coaches and their clients with discretion and ethical awareness. Interludes are not always successful and should be carefully constructed by the coach and client (macro-coaching). The reframing micro-coaching tactics significantly expand the repertoire of a coach and make significant change possible in difficult and resistant circumstances. The very forces that bind people and organizations to one way of doing things can be used as levers for change. With such powerful tools, we must be certain that these individuals and organizations actually desire the proposed change and trust the intentions and competencies of those aiding in the reframing process. Any Coaching Interlude must be mutually desired and designed by the coach and client.

One coaching client will find a solution-oriented reframing to be most helpful, while another may find it more beneficial to focus on the framing of a current or desired state. These are macro-coaching matters. In working with Susan, for instance, Alicia may think that the most important role she can play is to be reflective with Susan about her relationship with Ralph. Susan might decide that they should focus on Ralph's problem. They might both decide instead (with Ralph's concurrence) that Alicia should coach both Susan and Ralph—focusing on the relationship between them rather than on either Susan's perceptions of Ralph's problem or the solutions Susan will initiate to solve Ralph's problem.

In many cases, reframing is most beneficial when directed toward a client's blind spot. This is the spot where this client is absolutely certain there is no room for change in perspective. The purpose of this approach to coaching is not to show anyone "the right way" in which to relate to one another, solve problems, or make decisions. It is rather to establish an Interlude that provides both challenge and support. It is a Coaching Interlude that enables a client to reflect on her own thought processes, identify her own distinctive strengths and competencies, and take actions that are appropriate to her own value system and aspirations.

7. Changing a Procedural Operation to an Expository Operation

As I have already noted, we tend to go through life operating primarily through our procedural system. In a highly complex world, it is fully adaptive to assume that our habitual behavior is appropriate. Daniel Kahneman (2011) describes this as a proclivity to engage in fast thinking. We hold a set of procedural rules (heuristics) that guide most of our behaviors. However, these procedural rules aren't always effective. They can lead us in the wrong direction. Fortunately, there often are signals indicating that we are veering off course. Micro-coaching can be engaged to help our clients acknowledge these signals and determine what to do in response to the signals. As Kahneman

recommends, we must slow down our thinking. We must shift from our procedural operations to an expository mode of thinking.

A clear example of this shift from procedural to expository is to be found in the role played by Speed Limit signs—especially those that are blinking. We are often "unaware" of our speed when engaging our procedural brain. The speed limit sign promotes a shift on our part to an expository readjustment in the control of our speed. When we are made aware of the speed limit, then we shift from procedural/habitual behavior to expository/conscious behavior. We are aware of our speed and adjust our driving behavior. Awareness leads to adaptation. We reduce pressure on the accelerator, look more often at our speedometer, and "pay more attention" to our driving. It is interesting to note that many cars now being manufactured actually capture an image of the Speed Limit sign and display it on the dashboard. All of this is on behalf of the shift from procedural to expository operations.

What about procedural behavior we engage when "driving" the operations of an organization that we lead, or attempting to navigate the route taken by our children? Are there signs and signals in these domains of our life that encourage (even force) us to pay attention, reexamine our assumptions about "correct" behavior, and perhaps change our behavior? Micro-coaching can be of value in this regard. As micro-coaches, we can help our clients either acknowledge "speed limit signs" that are already available or build these signs if they are unavailable. We can also encourage our clients to review what they might do if the sign says they are going too fast or too slow, are going in the wrong direction, or have never actually left home.

I find that the reflective practices, portrayed by Chris Argyris and Don Schön many years ago (Argyris and Schön, 1974), are particularly valuable in moving from a habitual/procedural approach based on espoused theory to a critical/expository approach based on surfacing theory-in-use. Their left and right column exercise proves to be an excellent micro-coaching tool. I also find that Daniel Kahneman's (2011) description of specific heuristics to be of great value in surfacing the habitual/procedural processes that are most likely to lead to erroneous assessment of and predictions regarding the problems being faced during a coaching session. Finally, I find that the distinction drawn between Noise and Bias by Kahneman and two of his colleagues (Kahneman, Sibony and Sunstein, 2021) to be a source of micro-coaching insight regarding the potential errors to be found in group problem-solving, with Noise resulting from diffuse viewpoints regarding the problem, and Bias resulting from a unified, but incorrect, viewpoint.

8. Changing A Random Event into an Expository Source for Reflection

When engaged in procedural operations, we often "take the world for granted." We discover a change in the environment where we are operating and simply adjust to the change. Not much thought (expository system) is given to this change. At some level, we simply accept the world we face as a given. We might even consider our current condition to be God-given or produced by other external forces over which we have little control. Such a perspective often leads us to believe that nothing is really random and that we must simply accept what appears before us.

The noted psychologist and psychotherapist, Carl Jung, suggested later in his life that this is an accurate assessment of the world in which we operate. It is not just a matter of us being tired and unwilling to fight back, nor is it a matter of believing in some all-controlling deity. In fact, nothing might be random. As Jung (1931) proposed, everything might be connected. Jung's highly controversial perspective is called *Synchronicity*. While one does not have to believe in this non-randomness, this assumption can be valuable in engaging a micro-coaching strategy associated with fortunate telling and other "non-scientific" interventions.

In essence, this form of micro-coaching provides clients with the opportunity to view the issues they are addressing during their coaching sessions from a distance. An Interlude filled with distal (distant) perspectives in time or space

can yield great insights. The noted philosopher and leader, Marcus Aurelius, put it this way (Robertson, 2019, p. 261):

> . . . anyone seeking to understand human affairs should gaze down upon all earthly things . . as though from a high watchtower. Each day I would rehearse, just as my teacher [Plato] did, imaging myself suddenly raised aloft and looking down on the complex tapestry of human life from high above.

From above, with the assistance of a coach, we can discern patterns of our own behavior, patterns of other people's behavior, and patterns of life events. Our proximal (close) view that concerns moment-to-moment adjustments is set aside on behalf of broader purposes and longer-term goals. We are also likely to find that the view from these heights reveals a world that is not all white and black nor all right and wrong. As Paul Watzlawick (1986, pp. 38-39) revealed:

> . . . there is something fundamentally wrong in assuming that the opposite of bad must be good—and not just because the good is not yet good enough or because the bad has not yet been totally exterminated.

At these heights, we become relativists (Perry, 1970), discarding our dualism. We discover that both goods and bads are to be found in our current condition. No one solution is all good or all bad. In accordance with Watzlawick, we come to acknowledge that it is not enough to eliminate the bad in our lives; we must also find a way to construct a compelling and comprehensive good, which often includes something of the bad that we had hoped to abandon in our lives.

For instance, from a distal perspective, we find that our working relationship with that person, whom we just asked to leave our team, was a source of great insight for me regarding how to confront someone assertive. Or we discover that there is a pattern in our work life. We move on to a new job every two to three years. While it is a "pain" to keep packing up and moving to a new job, we have been able to bring what we have learned from the old job to our new job. Furthermore, we have been able to move from job to job because we keep getting recruited to a new position, based on our ongoing improved performance. Good (improved performance and job upgrade) is mixed in with the bad (unsettled life). As William Bridges (Bridges, 1980; Bridges, 2001) repeatedly noted, a successful transition to a new place in our life requires that we acknowledge what was beneficial in the old place. We must grieve what we have left behind (and bring some of it with us to our new life) if we are to successfully transit into the new.

Message from Olympus

There are a variety of ways in which we can provide a bit of Stoic coaching. We can construct an Interlude in which we encourage our clients to reflect from a distance by making use of metaphors, analogies, parables, and/or similes (Bergquist, 2021). As a coach, we tell a story related to our client's current condition. This allows our client to look beyond and above their current, often siloed, viewpoint. In an Interlude of Metaphors, I often envision my client receiving a message from the gods on Olympus. This "message" can come in the form of an event occurring in my client's life, or a disturbing interaction with some other person. At times, the message can even come from a dream, play, piece of music, or book that somehow has recently delivered a strong emotional "punch" in my client's guts. Paul Watzlawick (1986, p. 24) would seem to agree, telling a tale about a man:

> . . . for whom there was a new feeling towards the world and his own life; he had a longing for something he vaguely called happiness, harmony, being in tune, something that he experienced in curious moments when he was incomprehensibly touched by music or seemingly quite trivial experiences.

This incomprehensible touching or emotional punch might relate to Jung's synchronicity. The Gods have provided us with wise insight or advice. We should pay attention to and make use of this insight or advice. It might lead us to new feelings of happiness, harmony, or being in tune.

When providing coaching, we often encounter moments when our clients are confronting a failure in their own work, a disappointment regarding their aspirations, or a mistake in a decision that they made. A bit of micro-coaching might be engaged by inviting one's client to take a step backward and "pretend" for a moment that the failure, disappointment, or mistake was actually purposeful. The "gods on Olympus" actually planned for this outcome, hoping that you (the client) would learn something from this event that could be of great benefit in the future." A few moments of reflection in an Interlude of Safety not only helps one's client gain a bit of emotional reprocessing of the event but also helps them extract some important lessons. As many wise counsellors have suggested, there is only success and learning in life. There is neither failure nor disappointment.

There are also times when we find ourselves quite anxious. We are not quite sure what the source of this anxiety might be. Many years ago, Sigmund Freud (1936/2000) suggested that anxiety often signals the potential appearance of some unacceptable thought or action. What might this 'unacceptable' be? If we become aware, in an Interlude of Safety, of what is being signaled, then we can either ignore it or continue to block it out from our consciousness; however, we can also test to see if this is actually based on an old childhood fear that we can now set aside: "I need no longer fear being abandoned if I let them know of my disagreement." "It is OK to let this person know that I care deeply about them." Even if we choose not to act upon the anxiety we experience, this anxiety can provide us with a teaching moment. With the support of a coach, we can find Freud and Marcus Aurelius joining together in pointing the way to our distancing from and reflecting on the signal anxiety that appears in our life.

Fortune-Telling-Based Reflection

One does not have to "believe" in fortune tellers and their many devices to find these devices of value in setting up an Interlude of Magic and generating a bit of micro-coaching. For instance, as a coach, I often bring out Tarot Cards. My client pulls out a card, and we begin a discussion about what this card might mean in my client's life: "You pulled the card containing the image of a chariot. What does this tell you about travel or change in your life right now?" I often recount a bit of the history of Tarot Cards (or at least one version of the story). During the Middle Ages, these cards were used to guide discussion in the high chambers of Royalty. Since many topics would have been met with suspicion by Royalty ("Are members of my council trying to tell me something I don't want to hear?"), it becomes much safer to arbitrarily pick out one card from the Tarot deck and commence with conversations regarding the theme in this card: "We have pulled the chariot card. Should we consider what changes we might make or the land to which we must travel to improve international commerce?"

Similar use can be made of devices such as the I Ching and Runes. I recently coached a young adult who had just experienced a major failure in her life. We spent several hours throwing coins to reveal I Ching hexagrams that speak to important themes, and overturning Rune stones that contain symbols that speak to specific themes. My young client was able to reflect on what she might "learn" from her failure, making use of the themes revealed in the hexagram and Rune symbol. Once again, the reflections based on random events (tossing coins, turning over a stone) generated the content for this reflection, while also providing a way in which to distance oneself a bit from the emotion associated with the event on which one is reflecting.

There is one additional micro-coaching process that might be engaged. This is the legendary reading of palms. Once again, without considering whether palm reading actually yields an accurate forecast of one's future, we can use reflections regarding lines on our client's hand as a rich source of micro-coaching insights. The ancients declared that

our hand is somehow *Enchanted* (Bashford, 2025, p. 329). The gods have invested our hands with knowledge and wisdom. Holding this ancient, exoteric assumption to be true for a moment, we might ask what we can learn from this enchantment. What if one of the lines revealed a long life? What steps might our client take to ensure that they are prepared for a long life? Another analysis suggests that our youthful client will be joined in their life by many children; how might our young client generate some contingency plans for such an outcome? Or how might they set plans for NOT having many children if this "fortune" is threatening other life plans?

Perhaps we can temporarily declare other parts of our body or other elements of our personal world to be "enchanted." This being the case, what can be learned from this enchantment? We transform random events into purposeful venues for reflection. As the Stoics suggested, we benefit from stepping outside and above ourselves and looking down upon the life we are living and the world in which we dwell. We find that rich learning is crying out to teach us about who we are and what we should choose to do and be during our lifetime. Micro-coaching can be engaged to open the door to this Stoic perspective.

Conclusions: Coaching in the Thin Place

An important outcome can be generated in a coaching session when providing a moment of micro-coaching in an Interlude that is secure and filled with insightful concepts and processes. The coaching outcome might be a small thing; however, it could reverberate and lead to a teachable moment where significant learning can take place. Many people involved in the provision of spiritual practices speak about *the Thin Place* that seems to be situated between two domains of existence. We don't have to accept this assumption of two domains to appreciate the potential way in which an interlude of micro-coaching can pierce the thin membrane that exists between our current version of the life we are leading and the potential version of this life that would be more purposeful and gratifying.

At a more modest level, this could be the thin barrier existing between the inadequate solution to a pressing problem that is stuck (*Einstellung*) in our brain and heart, and the new solution that takes us to another level of thought and action. The main thing to keep in mind is that this membrane or barrier is Thin. It may take only a bit of micro-coaching to break through to a new solution to our pressing problem or to a new version of our life.

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