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The Axes of Change

PART 1 of 3

Introducing a New and Non-Therapy Based Change Model

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Coaching for a Change - Thousands of people worldwide who commit to coaching are looking for increased benefits in their lives, and it's not usually because there's anything to fix. It's simply that they want more successes, and more of the things they're succeeding with already. In this three-part series, L. Michael Hall and Michelle Duval present their innovative model for effective change.

"You can't change anything by fighting or resisting it.

You change something by making it obsolete through superior methods."

Buckminster Fuller

If coaching is about anything, it is about change. And if coaching is first and foremost about facilitating the dynamic process of change or transformation in the lives of people, then ultimately a coach is a *change-agent par excellence*. That's why we coach, is it not? We coach to make a highly desired change in an area of life or personality that will allow us to maximize our talents, unleash our potentials, and take our skills to a new level of development. That's also why we hire a personal coach, is it not? We want to make changes to take our talents and skills to a new and higher level for peak or optimal performance.

- **Yet, what is this thing that we call change?**
- **Does change have a good or bad reputation to you?**
- **Is change easy or hard, fun or traumatic?**

Kinds of Change

When we think about change, we often first think about the change that's connected to therapy. Therapy is also about change, but it is about *remedial* change-fixing things, repairing what's broken, getting a person through or over hurts and

traumas, altering significant distortions in personality, thinking patterns, emotional distresses. In this context, most people find change challenging, difficult, and even hard. In this context, therapists and clients have to deal with a wide range of subjects connected to that kind of change, namely *resistance*, defense mechanisms, fighting change, fearing change, and relapse.

By way of contrast, coaching is about *generative* change. It's about taking talent, knowledge, and skills to a new level of excellence. It's about facilitating the highest *development* in a well-functioning person and about enabling new *transformations* to occur that empower a person to excel his or her own visions and dreams about what's possible. In this context, the people who sign up for coaching embrace change, desire change, and are ready for change. And when you have change-embracers asking for change, this makes much of the therapeutic understandings, premises, and models of change completely inappropriate.

The Need for a New Change Model

So what's a coach to do? Most, if not nearly all, of the *change models* available today were developed by psychologists and psychotherapists who were working with people who needed change but who resisted it. In those change models we find a major emphasis on resistance, relapse, that "change is hard and painful," and that people will actually fight you about change.

For the field of coaching and for leading coaches, the prob-

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lem is that many of these change models have been adopted wholesale from therapy. "Change is difficult" is the first line of the third chapter of *Coach Yourself*, an excellent book on coaching. Yet by adopting the old trans-theoretical model by Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, the authors have failed to see and utilize the difference between therapeutic change and coaching change. They also developed their model from how alcoholics and other addicts went through the process of self-change.

I have another complaint about the trans-theoretical model. In presenting the stages of change, it offers the following steps or stages in the experience of change: 1) pre-contemplation, 2) contemplation, 3) commitment, 4) action or change, 5) maintenance, 6) relapse. Now, how about that fourth step? Don't you love it? *Change!*

Change is what a change model is supposed to detail out. It really doesn't do any good to put "change" as one of the steps in a model designed to sort out the steps of change.

That reminds me of the cartoon drawing of a wild-hair professor working on the formula for "life." He's standing facing a chalk board that he has absolutely filled it up with a complex mathematical and scientific formula. Then at the end, near the bottom of the blackboard, he writes, "Then the miracle happens" then next comes an arrow that points to the end result, "Life!"

Change is what a change model is supposed to detail out. It really doesn't do any good to put "change" as one of the steps in a model designed to sort out the steps of change. As a model for describing how to bring about change, a change model needs to identify all of the mechanisms, processes, and variables and then present those variables in a step-by-step fashion so that we can move through the process and experience a change. Doesn't that make sense?

If coaching is truly about generative and transformative change, then what model or template informs and guides us in facilitating the change process? In Neuro-Semantics, the *Axes of Change model* is our answer. In designing it, we have started with the difference between remedial and generative change so that it reflects the variables and contexts how healthy, sane, and well-functioning people bring about desired change in the way they think, feel, respond, relate, and perform.

What is the Axes of Change model?

As a model or template for working with the *change process* The Axis of Change model uses the key mechanisms or variables that are involved in change. These include:

- 1) The negative and positive emotions that move us away from one thing and toward another.

- 2) The reflective understanding of what needs to change and the decision or commitment to make it happen.
- 3) The constructive planning and designing of what to change to and the beginning experimentation of the action plan to see how it works.
- 4) The reinforcement of what works well to reward it, and the ongoing testing, monitoring, and accountability that enables the change to solidify.

When we distinguish the two meta-programs in each of these processes, we have eight change factors or variables.

- 1) **Aversions:** fear, anger, stress, frustration, distress, pain, unpleasantness, intolerance, having had "enough," threshold, necessity, negative emotional tension, etc.
- 2) **Attractions:** hope, dreams, values, visions, anticipation, pleasure, inspiration, possibilities, growth, development, positive emotional tension, etc.
- 3) **Reflective understanding:** knowledge, heightened awareness, insight, discovery, the Ah-Ha! recognition.
- 4) **Decision:** the saying no to the old and yes to the new possibilities, the courage to break free to make a change, commitment, willingness, etc.
- 5) **Creative design:** the planning for change, the know-how about what to do now, an action plan with time table and schedule for change, the strategy for how to do it.
- 6) **Action:** performance, practice, experimentation, trying something out, trial and error learning, implementation, feed-forward.
- 7) **Reinforcement:** support, celebration, championing a new practice, reward, partners, etc.
- 8) **Testing:** monitoring, feedback, renewed practice, accountability, performance review, re-designing the action or performance plan, etc.

And for a change-embracer, someone who is already a healthy high performer, these are the variables that make change possible and that create change. In fact, there will be times when a single one of these factors may be completely sufficient to create change. We may have experienced it or we have seen it work in the life of another when sufficient *pain* drove a person to change overnight. Perhaps a friend got a diagnosis of lung cancer and from that moment totally quit smoking. Sometimes a great vision wakes a person up to new possibilities, and they are transformed. Saul on the road to Damascus was like that. A vision awakened him to a whole new world. Sometimes it is the *Ah ha!* experience that creates an immediate and complete change, or a *ferocious resolve of a decision*, or a plan-a specific and compelling plan that sets forth an exciting strategy. It could be the experience of having a little piece of doing something different or right reinforced that makes the change. Or it could be receiving some performance feedback that suddenly gives us a mirror that leads to transformation.

Typically, however, it is the working of all of these factors together that brings about solid and lasting change. In this, we also usually need the different change mechanisms to work together in a coordinated way. If we create a wonderful plan for change but don't have the emotional energy, we will *intelligently know* what we should do without doing it-a typical problem many people have with change.

Or we may know what we want to change *to*, but not be all that clear on what we have to move away from to make that happen. We may have a great plan and begin to act on it, but if we don't have sufficient reinforcements or feedback, we may find the change doesn't last and that we revert back to our old habits.

This is where we need a model that ties the change mechanisms and variables together and provides an understanding of how they relate to each other. Considering the need to see the inter-relationships between the eight change variables, we find that we can classify them into four change processes or stages.

1) **The Energy stage:** creating sufficient emotional energy, motivation, and creative tension to feel both the need and the desire for the change. This gives us a propulsion for change: away from the aversions and pains and toward the attractions and pleasures.

2) **The Decision stage:** creating sufficient understanding and knowledge about what to change, why it doesn't work, and generating enough decision power to create a readiness for change. This gives us the prod to say no to the current way of thinking, feeling, and acting and yes to the possibilities of a generative change.

3) **The Creation stage:** creating a specific action plan that describes the change, giving us a step-by-step plan that we can then begin acting on and experimenting with. This gives us the plan to implement and actualize in real life.

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4) **The Solidifying stage:** creating specific rewards and support for the new actions that we celebrate and champion, all the while testing, monitoring, and using feedback to make richer, fuller, and more integrated into our new habit and way of responding. This gives us a way to keep solidifying the change so that it becomes part of who we are and so that it fits ecologically into our life style.

As we step back from these four stages or processes of change, we can easily see the role that anyone who plays the facilitator or change agent will play in promoting life-enhancing change:

1) **Challenger** of current reality and of the aversive consequences if things don't change.

2) **Awakener** to a new vision of possibilities and all of the attractive opportunities if we do change.

3) **Prober** of one's current understandings and meaning

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frames that describe one's current behaviors and feelings thereby creating a leverage for what to change.

4) *Provoker* to making a decision to say *no* to the current and *yes* to the new possibilities, thereby creating a readiness for making the change.

5) *Co-creator* to design the new strategy and action plan.

6) *Actualizer* to begin the experimenting, trials, and new fledging performances.

7) *Reinforcer* to provide support, nurture, and celebration of the new behaviors and responses.

8) *Tester* to monitor, give feedback, hold accountable, and refine the new changes.

Yet there is more. Not only do we now have four stages or processes of change, but these four processes correspond to four key meta-programs or perceptual filters that we use in paying attention to things and sorting out what's important.

1) *The Energy stage* relates to the meta-programs of *toward* and *away from* - toward the attractions that we want and away from the aversions that we don't.

2) *The Decision stage* relates to the meta-programs of *reflective* and *action* in how we respond to information, events, and people. First we *reflect* on what's currently going on and then we take *action* as we make a decision to do something.

3) *The Creation stage* relates to the meta-programs of *internal reference* and *external reference*. First we internally reference our matrix structure of meaning frames and create a plan using our know-how knowledge of what to do, then we externally reference the outside world that we live and move in for where and how the action plan will be implemented.

4) *The Solidifying stage* relates to the meta-programs of *matcher* and *mis-matcher*. First we perceive by matching for what is similar to the game plan that we designed and noticing and acknowledging what's working even if in the tiniest bit as we nurture, support, and validate the person who has taken action. Then we mis-match by sorting for differences, what's not fully congruent with the game plan as we test it out, give feedback, offer ideas for further refinements.

This now gives us four axes that relate to four meta-program continua. Each axis is one of these four core meta-program continua which governs how we think-feel-and-respond when we encounter new information or challenging events. Each axis offers a continuum on which two polar perceptual filters exist which informs *how* we think about and code the trigger that invites a *change*. In terms of change, these deal with

Our motivational energy for change: toward and away from.

Our decision readiness for change: reflective and active.

Our creating and implementing a new change map: internal and external referencing.

Our solidifying and maintaining the change in the real world: matching and mis-matching.

As we have modeled how *change* and *transformation* actually occurs in the four stages, we have designed these axes of change so that a coach (or anyone working with transforma-

tion processes) can *dance* with the client in following the client's energy through his or her unique Matrix of frames. This enables the coach to find and use the most effective *leverage points* in that client's mind-body (or neuro-semantic matrix system). The axes of change not only apply at the individual level, but also for organizations and groups and so provides a dynamically practical tool for Coaches as change-agents.

Summary:

The process of *change*, like any and every subjective experience has a structure, and as such, can be modeled. For years, therapists have studied change. Yet their studies have focused on how hurting people change-how traumatized, limited, wounded, and stuck people change. It makes sense that those models of change see change as painful, difficult, a struggle, and something clients will resist and relapse from.

But how do peak performers change? How do self-actualizing people change? What is the structure to that experience? *The Axes of Change model* is the first non-therapeutic change model in the world, a model based on how top performers, well-functioning people, people who are not hurting and who do not need to change, but who want to change, how change-embracers change.

NEXT: FACETS OF THE AXES OF CHANGE MODEL

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*You can find the Axes of Change model in the newly published book, *Coaching Conversations* (2004) by Hall and Duval. Also, it will be published in great detail in *Meta-Coaching, Vol. I, Coaching Change* (in press, due November, 2004). For more about *Meta-Coaching* and the *Meta-Coaching* system, see www.neurosemantics.com and click on *Meta-Coaching*. *Meta-Coaching certification* is now being presented in the UK, Australia, South Africa, Geneva, Paris, USA, and soon in other parts of the world.*

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