

"A must-read for any coach or aspiring coach." —WILLIAM BERGQUIST, PhD,  
CEO and Author of More Than 50 Books on Coaching and Consulting

**THE ART OF**

*SECRETS TO UNLOCK*

**EXECUTIVE**

*LEADERSHIP PERFORMANCE*

**COACHING**

**NADINE GREINER, PHD**

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PRESS

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*I dedicate this book to you.*

*May you summon the courage to learn something new,  
and may you build the resilience to sometimes fall,  
pick yourself up, and learn even more.*



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# FOREWORD

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IN MY 30 YEARS OF FORTUNE 500 consulting experience, I've often served as a coach—it's unavoidable. When projects are initiated and plans implemented, key people need coaching in how best to garner support, delegate work, and assign accountability.

All too often, the traditional view of “coaching” is remedial: Someone isn't measuring up, so they need help in the form of an expert—the coach. However, the traditional view is wrong, because that's the minority role of coaching. I equate it to flying on an airplane primarily to enjoy the food, rather than seeking a safe, on-time arrival where you intend to go.

If you consider people at the top of their game, yesterday or today—Frank Sinatra in song, Meryl Streep on film, Denzel Washington onstage, Tom Brady on the football field, Jack Welch at GE—they all had or have coaches. Strong people realize there is constantly a need for new ideas, diverse suggestions, and outright improvement. The best seek out coaching, because they're usually head and shoulders above the competition to begin with. (And, sometimes, there *are* some dysfunctional behaviors that accompany highly positive ones, which should be culled.)

As of late, having a coach has evolved to possess a caché. Thus, we have “coaching universities” (who certified the certifiers?) and “life coaches” who, presumably, coach anyone about everything. After all, life doesn't come with an instruction book.

In a volatile world, such coaching is more important than ever, largely because we tend to default, if we don't understand coaching, to the remedial, instead of helping those who can help us most—the all-stars!

Nadine Greiner is the perfect person to help coaches to fulfill these vital roles. She doesn't hold “certificates” of completion from a pseudo-university, but rather quite real PhDs in organization development and clinical psychology. (That's what certifies the certifiers!) She has been a CEO, a clinician, and a consultant. She grew up in a war zone, so she can certainly handle the boardroom.

This is a rare book oriented toward improving coaching with an exclusive look at the traits and skills required to help people to help people. It is neither mercenary nor aimed at marketing (I know this because I'm the one who wrote *Million Dollar Coaching*). This is a special book for specialists. It is undiluted and not diverted by a focus on other specialties or helping professions.

With all my experience, I learned by reading it. That's because I know I need a great coach, too. With *The Art of Executive Coaching*, you now have one as well.

—Alan Weiss, PhD

Author, *Million Dollar Consulting*, *Threescore and More*,  
and More Than 60 Other Books

# PREFACE

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ARE YOU A PRACTICING executive coach? Do you want to become one? Are you a coaching consultant who wants the new, exciting challenges of helping executives deliver transformative results? If you are, you've come to the right place. This book was written to inform, entertain, and inspire you. Through the nine stories presented here and the practical advice sprinkled throughout, you will follow an experienced coach as she guides her clients through the challenging process of change. Some of these clients are high performing and brilliant, lined up for their next promotions. Others are struggling in one way or another, in danger of being fired or disliked by their teams, and a few have placed their entire enterprise at risk.

You will see these individuals struggle to change their personal and leadership styles—and triumph. You will watch as they overcome their resistance, illuminate their blind spots, and adopt new ways of relating and managing. And you'll see how these personal changes affect entire departments and even whole organizations.

By the end of the book, you will understand *why* coaching works so well—why it is able to achieve such dramatic results in a relatively short time. And you will begin to learn *how* coaching works—techniques that are most effective in bringing about a positive outcome.

## **What Does an Executive Coach Do?**

Even for those with experience working with executives and coaching others, it's important to clarify the purpose of executive coaching—and how it differs from the everyday coaching that occurs between co-workers or between managers and direct reports. Simply put, executive coaching is an on-target, tailored, expedited, and effective way of boosting leaders. It is a formal engagement in which an executive coach works with a client in a series of confidential and dynamic meetings designed to establish and achieve clear goals.

Similar to other executive and leadership development processes, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to executive coaching. There is no step-by-step procedure that will work, without fail, for each new client. Intuitively, that makes sense. While executives might share some traits or habits, they and their work are unique. The challenges they face are unlike those of another executive at the same size firm, in the same industry, down the same street. That's part of what makes the business of executive coaching thrilling—but also increasingly in demand. No executive is perfect; there's always room for improvement—improvement that can have impressive effects on the business, its employees, and its customers.

Because of the essential individuality of executives, I've written each chapter to present the story of a client who is experiencing a different type of challenge at work. Each story demonstrates the different approaches you can employ in working with your clients. That said, there are certain processes and procedures that any executive coach should consider deploying and can enable anyone with a passion for coaching to become a more effective executive coach.

While my own clients often appreciate the immediate value I add (having held the most senior positions within an organization myself), a coach need not necessarily have held a particular position to be successful, especially if you follow a structured process as described here. As an

expert in human performance, I designed a process of executive coaching that has four distinct steps. This scope of work or contract can be applied to most executive coaching engagements: assessment, goals, implementation, and review.

- 1. Assessment:** Before you can suggest advice or create a development plan with a client, you must compile information, such as a 360-degree feedback assessment. This process involves interviewing the client's colleagues about the client's strengths and areas of potential development. Assessments can also include psychological and business profiles and other such tools.
- 2. Goals:** Based on the assessment's results, you will set goals with your client. These goals are built around developing certain competencies, such as developing and operationalizing strategy, executive presence, confidence, critical thinking, problem solving, project oversight, setting priorities, managing through systems, team building, and interpersonal ease. In situations where appropriate, they might then forward the goals to a superior.
- 3. Implementation:** During your sessions, you will use coaching solutions to help the client meet their coaching goals. Such solutions can include encouragement, reflective listening, questioning, exploration, guidance, reframing, compassion, challenging thinking, and support. There will be homework, of course. Tools for attaining goals might include reading, learning new skills, course work, practicing new skills, rehearsing or role-playing, viewing video of the coaching client, and shadowing.
- 4. Review:** Before you can tie a bow on the coaching engagement, you need to compile any post-coaching results

and feedback to make sure the client achieved all their coaching goals. This is also an opportunity to provide final recommendations before you part ways.

An important aspect of executive coaching is confidentiality. The goals of the coaching engagement are often sent to the manager or the board of directors, but how we obtain those goals and everything else we discuss is strictly confidential between the coaching client and coach. I usually work with the client actively for four to six months—they have unlimited access to me during that time—and the contract specifies a set project fee.

## **Who Am I?**

You might be wondering about my background, or what makes me a person with secrets worth sharing. Well, I am an executive coach with doctorates in organization development and clinical psychology, and I teach in master's and doctoral programs. I've held high-level positions in private and publicly traded companies. I first served as a CEO at the age of 38, so I understand the experience of leadership in a very intimate way.

This unique combination of psychology, business, and executive leadership has contributed to my success. I believe we are placed in this world to learn from one another. I have been blessed with powerful mentors, and I am eager to share my knowledge and secrets. During my 30 years of executive coaching, I've helped more than a thousand clients become more effective and fulfilled in their jobs. I also prepare a very select few individuals to become executive coaches themselves, and they in turn change the professional lives of many more executives.

Business books can be long and wordy. I wanted to offer a short book packed with solutions—and I expressly wanted to write a business book that was an enjoyable read with plenty of tools, techniques, tips, and secrets for the reader. I learned long ago that people learn best when they are relaxed and having fun.

## What's in This Book

In these chapters, you will find:

- A short, animated description of the coaching client and their challenges. The executive coach is referred to as Alice Well; however, this is a fictional name, as are the names of the coaching clients.
- Examples of the four distinct phases of coaching: assessment, goals, implementation, and review. Each phase has a distinct set of tools and processes, laid out in a simple, easy-to-follow fashion.
- A diagnostic picture based on psychological profiles and interviews with colleagues.
- Coaching goals formulated with the client along with remedies and homework.
- A “Tips for the Reader” section, with activities and approaches that are known to yield positive results.
- A review of the coaching engagement’s results.
- A “Why Coaching Matters” section, in which coaching clients speak directly and openly about the impact of coaching.

*The Art of Executive Coaching* presents a number of remarkable success stories. If you enjoy being inspired by happy outcomes to troublesome situations, you will enjoy this book.

## The Power of Coaching for the Coaching Client

Do you find yourself baffled by a colleague? Or surprised at how you react? Could you use some tips on how to navigate the culture at work? Perhaps you want to provide value within your company?

Most of us work in some kind of organization. We might have taken training and earned degrees to prepare us for our jobs. But nobody taught

us how to handle some of the personalities we come across at work or how to conduct ourselves in puzzling new situations. Through dramatic situations and humor, this short, entertaining book illustrates how you can be more effective and happy at work.

The coaching tips, tricks, and goals you're going to read about have proven results. Each chapter provides secrets that will help you stay in control of your job, your career, and your future. In addition, they'll each give you a leg up in handling different personalities and difficult situations at work. So, this book is written for anyone who wants to learn how to navigate more skillfully through challenging situations in the workplace.

It will also be of interest to managers at all levels who want to learn more about executive coaching. Coaching is a hot topic these days, and there are good reasons for this: A *Public Personnel Management* study shows that when training is combined with coaching, individuals increase their productivity by an average of 88 percent, compared with just 22 percent with training alone (Olivero, Bane, and Kopelman 1997).

The benefits of successful coaching, however, are not limited to the individual being coached; they can apply to their entire department and, by extension, the whole company. Numerous studies have shown a return on investment of 500 to 800 percent on the cost of coaching, in addition to substantial intangible benefits to the business (Anderson 2001; ICF et al. 2009; McGovern et al. 2001). The stories in this book reveal these dramatic collateral benefits as the executives change their leadership styles.

## **Your Journey**

I can't promise you will always have your dream job for the rest of your life. But, whether you are an executive coach or not, I can promise you that you will increase your choices and your chances of being

effective and happy at work by using the secrets, methods, tips, and tricks presented in this book. And I promise you will smile when you read about the fascinating personalities in each chapter.

To summarize, this book will do three things: inform you about executive coaching, provide you with tips and insights on how to negotiate difficult situations in your workplace, and entertain you with inspiring stories.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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All proceeds from this book go to the protection and love of animals.



# 1

## THE BULLY

*Even immensely successful sales directors need coaching. Tom, a sales director for a hospitality and tourism company in the United States, was known for tripling sales during his first year on the job. Although Tom outperformed his peers thanks to his single-minded focus on results and the company benefited tremendously from this success, he had some aggressive behaviors that hurt people—and himself. Dr. Alice Well’s task was to soften Tom’s behaviors while allowing his high performance to continue.*

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TOM CALLED ALICE UP one day and said he’d like to work with her. His colleague in marketing had gone through her coaching process, made changes, and gotten promoted. Managing West Coast sales for a hospitality and tourism firm, Tom had done well for himself, but he too wanted a promotion. He aspired to become the global vice president of sales. Perhaps Alice could help him get there.

### **Week 1: Focus**

Tom’s secretary showed Alice into his office.

“He’ll be right in,” she said.



One of the walls was decorated with framed photographs, large and small. Some were of racing cars, others of men dressed in racing gear. One was autographed: “To Tom. Follow that line! Shel McGuire.” Alice recognized the name from a Ford commercial.

Next to it was a large photo of what looked like a cross between a sports car and a racing car.

“That’s one of five,” said a voice behind her.

She turned to face a tall, tanned, fit man who smiled and stuck out his hand. “I’m Tom. And you must be Dr. Alice Well,” he said. He had thick, dark hair and nice features, but there was a certain hardness to his face.

She took his hand and smiled back. “One of five?”

“That’s an Aston Martin 419, 1992. They only made five prototypes. Never took it into production. They should’ve. I took it down to the track last Sunday. Sucker did 150 on the straights.”

Nodding, Alice racked her brain for any tiny bit about auto racing and classic sports cars. She’d never been into cars or shop growing up, but having worked with many übercompetitive male executives, she’d picked up bits here and here.

“Have you ever raced?” she asked.

He sighed and shook his head. “Should’ve started when I was a kid. Big regret. I’d love to be part of a racing team. Would you like to sit down?”

He motioned her to a low-backed chair and went to sit behind his large, uncluttered desk. The desk—and all the furniture—had an air of expensive chic. Alice couldn’t help noticing the large mirror on the desk as well.

“What attracts you to racing?” Alice asked, settling in.

“That’s easy,” he said. “Excitement, teamwork . . . and focus.”

“Focus?”

He pointed to the autographed picture on the wall. “I asked Shel what his secret was—how he’s won 57 races—and he said, ‘Focus. You’ve got to be totally focused when you’re driving.’ I haven’t raced, but I’ve driven tracks at some pretty good speeds. When you’re totally focused, everything else goes away. It’s just you and the car and the track.”

Sensing an opportunity to link racing to the matter at hand, Alice prodded, “You’ve been driving this sales department for a few years, and I understand that you’ve done very well. Is this the same focus that you’re talking about?”

“Absolutely. It’s my job to stay focused on the numbers and to keep everybody else focused. That’s why sales have doubled in the last four years.”

“That’s very impressive. Could you say more about how you achieve this focus?”

“Sure. I’ll give you an example. I just had a meeting with one of my sales team—Annie. Now, I like Annie, and she’s usually one of my top performers. But over the last two months, her numbers have gone south, so I called her into my office and told her that she had to bring them up. She said there was a personal matter, and I said I don’t get paid for listening to personal matters. I get paid—and she gets paid—for focusing on sales. That’s what I mean by focus.”

“OK. Thank you for that. Now, an important question: What do you hope to gain from our work together?”

In cases with a client who reached out to her directly rather than a company that requested she coach an executive, Alice liked to hear what the client wanted from the coaching engagement. That way she could measure the difference between what her clients wanted at the outset of coaching and what they ended up needing after the assessment. Self-awareness can vary widely in executives.

“I told you about my friend, Steve, who worked with you. He’s a VP now, and he credits you with helping him get there. I want to move

ahead too.” He paused. “And there’s something else. I don’t know, I’ve had a lot of wins here, but I feel I’m missing something.”

“OK, moving ahead and discovering what you might be missing,” Alice confirmed. “In a couple of weeks, we’ll focus on a few more specific goals that we can work on together. Right now, I’d like to go over with you what the coaching process entails.”

## **Weeks 2-3: No Bonus**

As she approached Tom’s office, Alice could hear him cursing and swearing behind the closed door.

“What’s going on?” she asked as she stepped in.

“Those suckers! I *creamed* the competition! They don’t even see that! How can they not give me my damn bonus for Q4?”

“Would you like to explain? I thought the numbers were up for Q4.”

“They are. They *are* up!”

“Then I don’t understand.”

Alice, now seated, reached for her notebook in her briefcase and winced; she’d scraped her hand after taking a fall in the parking lot. She noticed a little blood smear on the corner of the notebook. Tom did, too.

“Don’t touch that chair,” Tom ordered, not missing a beat or offering to get her a napkin. “They say my comp level was set so high that I missed the bonus.”

“Who set the level so high?”

Tom blew out a bunch of air like a tire going flat and collapsed in his chair, defeated.

“I did,” he said. “It was meant to be a challenge. Nobody got their bonus. The jerks should give it to me anyway. The numbers are up, the competition is down. . . . Damn!”

Alice had experience coaching sales executives and knew the compensation structure all too well: Tom had arranged it to benefit the top performers, with everyone competing against one another. Unlike other departments, in sales all boats don't rise with the overall increase in productivity. Tom had been caught by his own creation, and he didn't like it one bit. Alice made a note to talk about this compensation structure later, when he'd had time to cool down.

Up to this point, Tom had been nothing but upbeat about his work situation, despite passionately targeting the promotion he felt he deserved. Today, Alice witnessed firsthand what people had said about Tom's bad temper and his lack of compassion. His response to her bloody hand was not concern, but a gruff order to keep it off his fancy chair.

All this and more came out in the assessments, the first phase of the coaching process. As part of the 360-degree assessment, which happened during week 2, Alice had interviewed 10 people around Tom about his leadership style, personality, and competency. In addition, she had conducted a psychological profile, an evaluation of how he dealt with conflict, and a self-assessment.

According to those interviewed for the 360-degree feedback, Tom was mean and bad tempered. No compassion. He came down hard on people in the Monday sales meetings if their numbers were down, wanting only "winners" to work for him. Mixed in was some admiration for his ability to increase sales, particularly from the CEO; but mostly, resentment and animosity at the way he treated his direct reports and those who reported to them. Unsurprisingly, turnover was high in his unit due to his take-no-prisoners attitude.

By the time of their fourth session, Tom had read her writeup of the assessments, including the 360. They were ready to discuss next steps.

## Week 4: Management by Volume

When Alice came into his office, Tom was gazing out the window. He didn't respond to her greeting, so she sat down, got out her notebook, and waited.

"People don't like me, Dr. Alice," he said finally, still looking out the window. "That 360. . . . They say I don't care about them, I don't have any compassion, all I care about are the numbers."

Turning to face her, he continued, "I didn't think I got paid to care about them. I get paid for one thing: to make this company the top seller. I mean, here they've got great jobs, bonuses, perks—and they want compassion? I don't get it. I just don't get it."

He shook his head. "They say they hate Monday mornings. But I have to tell them who's behind and who's ahead. I'm the ass-kicker here. And if they don't like the way I do that . . . well, shit! I'm not here to coddle them. They need to grow up, get real."

Alice leaned forward. "I'd like to focus for a few minutes on your personal history. I understand that you worked for your dad in his bakery when you were a boy. How was that?"

"My dad was OK, but he expected the whole family to get up at three in the morning and work. I had to go to school too, of course. The bakery—it was just something you did. It was the family business. Nobody questioned it."

"Then, when you were 17, you went to work for an electronics firm?"

"Yeah, I learned about electronics and I learned about how business works."

"How would you describe the management style of your boss there?"

"Oh, I would say his style of management was essentially . . . yelling."

"Yelling?"

"Yeah. If he wanted you to do something, he'd yell at you. If you didn't do it right, he'd yell louder."

“Management by volume,” she smiled.

“When I was a young guy, I thought it was kind of cool,” he said, walking over to the window. “You yell, and everybody jumps. But he was a mean son of a bitch. He thought everybody was trying to take advantage of him.”

“How much of your management style do you think you absorbed from him?”

Tom looked back and nodded. “I think I probably swallowed the whole enchilada. But now it’s a part of me and I don’t think I can get rid of it. I mean, it would be nice if people liked me, but this is who I am, and it’s probably not going to change.”

“I think you’re going to be surprised,” she said. “But right now, I do see the resemblance. Your first boss, always an influential figure, was totally adversarial. He saw everybody as potential enemies, even his own staff. You have the same tendency. You say competition is to be ‘creamed,’ your sales team needs to be yelled at if their performance is down, your superiors are against you because they didn’t give you your bonus last quarter. . . .”

“But the thing is, it works! I’ve doubled sales since I’ve been here. You can’t argue with success.”

*Yes, you can,* Alice thought to herself. More than once she’d been called on to help a company where a new manager had come in and made a lot of changes that initially looked good, but left a lot of wreckage in their wake. And the toxic culture they’d created sometimes lasted for years.

Out loud, she said, “For starters, your homework this week is to seek out three managers whose style is more low key and inclusive, and describe what types of results they get. When you were 17, your first impression of what leadership and management was all about came from this electronics guy. There’s no blame there. We all get

things laid on us when we're young, but we don't want to be held back by the past. If you really want to move into another way of doing things, we can work on that, and I think you'll find your success will continue."

## **Weeks 5-7: Coaching Goals**

Over the next three weeks, Alice and Tom worked to set and draft three goals. Although his original list was a collection of to-do items and tasks, he quickly grasped the concept of competencies. They reviewed the 360-degree assessment comments and discussed the profiles again with an eye to creating goals for their next phase of coaching work together.

The goals they landed on were straightforward but ambitious:

- Improve interpersonal skills.
- Focus on customers.
- Build effective teams.

## **Improve Interpersonal Skills**

Tom could be aggressive and results oriented, with little awareness of how he affected people. And, because he had been so successful, he believed his way was the right way.

Remedies and homework included:

- Avoid knee-jerk reactions and keep composure while listening. Then, with an understanding of the situation, form a conclusion, communicate a plan, and act on the plan.
- Practice active listening. At the end of a meeting, close by using language that shows you heard what the other person said and ask for affirmation. (For example: "So what you're saying is . . ." or " . . . Did I get that right?")

- Adapt communications to audiences. Mentoring a direct report and presenting at a speaking engagement, for instance, demand different styles of communication.
- Build a purposeful rapport with colleagues at all levels.

## **Focus on Customers**

Tom had to start by building his listening skills; he was often “too busy” to listen.

Remedies and homework included:

- Spend time in the field with sales staff, build rapport with the team, listen to customers’ business needs, and learn to anticipate future needs with the team.
- Diagram the links or processes between employee and customer engagement. This could result in new training and tools.

## **Build Effective Teams**

Tom didn’t reward individual members of his sales team in an effective way. Because he had a focused mindset, he was only now learning to foster open dialogue and manage process.

Remedies and homework included:

- Engage the team in building common goals and mindsets with a game plan.
- Instill the practice of anticipating customer needs and employing innovation and process improvement to meet those needs.
- Mentor and promote two managers.

Executives might offer reason after reason for why they can’t move ahead: too much work, it’s not the right time, they don’t know where to even begin. Tom fit the same mold, but he embraced his goals and committed to doing his homework.

## Weeks 8-10: Star Performers

Tom was in a good mood. He had flown to North Carolina for a NASCAR race over the weekend and was full of talk about the event. His guy, Shel, had come in third, but Tom talked only about his great performance, the speed of the pit crew, and the near-disasters.

When he slowed down a bit, Alice jumped in. “I’m curious. Suppose your guy had a losing streak. Would the owner and the sponsor get on his case—tell him that his job is on the line?”

“No, they would never do that, not on this team. That’s not their style. Everybody supports everybody else, from management on down. Also, it might not be him. Maybe they got a new car. Maybe the car chief made some bad decisions about the engine or the tires. Maybe Shel’s just having a few bad months. Drivers are like any athlete. They can have a bad day, or even a bad year. Or, like they said about the Chicago Cubs, ‘Anybody can have a bad century.’”

They both laughed, and Alice rejoiced at the laughter. Laughter always makes everything go more easily with clients, and it’s a sign that they feel comfortable. Up to now, she had shared few laughs with Tom.

“Besides,” he continued, “they wouldn’t come down on him because he’s their star. You don’t come down on your star.”

Alice leaned forward. “It seems to me that there are a number of stars around here. The members of your sales team are your drivers. They’re the ones who make it all work with your guidance. In the world of sales, both you and your team are stars. Your performance over the last four years is star quality.”

Tom paced behind his desk. “You’re suggesting that maybe I shouldn’t come down on people so much. But what about consequences? There have to be consequences if you have a bad quarter. They have to know that I’m not pleased with them. They have to know their performance is shitty.”

“But you say that a losing streak for a driver might come from several different things. Your team’s performance might be affected by other things too, like new products, competitors, or personal things. You told me Annie had a bad quarter. At that time, her son was in the hospital with spinal meningitis. He almost died.”

He stopped pacing and looked at Alice in surprise. “Aw, damn! Why didn’t she tell me?”

“She tried, but you didn’t want to hear it. She didn’t pursue it because she didn’t think you cared. She’s afraid of losing her job like everybody else. She was afraid that if she told you that she was spending more time with her son and was afraid he might die, that you might let her go, and she needs this job.”

Tom gazed out the window for a long time. Finally, he turned back to Alice. “You’ve given me a lot to think about.”

She nodded. “I know. But you’re handling it. I want to commend you for the work you’ve been doing. You’ve been moving ahead rapidly on the goals we set. And you’re doing it all at the same time you have this demanding job.”

He gave her one of his rare smiles. “Thanks for that, Dr. Alice. I needed that.”

From day one, when Tom talked about the racing team, Alice knew she had something she could use. Her approach to coaching was to be open to using whatever interests or habits she discovered to help guide clients in the direction they wanted to go. The way she saw it, she had some key things going for her:

- the racing team—the teamwork and the way they supported one another, and Tom’s admiration for them
- Tom’s ambition for a promotion and more recognition
- his goal to discover what was missing in his life
- her skill in helping clients work through their blind spots.

On the challenging side, they had:

- The model of his first boss. The impact of that example was still with him 25 years later.
- Tom's resistance to change. He feared that he would become a different person.
- Ironically, his success in doubling sales. Because this had been accomplished before Alice started to coach Tom, he feared that changing his personal style would negatively affect his performance.
- His uncertainty about how to move ahead.

Also on the positive side were Tom's intelligence and ability. Most of Alice's clients were very accomplished people; if she could get their talents and abilities working for change—and she usually could—she knew the outcome would be a good one.

Over the next two weeks, they discussed ways to achieve Tom's goal of expanding his presence in the community through public speaking. They discussed the best venues, how he might present himself given his new insights, and what topics to speak on. Ultimately, he decided to wait until the coaching was over before pursuing speaking engagements.

## **Weeks 11-14: As If**

By week 11, Tom and Alice were back to interpersonal matters. Tom was still worried that if he changed his style with his team, their performance would suffer. He pointed out that they became the best in the industry when he was his old aggressive self. Alice acknowledged his concerns, but assured him that she had never seen performance go down as a result of changes made from coaching; usually, it went up.

But Tom was also worried that any attempts to become “Mr. Nice Guy” would ring false—that he would come across as phony. That's

## Tips for the Reader

Do you recognize one of your coaching clients in Tom? If so, perhaps encourage your client to act *as if* until the client can develop a more authentic tone or manner. Ask them to talk like, and adopt the behaviors of, a more considerate and kind person (maybe even a role model) until it becomes second-nature to them.

But what if the past is holding your client back, like how Tom felt hamstrung by his experience being ordered around by his first manager? Encourage your client to experiment with *responding* instead of *reacting*. You might say, "Don't go with your first instinct; instead, take a few seconds to consider your many options of how you might respond. And, if you can't think of a good way to reply, you might want to keep your contribution to a minimum until you can."

Encourage your client to see their customers as partners, not as conquests. Executives and senior leaders have important business and perhaps sales goals and are motivated to meet them; but the key to long-term success is partnering with customers to better understand and predict their needs. This will ensure your coaching client is ahead of product or service development, and it will make for very appreciative customers who enjoy the partnership and the attention to their needs.

If your client works with people who behave like Tom, encourage your client to be a team player because success builds on success. Encourage your client to boost their colleagues' sense of self and to collaborate in a way that makes the colleague look good. Their colleagues' self-image is fragile, despite that learned harsh manner; if your client can reassure them, your client might be better able to partner with them. Most coaching clients work in ecosystems, and changing the coaching client internally is not sufficient for success. Helping the coaching client set the tone of interactions, and hence the internal dynamics of a colleague, is a great goal.

when Alice introduced him to the “as if” strategy. For the next few weeks, in the privacy of his office, he would practice saying things like, “Can I help you?” or, “Sorry,” or friendly things like, “How was your weekend?” He would say them *as if* he was really concerned; then, after a while, he would begin to sound authentic, and finally he would begin to feel authentic. She assured him they would rehearse until he felt ready to take this out of the office.

## **Week 15: “Please Do More”**

Alice had watched Tom rehearse his interpersonal skills in the privacy of his office. Soon, he had begun to use them out in the company environment.

On the way up to Tom’s office, she passed Annie in the hall.

“Hi, Dr. Alice,” she chirped, smiling.

“Hello, Annie. How’s your son?”

“He’s much better. Doctors say he can go back to school next week.”

“That’s wonderful!”

Annie moved closer and lowered her tone. “You know, somebody else asked me about Ethan yesterday. It was Tom! Tom stopped me in the hall and asked how my boy was. And he was really asking—not just being polite.” She touched Alice’s arm. “Whatever you’re doing with Tom, please do more. It’s working.”

## **Weeks 16-20: Part of the Team**

By week 16, Tom’s practice on interpersonal skills, with Alice’s encouragement, was already beginning to bear fruit.

When she came in for their next session, Tom was all smiles—a big departure from his usual impassive expression.

“OK, Dr. Alice, I just accomplished one of my goals. I just realized what it is I’ve been missing—that nagging feeling we’ve talked about.

“For years, I’ve been wondering if I should just chuck all this and join a racing team. I’ve seen the way that Shel works with his team—everybody knows their job, and they all support each other, from the pit crew to the management. I thought, *What a great thing to be part of a team like that!*”

He shook his head in disbelief. “Now, I’m beginning to see that I can be part of this sales team. I’ve been using the stuff we’ve been practicing, and it’s actually working. People respond to me differently. So yesterday at the meeting, I suddenly realized, *Oh, this is what I’ve been missing. This is what I want!*”

“This is wonderful, Tom. This is a big win!”

“What gets me is that it was so close all the time. All I needed to do was shift the way I relate to people, and suddenly I’m not the bad guy anymore. I’m part of the team. A couple of times, I got annoyed at something, but then I remembered what you said—that I have a choice of how to respond. So, instead of getting pissed off, I responded more calmly. I still disagreed, but without getting all riled up.”

Over the next few weeks, with Alice’s help, Tom continued to hone his interpersonal skills. He watched videos on how to recognize other people’s body language and how to be aware of what his own body language was saying. He also began to employ his hard-won skills to improve his relationships with customers and his sales team.

Tom had thought of customers in terms of predator-prey. Alice reintroduced the concept of customers-as-partners: listening carefully to what they need and what issues they have, then showing them how your products can help them deal with those issues. This involves a constant give-and-take; but in the end, it results in loyal customers who view the company as a helpful partner and collaborator. Of course, this wasn’t all new to Tom—he had simply chosen to dismiss it as an ineffective, less impressive way to make a sale.

In addition, Tom began to work with two members of his sales team on developing their leadership skills. Alice had pointed out that mentoring these new leaders would help him enhance his own leadership skills. It also worked to ease his tendency to micromanage and allowed other managers to take some of the burden, freeing him up to do other things.

With things going well for Tom, Alice suggested they bring the coaching engagement to a close. She reassured him that if he needed support, reminders, or advice on a particular matter, as her former clients often did, all he had to do was call.

## **Week 21: Blind Spots**

Alice had one final session with Tom.

“Dr. Alice, I’m a smart guy, right?”

“Yes, everybody knows that.”

“Well, how come I didn’t see what I see now? Now, I feel like part of the team instead of just being the ass-kicker. Do you know people actually smile when they see me now?”

“And that feels good, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, it does. But how come nobody told me this before? It seems like such an obvious thing.”

She smiled. “To borrow a favorite phrase of somebody I know, ‘They don’t get paid to do that.’ I’m the one who gets paid to do that. And, to answer your first question about why you didn’t see what you were doing, people have blind spots. I’ve worked with some super-smart people, including you, and a lot of them had blind spots. I find those blind spots and set up strategies to work through them.”

He shook his head. “With some people, you have to start from scratch . . . like with the interpersonal stuff.”

## Why Coaching Matters

At the end of each coaching session or engagement, it's helpful to ask your coaching clients, "What stands out to you about our time together?" This can enable you to gain more understanding about their experience and what you can do to refine the process as an executive coach.

For example, to Alice, Tom mentioned that he felt bad for having been a jerk to his team over the years. Now, he wants to see them grow. Through coaching, Tom seemed to have developed greater self-awareness of how he came across to his team and, as a result, had some guilt and remorse. This was a good sign and helpful as a moral compass, but he needed to continue to apply these newfound skills to be a better leader and forgive himself for the past. Alice made a mental note to check on that if they stayed in touch.

"You never gave up on me," Tom said to Alice. "Life is strange and short, and people who stick by you are rare." Some executives and leaders grow to feel isolated as they climb the corporate ladder, with fewer people to lean on for support and more looking to use them for their own advantage. While Alice did find herself frustrated at times by Tom's insensitivity, she hung in there with him, like any successful executive coach needs to. He felt that, and it mattered to him. You'll find yourself working with many clients who are struggling with some personal or professional baggage, so you almost need to have a soft spot for leaders like Tom.

"Yes, you worked hard on that. You worked hard on everything; that's why you're in a different place. Some things seem obvious now, but they didn't a few months ago. Where you are now is due to months of work."

Tom did indeed call Alice up and email her a few times, but it was mostly to report good news. The practice of treating customers as partners was strengthening connections with the company's customers—

and this partnership approach to customers was the executive coach's secret to Tom's success. The mentoring of new leaders was enhancing Tom's own reputation as an accomplished leader, and the new managers were contributing their skills. He was doing more public speaking and including some of the themes they had worked on together. This was another case of a client who sought coaching for one reason, but was able to advance in several areas while enhancing the company's performance.

With Alice's help, Tom was more enthusiastic about work again, about his team smashing their performance record in the last quarter, than about getting a promotion. The joys of coaching lie in sticking with clients through the difficult coaching process and never giving up on their potential.

## Summary

Tom got high marks for his performance as sales manager, but very low marks for his interactions with people. Although Tom was sometimes doubtful that he could change, he worked hard at reaching the goals he set with Alice. During their time together, Tom grew in self-awareness and made significant changes to his leadership style. He began to treat customers as partners instead of targets to take advantage of, and he learned more effective ways of engaging, leading, and rewarding his team—all of which ultimately increased sales.

### Takeaways:

- As a result of skilled coaching, people with extreme behaviors can change, even when they doubt they can.
- In addition to making the workplace more pleasant, personal shifts often result in improvements to the bottom line.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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NADINE GREINER, PHD, is an executive coach with a dual doctorate in organization development and clinical psychology. She has helped more than a thousand people become more effective and fulfilled at work, which has positively rippled out to 10,000 of their colleagues. Recognized for her immense success rate, Nadine has more than 30 years of experience in the field of coaching. In addition to her advanced academic preparation, she has held several high-level positions in privately held and publicly traded companies, and served as CEO at the age of 38. This trifecta of psychology, business, and executive leadership makes her a unique and effective coach who produces excellent results for her clients. Nadine speaks and lectures in postgraduate programs globally.

On a personal note, Nadine is dedicated to animal welfare, and has fostered, rehabilitated, and trained thousands of cats and dogs. Twenty percent of all her profits go to animals. Nadine stays fit by running after them, and by joining the dance party with her friends at Zumba.