





Generating a

giving mindset

How do we, as coaches, develop the sense of human connection that supports our clients and ourselves to move from a fixed to a growth mindset?

By Sally-Anne Airey

“I completely wasted my time!” How often have we heard people say this, or voiced or thought it ourselves? I recall how these words once hung in the air during a one-to-one coaching session with my client (*whom I’ll refer to as Jim*). It was **Jim’s emphatic conclusion to a tale of unrewarded effort.**

A self-employed sales agent whose income was entirely commission-based, to Jim, time was money. He’d spent several weeks deploying considerable knowledge, skills and experience to influence a client to buy an expensive financial product. In return, he’d been expecting a handsome commission from the

product supplier. However, Jim’s client hadn’t told him that in parallel she’d been consulting a broker who’d recommended the same product. She initiated the purchase through the broker, who therefore pocketed the commission.

The scenario wasn’t uncommon – as Jim acknowledged – “You win some, you lose some; people often aren’t straight with you”. However, his frustration with the unfairness of the outcome was palpable.

Jim felt that his customer had sought and valued his reputed advice, yet someone else had benefitted from it. Jim shared that this was the very reason he’d left corporate life. He despised the manipulative behaviours of ‘office politics’ and he’d hoped

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that being self-employed would enable him to live by his own rules and develop a successful business on a platform of ‘good’ principles.

Supporting Jim to embrace the origin and impact of his choices and behaviours was a rich learning experience. Themes of value, personal fulfillment and well-being, and their global impact, found a voice.

Jim wanted to succeed and feel good about it. To him, this meant providing a professional service that helped people optimise their financial affairs. He wanted to add value to people’s lives by sharing his knowledge and expertise. We co-created strategies to help Jim live the life he wanted: benefiting others at less personal cost.

A RECURRING THEME?

In my last eight years as an executive and life coach (and in my previous 23 years as a Royal Navy officer – where a key element of people’s motivation was to give service), themes of purpose and fulfillment have underlaid most of my coaching conversations. In my experience of executive (and life) coaching relationships, workplace performance goals are the tip of a

When I choose to adopt a giving mindset, and I consciously embody this in my heart and gut, I am more inclined to experience humility, compassion and empathy

complex, human iceberg.

Coaching conversations are potentially a rich tapestry of human aspiration.

I’ve reflected, and continue to reflect, on the extent to which my values and beliefs, outlook and focus (and their mutuality), and my ‘way of being’ influence how I coach and, indeed, where I sit on the directive/non-directive coaching spectrum.

Am I following my clients’ direction or subconsciously pulling them towards mine? Or is there a larger consciousness at play?

SCANNING THE BROADER PICTURE

Human resources literature and the findings of numerous surveys point to an upsurge in people seeking personal fulfillment in their life and work. The

CBRE survey report, *Fast Forward 2030: The Future of Work and the Workplace*, concluded that business leaders and young people from Asia, Europe and North America seek happiness, purpose and meaning in their job role, more than financial success (<http://bit.ly/1zzetDn>).

Arianna Huffington, web guru, uber networker and founder of *The Huffington Post*, has redefined success by creating a third metric (alongside power and money) “well-being, wisdom, wonder and giving”.

Jeff Haden, an author and regular contributor to *Inc.* magazine – a well-established American publication focusing on growing companies – has written cogently on the behaviours of highly successful people. These are: honesty, vulnerability, empathy, respect, kindness and genuine pleasure in the success of others. In organisational psychologist Adam Grant’s closing keynote speech to the 2014 CIPD annual conference, he linked a culture of generosity and altruism in organisations to better business performance (<http://bit.ly/1ITvcbw>).

How do these broad waves of embodied possibility correlate with a more narrowly results focused, ‘mechanistic’ modern world? Forty years ago, Fritjof Capra, in *The Tao of Physics*, drew parallels between quantum science and ancient Eastern philosophies. Capra demonstrated that they all share the same world view: of an interconnected universe, a ceaseless flux of living energy of which we are all a part.

In the summer 2015 edition of the

Top tips for developing a giving mindset

● **Mindfulness** The breath is a vehicle that unites our body to our thoughts and brings us back to our body in the present moment. I find regular meditation, even for just a few minutes, helps quieten my thoughts and increase my sense of compassion for myself and others.

● **Practising gratitude** On waking in the morning (and at other times), putting my feet on the floor and saying the word “grateful” to myself silently, and just sitting there for a moment and seeing what happens. Offering a smile to another person whenever I can.

● **Practising kind speech** Especially on challenging occasions.

● **Practising identity action** Recognising that whatever I do, I don’t do it by my own power alone. Whatever I do involves others and the whole world.

● **Practising compassion** Going softly towards, rather than turning away from, the suffering of others, and my own.

