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**A perfect partnership**

**The high performance coaching relationship**

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Imagine that tomorrow you meet someone who you will readily welcome into your life.

This is a very special kind of person, one who looks right past the superficial parts of your personality, your typical defenses, the insecurities you've worked so hard to mask, and the failings you're ashamed to admit, let alone accept.

Imagine that this new person sees all of you and simply accepts you for who you really are –a unique individual who wants to be special, make a contribution, and use their most precious talents to make a real difference in the lives of others. At the same time, this new person also sees how your personality, defenses, and insecurities get in the way of you performing at your best.

This person knows when you subtly sell yourself short in your work and career, in pursuing your passions and dreams, and in your expectations for the future. And she won't let you get away with it any more. She cares about you too much to let this continue.

Because this person sees the real you and cares, she will not accept anything less from you than your very best. With a deep appreciation for who you are, this person confronts you with a level of honesty that does not allow you to deny the truth of your potential. At the same time, she recognizes clearly that this is your challenge –not hers. The only thing that's certain is that she is going to hold you accountable for becoming the very best version of yourself.

What would it be like to have just such a person so completely on your side? Now, imagine what it would be like to be that person for others.

### The Power of Appreciation.

The power of a positive, appreciative relationship is not a recently discovered principle of human behavior. Socrates and Plato both believed that all individuals possessed inherent wisdom and talents, and could make significant contributions to humanity by focusing on and developing their gifts.

In modern Western thought, the idea can be traced back to the 1950's, most notably in the work of psychologist Carl Rogers. Rogers believed strongly that a climate of trust and respect was essential to facilitating a person's ability to develop in a positive and constructive manner. He created a therapeutic model around this theory which he called client-centered therapy. "If I can provide a certain type of relationship," Rogers explains. "The other person will discover within him/herself the capacity to use that relationship for growth and change, and personal development will occur."

Rogers' theory garnered much attention among psychologists in the 1950's and 1960's, and it remains influential today to the practice of high performance coaching in the workplace.

In 1987, David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva published a ground-breaking paper entitled "Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life."

In it, they outlined what they called the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) method for organizational change and development. Essentially, AI takes Rogers' ideas about client-centered therapy and applies them to organizations instead of individuals. As its name suggests, AI aims to identify, support, and perpetuate the very best in an organization through structured questioning.

The authors recognized the motivation people gain from their own visions of success and suggested that pointing out and celebrating success in an organization, rather than focusing on flaws and failures, resulted in greater improvement in overall performance. According to Cooperrider and Srivastva, "organizations change in the direction in which they inquire."

An organization which looks for problems to fix will find and focus on problems; one which seeks out the positive things within itself will succeed in identifying all that is already working well and therefore can focus on doing more of those things.

Even in the most difficult of times, we can find signs of life and hope if we look for them. The things we choose to pay attention to and the attitude we have toward change and development can make all the difference to the results we get. Whether our focus is on the individual or the organization, performance improves when we focus on our successes, talents, passions and the future potential which exists.

## The Expectation/Performance Connection.

Consider for a moment the people with whom you work most closely. Who would you classify as your A players? Your B players? What distinguishes these groups from one another? What characteristics are shared by A players? What do the B players have in common? What thoughts do you have most frequently about each group?

Now consider this: they know how you rate them.

Whether you express your assessments verbally or not, the people on your team have a pretty good idea into which category you have placed them. We're always more transparent than we would like to believe; the truth is we communicate our opinions quite clearly, often unconsciously, through a variety of verbal and non-verbal cues.

For example, we will change the tone of our voice depending on whom we are addressing. Or, we will avoid eye contact with some while granting others our full attention. More often than not, the people around us know what we think of them and – here is the crux of coaching – people live up to or down to our expectations of them.

When we think of others as unmotivated, incompetent, or unintelligent, they know it and will typically resent us for it. They will dislike working with us and will attempt to avoid us whenever possible.

However, when we think of others as unique, talented, and developing, people know this as well and will respond accordingly: they will like how they feel about themselves in our presence. They will desire to work with us, and will grant us their discretionary effort. They will allow us concessions they will not allow of others. We will have gained their loyalty – a rare commodity today.

If we want to coach others for exceptional performance, we begin by thinking well of them. Only then can we heighten their awareness of their value, strength, and performance potential. By bringing an appreciative attitude into our relationships, we help others overcome the limits they have imposed upon themselves, and significantly expand the possibilities available to them. Great coaching leaves a legacy of people who know their greatest strengths and as a result, have the internal motivation to seek opportunities in which to deploy them.

## A Perfect Partnership.

The high performance coaching relationship is a Perfect Partnership: it is a relationship that sees others at their very best; challenges them to examine their own gifts, talents and aspirations; and ultimately, holds them accountable to become the very best version of themselves.

Try This: Think of one person with whom you work. What untapped potential do you see

in them that they might not see in themselves? Make a point to tell them today. Find one opportunity to do this each day until it becomes a leadership habit. Notice how people change in their relationship with you.

*Based on an excerpt from "Unleashed!: Expecting Greatness and Other Secrets of Coaching for High Performance."*