BREAKTHROUGH COACHING PROCESSES

Coaching for Future Performance

The presentation below is designed to be useful for individuals, groups, managers and coaches. Our experience with breakthrough coaching processes has been both with our own organization and with clients over the past twenty years.

Breakthrough coaching processes are designed to help individuals and teams transform their success frame of reference. Although breakthrough coaching processes may seem to be just a new approach or methodology for establishing and reaching performance goals, it's transformational strength lies in its capacity to thoroughly remodel the way individuals and systems evaluate past successes and establish future challenges.

Basically, the breakthrough coaching process presented below is an approach designed to help modify individual, team and organization operational perspectives through fundamental shifts of individual and collective performance frames of reference. Consequently, the breakthrough coaching process is tailored to raise personal and collective expectations, and to reach unprecedented measurable quality levels, savings and/or profit-oriented results.

Over the last two decades, breakthrough coaching processes has measurably proved their worth by helping clients in industrial and service industries increase their quality and profits by double digits on a yearly basis. Individuals and teams can implement breakthrough coaching processes when setting goals no matter their business context, their environment, their culture and their history. In order to give concrete examples in the course of this article, however, we will present applications of the breakthrough coaching process in the hospitality and restaurant industry.

Before we describe an example of breakthrough coaching processes below, we will share some general observations on the way a large number of corporations go about doing business and on the difference between **management** and **leadership** when corporations go about setting goals for themselves, for their teams and their personnel.

THE BUDGET APPROACH IN MANAGEMENT

Performing managers typically evaluate all their available means in order to set their goals, whereas performing leaders first set extraordinary goals and then motivate everyone to find or develop previously unavailable means to reach and then surpass them.

In general and in mature organizations, most goal setting and measurement of achievements are implemented with a management approach, or are based on available means. This is commonly done through and with the budgeting process. Consequently, operational goals and results for a given period are usually established and measured against the budget established for that period within the following standardized framework:

- The time frame commonly used for budgets is the fiscal year.
- Budgets are usually discussed in a hierarchical context.
- Budgets are usually measured against the results of the previously completed year, and take into account perceived or expected future contextual variations.

This linear approach, based on the past to define the present and project into the future can be illustrated as below:



This goal-setting process rests on logically comparable spans of time. It permits a reasonably solid measure of the evolution of results from year to year as they hopefully grow, sometimes remain stagnant or recede, year to date. this process permits the comparison between similar months and seasons which theoretically should allow equivalent activity on specific local markets.

In most organizations, other subjective factors unrelated to past time spans and market cycles are also covered. They are focused on projections into the coming fiscal year or time span:

- Some reasonable subjective or objective allowances are made for suspected or predictable market variations and organizational evolutions or transformations.
- Managers attempt to build in some maneuverability by negotiating more or less comfortable spaces and cushions into their budgets,

pessimistically predicting difficulties.
- Executives use the budgeting process to put these same managers under pressure by optimistically predicting more facility, room for savings or growth and the need for more efficiency in management and organization.

The trend is therefore for executives to attempt to "tighten" and stretch budgets to make them more challenging, while managers and personnel negotiate to "loosen" them, working in more maneuverability. This process often takes the form of a "power game", as different career and political strategies come into play. As a result, budget negotiation is regularly taken for several re-negotiating loops, sometimes wasting precious time and creating a sense of frustration between personnel, management, and executives.

Another both subjective and analytical dimension is commonly part of the budgeting process. An in-depth study of the past year's activity and results is often undertaken to validate the differing points of view regarding the projected year. Often an integral part of "Participative Management by Objectives" this analytical process may be subject to the following interactions which often resemble a game of "Courtroom":

- The organization's executives will underline past actions that could have been taken by management to avert difficulties and improve the previous year's results, and will conclude by stressing the urgent need for better performance the coming year.
- The same organization's management will "defend" its case by underlining unexpected difficulties, underestimated means and low support from hierarchy in the past, and unpredictable negative environmental influences and pressure in the future.

As a result, this whole "justification process" often becomes psychological and emotional "joust" cosmetically presented as a technical and analytical approach. Consequently, the budget process is often felt to be time and energy consuming. The tension resulting from it can often have a more or less permanently negative influence on relationships within the organization, creating or reinforcing a perception and communication gap between executives and personnel.

An American journalist once said "history will prove Nixon was a great president". That comment really reveals the subjective nature of history. If we can later say that what happened at some point in time is actually the opposite of what happened when it happened, then where does the truth lie? How can we say a president must be impeached, and then later say he was great? The fact is, history is rewritten every time there is a need to validate a new and different present. Art trends will make great artists out of unknown painters, often much too late for them to profit from the glory. Great composers of multiple pasts are now hardly remembered, and may later be rediscovered and glorified. Also trust that Tito's role in the history of Yugoslavia has been rewritten to validate the present dismemberment of that country in very different ways depending on the concerned newly created state. Other history books will have to be rewritten if ever strife ever really stops in Northern Ireland, if Islamists really take control of Turkey or Morocco, etc..

We therefore all redefine our pasts to validate our ever-changing presents. But what if our present was different? And what real effect does this justification process need to have on our possible futures? All in all, however, the budgeting process is commonly used and widely considered a satisfactory management tool. Over the years and in different organizations, it has been fine-tuned and has permitted systems to progressively set higher and higher goals and implement measurable progress with a reasonable degree of satisfaction. More often than not, comparison to budget has also been one of the preferred measures of organizational success for executives and managers. Depending on the maturity of a product and its market, results below and beyond budget are also compared with market share, the competition and other organizations in similar fields so as to measure benchmarked success or failure.

When the comparison with competition is advantageous, managers and teams will obtain recognition and rewards in the form of well-earned incentive perks, plaques, raises and promotions. Less advantageous results compared to budget and market share will justify less-motivating reactions such as indifference or corrective action that may go so far as termination or calling in specialists that will rapidly and radically re-engineer the system.

Consequently, the budgeting process and the decisions it may justify often has a decisive influence on compensation and careers. This largely explains the intensely emotional communication processes that yearly accompany the year-end budget period in most organizations.

THE HISTORICAL IMPERATIVE

The budgeting process has a more subtle and less conscious influence on goal setting and organizational results. Due to the importance it places on the preceding year in the preparation of the approaching one, the budget process rests on an underlying limiting frame of reference which strongly influences executives, management and personnel.

Consider the following usual steps, commonly undertaken in most systems:

1. Previous year's results are finalized and scrutinized.
2. An in-depth analysis of these results is undertaken to evaluate management and personnel competency.
3. Other factors and analysis concerning the expected context, market and projects for the following year are worked in.
4. Based on this analysis, a "challenging" percentage of improvement is applied by executives to make the following year's potential tangible.

5. This percentage applied to the previous year's numbers determines the following year's budget and/or goals.



For example in a restaurant: 50 Restaurant Covers (Average Occupancy) X 10% increase = 55 Covers Average (Occupancy Goal).

Unfortunately, although the centerpiece of this process primarily involves numbers, it also very deeply influences the frame of reference of all people concerned.

The process implicitly conveys an underlying assumption: management and personnel will improve on the previous year's results. That generally does not imply that past work methods should be radically reconsidered.

Indeed, the budget process invariably conveys the assumption that the organization's previous year work methods, by and large, were reasonably valid. These are kept and improved to deliver some marginal gains. The strategic conclusion for future operations is that teams and personnel should make a greater effort, doing the same thing, very much in the same way, but better.

In most organizations, when the previous year's results have been reasonably good, the work methods which permitted them are rarely fundamentally questioned nor revisited. “When it works, don’t fix it”, as the saying goes. Maybe improve on it, but that is still based on preserving past basic assumptions.

This thought process may not prove to be too counterproductive over a short period of one or two years in a market or activity displaying a slow or normal evolution and soft competition. But "reasonable" improvement from year to year may ultimately be the key reason for an organization's slow and long-term slide into slumber and obsolescence.

In any field, over a period of ten to fifteen years, one can expect at least one important breakthrough that could completely restructure the market, reposition organizations, revisit business models, make and break companies. If an organization’s yearly progress is limited to gradual improvement of established results and processes, the result may be far from a strategy keep up with radically new discoveries and exploding technologies. A five percent marginal improvement over twenty years almost invariably leads to obsolescence.

More often than not, organizations seem to need an unexpected and major crisis or the admittance of obvious failure to start considering radical change in their work methods and processes. That type of crisis-based radical change is often provoked by irate shareholders or owners, accompanied by a complete change of the executive team. It is generally followed by major organizational upheavals and thorough re-engineering.

It seems rare that an established management team will "naturally" undertake a fundamental reconsideration of its business model if it is perceived as "satisfactory" or merely “improvable”. As a matter of habit, when results are reasonable, there is no reason for anyone to change work methods and thereby set extraordinary challenges that will overwhelmingly surpass preceding years.

What numerous organizations obviously need is a challenging internal goal setting process that can stimulate management and personnel and focus the system on exponential growth in spite of reasonable success.

What also seems to be obvious is that the "routinely" budgeting process described above does not seem to be enough to create the same sense of urgency as that provoked by a crisis situation. Consequently, the budget process is not enough to create the context to achieve extraordinary results, from year to year. As a matter of fact, beyond its highly emotional value and its links to compensation, the budget process could sometimes even be considered a tedious and boring accounting ritual.

Another basic assumption implicit to the budgeting process is that top executives naturally need to push for progress while their managers and personnel will naturally resist. The budgeting process reinforces a top-down approach to management which could be extremely counterproductive if real operational creativity and progress were to actually come from the personnel. It is interesting to note the fundamentally contradictory natures between budgeting processes in most organizations and the lip service paid to delegation and empowerment.

Our contention is that the budgeting process has not proved to be a successful goal-setting tool in that it implicitly limits possible progress to merely searching for marginal improvements of known and tested work methods: those that were implemented the preceding years. Fundamentally, it proves to be a stable and very conservative management process which keeps the lid on potential development in the hands of a limited number of career-oriented executives.

The budget process carries another implicit frame of reference. It follows too closely the traditional linear and causal view of time and events. Typically, in this view, what happens first influences what happens later. In this way, our past has influenced if not caused our present, which in turn is going to cause or influence our future. In effect, if I am who I am today, it is because of my past. But what if the radically different future I define for myself today could totally influence everything I choose to do from now on? What if it was my future that could most influence my present?

To conclude on the "conservative" effect of the budgeting process on goal setting, we wish to clearly underline that

- it is a very useful managing or accounting tool which can bring a measure of predictability in slow growing and reasonably stable organizations,
- it is definitely not a very powerful future-oriented and challenging leadership process.

To obtain outstanding results in organizations, a complementary, different and much more challenging goal-setting process is needed: one that would permit leaders to develop a context

- for a more ambitious search for completely if not radically new work methods
- and help personnel set themselves extremely challenging goals to obtain unexpected performance results.

To set yearly goals people and organizations may also need a breakthrough coaching process that can bypass or supplant the "budgeting" frame of reference and stimulate managers and teams to completely revisit their personal and collective frames of reference (values, behaviors, principles, beliefs, habits, etc.).

THE BREAKTHROUGH COACHING PROCESS

Over the years a breakthrough coaching process has gradually been developed and experimented. It has often permitted a huge surge in both personal and organizational results. Note that the breakthrough coaching process also can permit very radical change in such subjective areas such as extraordinary surges in quality, client satisfaction, motivation and employee satisfaction.

Although the breakthrough coaching process first rests on the budgeting process described above, it goes beyond that preliminary accounting and management procedure. Before going for the breakthrough process, we therefore suggest that one still complete the well-known "budgeting procedure":

- Obtain all possible correct and pertinent figures for the previous year(s).
- Establish the coming year budget by setting challenging goals, without getting too emotionally involved. (Remember that it is only an accounting procedure).

Then go on to the next five steps, treating them in that precise order. This is an exciting procedure that really consists in creating new and different performance frames of reference for both individuals and teams

1. Define measurable **ultimate potentials** for each pertinent budget line or realm of responsibility, in terms of quality, earnings and savings, to influence both top and bottom lines.

2. Establish exciting **breakthrough challenges** in each of these realms, starting with the most urgent, or the ones that will give the highest immediate return.

3. Search for all new and creative means which can be immediately available and cheaply applicable. Then choose the **one or two means** that seem the most efficient, which can be immediately implemented.

4. For each of these means, design an action plan and **tracking tools** that will ensure daily or weekly measures for follow-up.

5. Start **immediately.**

These steps are detailed below. The guidelines are those found useful in different contexts. These, of course may not all apply to any one particular person, team or organization.

1. DEFINE AN ULTIMATE POTENTIAL

The first step in coaching a breakthrough process in the way a system sets goals is to stop thinking in terms of past achievement, no matter how successful these in fact were.

All the information concerning the past year, the numbers, their analysis and other evaluations are only useful as measures. These are just information and frames of reference pertinent to the past.

To implement a breakthrough coaching process, we strongly suggest this information be completed and put in perspective by another set of numbers that can and should influence "possible futures". These numbers first put a concrete measure on what can be called "ultimate potentials".

An "ultimate potential" is the result a person, a team or an organization determines they could ultimately achieve in the best of all possible worlds, with the basic means they already have at their disposal.

In short, if we produced our best quality and quantity, with the lightest and thriftiest organization, if we wasted nothing and if we very effectively sold it all at the highest acceptable market price how much could be earned? The questions that could be asked to define "ultimate potentials" for individuals, teams and organizations include some of the following:

What could be the results…?

- If we sold out every day of the year at the highest possible rate.
- If I were fully trained and as efficient as possible in my field.
- If we had total effectiveness in purchase and management of raw materials.
- If I organized myself to become fully time-efficient.
- If we produced full throttle, three shifts a day, all year.
- If I managed my team in a way that maximized each person's motivation.
- If we had zero defects, returns, client complaints.
- If we had just-in-time production and delivery (zero inventory and deadlines).
- If we had zero waste, loss and/or theft.
- If each individual developed and implemented full personal capability and professional competency.

In other words, if a person, a team or an organization were to become the worldwide uncontested innovative benchmark reference for success in a given field, what measurable results could be achieved?

GUIDELINES

First, having coached work on ultimate potentials with a large number of people, teams and organizations, we have found that some basic guidelines can help a lot. They can make the difference between reasonable success and a really remarkable splash.

- For one, it is important to stress that ultimate potentials are not goals. A car may be able to run at 170mph. That is its ultimate potential. It is useful to know a car's ultimate potential, but it is not necessarily one's goal to drive at 170mph. Some people and teams are scared to define their ultimate potentials because they are scared that someone will then tell them they have to reach for it. Consequently, admitting to an ultimate potential is not the equivalent of defining a goal.
- As much as possible, the ultimate potentials of a person, team or organization should be "locally" defined. Ultimate production potentials should be defined by the production teams, ultimate sales potentials by the sales teams, and ultimate potentials in administrative efficiency or savings by the administrative teams. Time and again, we have been faced with situations where executives and management and executives grossly underestimate the ultimate potential of sub-parts of their own organization's. Le the personnel do their work evaluating what they really have in their guts and hands.

Consequently, the top-down approach that consists in telling people what to do and how to do it has time and again proven to be conducive to resistance, passivity and mediocre results. People and teams get more excited when they define and reach for their own futures, in their own way. This is central in all breakthrough coaching processes. As a matter of fact, the fist step in delegation is probably to let people be responsible for defining their own potential. It is theirs to begin with.

When in a breakthrough coaching process, each person and team in a system defines its own ultimate potential, it is more likely to really get excited about it, look for creative means to reach it, and then go for it. This works much better than when executives and managers tell their personnel and teams what to do. It is much more motivating for a team to own its goals. It will then own the energy, strategies and processes to try to reach them successfully.

Furthermore, we have observed that people and teams often choose to go for exceptional potentials that are not even perceived or dreamed of by their hierarchy or by headquarters. We have often discovered that people know their jobs much better and judge their ultimate potentials as being much higher than would their own peers or their own management.

- In this context, management's role is to define a context or create the environment for the ultimate potentials to be expressed, and discussed. The breakthrough coaching process works only when it is delegated to teams and individuals.

Consequently, we strongly suggest that budget-oriented managers stay away from their team when it is discussing and defining ultimate potentials, only to re-appear later. In management's absence, a team's search for ultimate potentials can develop a sense of excitement more conducive to developing responsibility and ownership.

Staying informed on the process and on all progress is of course necessary for management, and prior sharing with the team all the financial and technical information useful to the endeavor is an excellent way to fuel it for success.

- Personnel and teams should be encouraged to define ultimate potentials on all lines of possible quality improvement ultimate, possible income increase (sales) ultimate and possible expense reduction (savings) ultimate, possible time-to-market reduction ultimate, etc.. Some of these may have a more measurable impact and therefore should be considered priority, but care should be given to avoid the easy satisfaction of exploring one obvious line of work, and forgetting other angles for dramatic improvement.

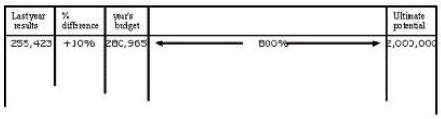
- Ultimate potentials should be defined in very materialistic terms of tangible measures and monetary value. Teams that have too often worked on vague value systems and general mission statements may unknowingly take that same avenue. The breakthrough process concerns very concrete and measurable or operational financial and quality results. This is where knowing measures such as budget numbers is useful. Simply put, ultimate potentials are just really extraordinary and somewhat idealistic, measurable an tangible operational results.

- Definitions of ultimate potential must take into account the shareholder's long-term view of financial results, and the market or client's view of quality product and service at a fair price. Achieving ultimate potential cannot happen through self-centered or short-term and unfair value-for-

money ratios. In other words, one cannot cheat or fool one's way to long-term success. Real performance is sustainable.

As the team determines each ultimate potential, we suggest that it start a chart or graph that will later be useful in determining breakthrough challenges.

The following graph is an example which concerned a photographic equipment sales team that was considering one of its less glamorous and forgotten products. For the considered product, the sales team members decided that although they did not have a dominant part of the national market, they could really conquer most of it if they really set their minds to it. So the ultimate potential was evaluated at about 70% of the total national market (because of the company structure, that team was not allowed to go international**).**



The last number to compute is the percentage difference between the coming year's budgeted "goal" and the perceived ultimate potential. In the above case the budget that could be considered difficult to reach, a full 10 percent more than the previous year, turned out to be "only" 13 % of perceived ultimate potential. In other words, this team's perceived ultimate potential is close to 800% of its budgeted "goal".

This example may seem excessively dramatic. It is real. As some teams define their ultimate potential line by line on all their different products, possible savings quality and delivery improvements, they will time and again discover areas where there is room for dramatic improvement. Although we have not kept any statistics, average ultimate "room for improvement" may be around 200 % of budget, many teams finding areas where some 400% can be gained.

Another example concerns a restaurant: Average number or covers per day for the previous year may be 105. Budget goal of 10% increase would be 111. What if the restaurant's seating capacity is 120 seats? Just one cover per seat per meal would ensure an ultimate potential of 360 covers.



Then again, that same team could define that the ultimate potential could be to serve two covers in the same seats for two of the meals. That would define their ultimate potential as 600 covers.

Determining ultimate potential and playing with numbers in the above fashion often has a very dramatic effect. It provides individuals and groups a major change of perspective. Individuals and teams no longer look at their work in terms of what they have achieved in the past but in terms of what ultimately could be done if everyone really wanted to maximize existing potentials. The relative satisfaction of past achievements is put in the perspective of the excitement to tap into unexplored territory and shoot for the stars.

Only once this preparatory task is completed on all pertinent lines of perceived areas for development can the time be ripe for the individual or team to go on to the next suggested step in the breakthrough coaching process.

2. DETERMINE A BREAKTHROUGH CHALLENGE

The question to be asked again and again in this part of the process is "what could really be a challenging goal for this year, considering the gap between budget and what is perceived as "ultimate potential".

As we have seen above, an ultimate potential is not a goal. In our above examples, a goal could be the budget figure, but is that really challenging? In our experience, every individual and team has the capacity to set itself a breakthrough challenge which exists somewhere between their budgeted goal and their newly perceived ultimate potential.

Intuition, motivation and teamwork are central elements in determining a good, motivating and achievable challenge. Team motivation will strive to push the goal up towards the ultimate potential, team intuition will try and keep the number within a feasible range and often, fear of the unknown, joking, conservatism, management pressure or complacency will tend to drive the goal down to safer, more reasonable or comfortable levels.

At this point, coach-type powerful questioning, again and again challenging the underlying feelings and motivations behind any quoted number and extensive discussion will help individuals and team members define the one goal with which they feel excited, motivated, and reasonably uncomfortable.

GUIDELINES

This goal-setting or challenge process should be carried out in the presence of the team leader, assuming that person doesn't have too much of a dampening conservative effect nor one that would push the team to aim for excessively lofty goals perceived by the team as fundamentally unrealistic.

In this phase of the work, the leader's position should be one of testing and questioning, to help determine the real number that all feel they can strive for.

Another important guideline in this part of the process is to avoid falling into the trap of discussing means or methods for achieving a challenge before it is set. Goal setting and searching for means are two different processes that should be kept separate.

Example: J. F. Kennedy's decision to send man to the moon within ten years, and bring him back safely, came way before the precise way to get there was clearly defined. As a matter of fact, the technology to get a man to set foot on the moon was developed only after the goal was set.

The difference stressed here underlines again an important difference between leadership and management. Leaders often "go for" challenges which are perceived by the environment as impossible and which drive everyone to look for new means to reach them. These means are often unknown or unavailable at the time the challenge is set. Consequently,

- Leaders are first concerned with setting motivating challenges and then with finding, developing or fighting for the means necessary to reach them.
- Managers are first concerned with evaluating all the available means, and then with setting the goal that they can securely, reasonably or "comfortably" reach.

Managers use all available means to reach their goals
Leaders use goals that motivate everyone to find or
develop new extraordinary means

Again, discussing and setting challenges in a breakthrough coaching process is most usefully done in a team setting and discussed with management or executives. Collective questioning and testing of each challenge and each person's position will help the group clarify engagement and motivation. The issue is not so much to focus on the value of the numbers as such but to clearly position where each feels there is too much comfort, a real challenge, or a goal that is way too far out of reach.

The ensuing breakthrough coaching dialogue can be about risk management, capacity to put one's neck on the line, fear of failure, the right to make mistakes, and difficulty at projecting oneself out of a known, tried and tested perimeter. In as much as the discussion takes place in the presence of the team leader, it can help everyone define internal processes and "rules and regulations" to ensure success.

Ultimately and ideally, of course, each challenge above budget should be set by the person or by the team directly responsible for achieving it. Care must be given to ensure that the questioning and discussing process does not slip into a collective or hierarchical pressure to impose stressful goals on others.

The nest step in the breakthrough coaching proces is to choose the main challenges which will provide the highest most immediate result in each field.

In this part, we usually suggest that the team develop a strong bias for choosing challenges that are in fields shared by two or more team members, across areas of responsibility or departmental boundaries.

- Raising average price or rates may include Marketing, Sales and Accounting.
- Raising quality may include Purchasing, Operations, Training.
- Speeding up delivery may include Sales, Operations, and Engineering.
- Cutting down on legal fees could include Operations, HR, and Sales.

We have regularly noticed that most really challenging team goals can be better achieved when team members, services or departments interface better or differently. Dramatic increase in results in collective settings can be best achieved if different team members or experts cooperate better than they have in the past. When teams set themselves new dramatically challenging goals, team members suddenly face the obligation to work together in new and different configurations.

In the breakthrough coaching process, we usually suggest that sub-groups or task-forces form to define the two or three main challenges that offer the highest immediate leverage or return on investment (quality, time, manpower, money…).

Consequently, we suggest these same task forces "break out" to work on the next steps focused on transforming the challenges into solid action plans. These are then to be presented to the larger team for improvement, confrontation and validation. Of course, it is useful that these task forces include all the people concerned by the breakthrough coaching process so as to develop a large base for analysis, motivation, involvement, and ownership.

3. BRAINSTORM NEW MEANS AND PLAN IMMEDIATE ACTION

Outrageously new challenges need extraordinary new means. These means need to be as immediately practical as possible. This part of the breakthrough coaching process consequently needs to be a very practical brainstorming sequence.

- We have often witnessed teams that enjoy indulging in very vague and general "brainstorming" rituals. Under the excuse that all ideas must be retained, participants volunteer broad concepts such as vertical integration, values such as honesty, buzz words such as cooperation, commitment or empowerment that are rarely of any specific use. At best, the team will then propose to brainstorm each of the items to figure out what they mean or what to do with them.

To be successful, a brainstorming process for new means to reach a challenging goal must be well defined and precisely action-oriented. Consequently, individuals and team need to avoid accepting a general principle such as "cut expenses", but should push for a more detailed and practical way to cut a specific expense in a precise way, within a clear deadline.

Consequently, for each idea proposed by any one team member and before volunteering another idea, the whole group needs to participate by suggesting specific areas, actions, numbers, deadlines. This is what we call "practical action brainstorming".

- Experts in each field play an important role during and after the brainstorm as really practical options are more easily evaluated and designed by team members that have professional competency and some history on each subject.
- Paradoxically, newcomers with obviously impractical solutions can often waltz a team of old timers into new and different thought processes, so also practice listening!
- As with any creative process, lateral thinking can help find new solutions to well known situations and problems that the team has learned to accept over the years.

The practical brainstorm process of action plans needs to be followed by a concrete and measurable evaluation of the possible time, head count or financial savings, sales increase and quality results each of the actions can deliver.

This part of the breakthrough coaching process will permit the team and the members responsible for each of the areas to choose the actions that need to be initiated in priority in order to achieve the highest immediate result and reach the breakthrough challenge. Heavier, time-consuming and unsure action plans can be pushed back to an ulterior date, after the first more reliable and immediately efficient ones are launched and well on their way.

- Paradoxically we have often found that the best ideas in most organizations are old ideas, which consist in really going back to basics and doing it thoroughly, for a change. So we sometimes suggest a brainstorm of obvious ideas that all know and nobody implements.

Note that most organizations that are “turned around” into a brighter and more successful future with double-digit profit increases are simply refocused on their main professional markets, on their core business. Getting rid of the expensive or superfluous frills and re-focusing on perfectly delivering one’s core business is often the best road to success.

4. DESIGN FOLLOW UP AND TRACKING SYSTEMS

This step is paradoxically the one that doesn't get enough interest. It is nonetheless a central key for long term success with the breakthrough coaching process. It concerns designing tools by which individuals and teams will regularly measure the long-term follow-up of a success-oriented strategy.

- Success rest on a well implemented simple idea much more than on a brilliant concept with no follow-up. Too often have we witnessed people and teams who love to dream. They call it a creative process. These individuals and systems are extremely motivated at fixing lofty goals and brainstorming new exciting challenges and processes. Unfortunately, the track record in terms of long term implemented and successful results is often dismal.

A few months after an exciting project is kicked off, a large number of teams lose interest for their lofty goals and slide back to old daily routines that lead to the usual average results. Consequently, beyond setting new challenges and implementing new means to reach them, the breakthrough coaching process includes means to ensure that individual and team motivation and energy stays constantly focused on the breakthrough goals. This is a long-term effort.

Successful individuals and teams are, do, become and achieve what they measure. One of the best ways for a team to ensure its long-term goal-oriented success is to give each of its members regular and precise feed back. This information is focused on the personal contribution and how it specifically adds to the collective results in each breakthrough challenge.

- It is interesting to consider that the higher the position a person holds in an organization, the longer the conceptual time-span this person is "programmed" to handle. Executives are trained to deal with yearly or longer-term strategies. They negotiate their salaries and benefits on a yearly basis, often with longer-term bonus packages. Conversely, the lower the position one has in the organizational ladder, the shorter the practiced conceptual time-span. Hourly employees are paid weekly, and the tasks they are asked to handle are repetitious or at best designed on very short-term cycles. Uncooked food is immediately returned to the kitchen, and low-quality service gets immediate feedback from the disgruntled client.

With this observation in mind, we systematically suggest that production and service teams design very short feedback loops on status of results concerning the breakthrough goals they really wish to reach.

The following example permitted substantial savings in a hotel that wished to lower the financial loss provoked by "lost" or destroyed linen (mainly face towels). A meeting with all the personnel concerned defined the problem, set the goal (0 loss), and designed the tracking system. The system was to follow up on the towels distributed to the housekeeping personnel and returned to laundry, per house-person, per floor, per week, all year. The following type of chart was posted in a back-of-the-house hallway and kept up to date for all to see and comment.

WEEK:	1	2	3	4	5	.....
Employee A						
Employee B						
Employee C						
Employee D						
....						
TOTAL $ COST						

Within a month following the beginning of this tracking process, linen loss dropped by seventy five percent. The progress continued over the next few months and total loss stabilized at close to 5 % of its original level.

This chart gave the personnel immediate information on the results much in the same way a dashboard posts information for a driver. Each house-person took regular corrective action so as to see the influence it would have on the charts. As the results improved for some, others informed themselves as to how it was done, and took the same actions, sometimes improving on them, and then in turn informed others.

Pertinent posted tracking helps people become goal or results oriented. Posting results drives people in a much more focused way than telling them what to do in terms of means. In the above situation, a traditional organization with a classical management frame of reference would have designed a tight control process and imposed it on the personnel, and reaped all the negative side effects.

Posted tracking systems centered on results focus people on goals and give them the freedom to be creative and constantly develop their own more performing means.

The following example of follow-up charts was posted in the back halls of a restaurant chain. The management had bought into the breakthrough challenge process and implemented it with its personnel. One of the agreed strategies for high and immediate return was that all the waiters needed to up-sell. If each waiting staff correctly advised clients as to buying wine, appetizers and deserts, the organization evaluated that the ultimate potential increase in sales volume and profits neared 100% or more.

The following chart was designed by the waiters themselves and set up by shift and in each restaurant so as to compare collective evolution. These were posted in the back-hallways of all the outlets, and kept up-to date by the restaurant supervisors.

Team A: AVERAGE COVER PER PERSON

WEEKDAY:	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL
WAITSTAFF						
Employee A covers						
Av. check	$	$	$	$	$	
Employee B covers						
Av. check	$	$	$	$	$	
Employee C covers						
Av. check	$	$	$	$	$	

The weekly totals for each of the teams and each of the outlets were charted on other graphs so as to give all pertinent actors an overview of the organization's total sales evolution as time went by. Comparison between the teams and restaurants stimulated a form of healthy competition that drove the sales up even more. Over a six-month period, profits doubled.

A later version of the chart also included a line that showed the amount of tip each wait-staff would earn on a 15% hypothesis. In this way each was constantly reminded that up-selling also directly influenced personal income.

Comparisons allowed by the charting process stimulated each to learn and implement the techniques that proved most efficient for the best selling individuals. Still later, nation-wide best sellers were given recognition by becoming trainers that were to teach other people and outlets how to do it.

People become or achieve what they measure.

5. ACT NOW !

Every wasted day is money lost! The breakthrough coaching process generally stimulates individuals and teams to the point that these want to implement their changes immediately. They get to work in the realms with the highest and quickest return without delay. Their awareness of possible immediate returns creates a sense of urgency that stimulates individuals and teams through quick planning and into immediate action.

Consequently, the deadlines for implementing action are often now, tonight or next week. If the deadlines are consistently "next month" or within two months or more, it may be useful to check again to see where the breakthrough coaching process was poorly implemented. Are the actions really focused on the core business? Are the means too vague or too conceptual? Is the tracking process too complex? Is the whole breakthrough coaching process introduced top-down? Have the people and teams worked transversally?

Some organizations have a habit of dealing with change by creating long-term focus groups or steering committees that meet over a long period of time and bring suggestions that are tested for too long before any real action is implemented, if ever. The breakthrough coaching process avoids this. The regular result for all concerned personnel is that they feel the urgency to act now, implement immediately, measure their first results this coming week.

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