

## What it is

A series of articles, best practices, and tools for engaging in a transformational approach to any kind of coaching interaction

## What it can do

This tool can help leaders, consultants and coaches:

- Learn and apply a model for transformational coaching
- Learn best practices and tools to create better, more powerful results in their coaching interactions

## How it works

The Transformational Coaching Toolkit includes the following articles, best practices and tools:

1. *The ASPIre Coaching Model*
2. *Coaching the Shift*
3. *Coaching for Alignment*

You can download the articles in this series, and many other tools for transformation, at: [atctools.org/resources/tools-for-transformation](http://atctools.org/resources/tools-for-transformation)

*This is the 1<sup>st</sup> article of 3 in the Transformational Coaching Toolkit series.  
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The notion of coaching has expanded from managing sports teams to encompass a wide array of formal and informal relationships designed to support individual growth, professional development, or improve a particular skill or capacity. Coaching has also become a key ingredient of organizational life, with 90% of large for-profit companies using coaching<sup>1</sup> and over 50% reporting that they “consider coaching as a key part of learning development” and “crucial to their strategy.”<sup>2</sup>

This might look like:

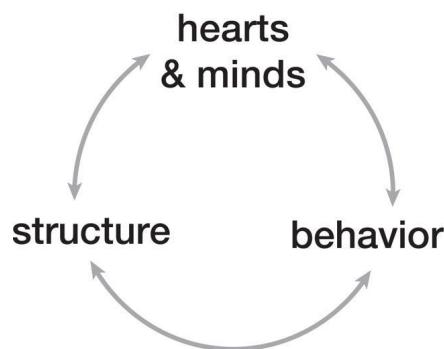
- Consultants offering formal executive coaching
- Consultants offering informal coaching in the context of organizational development
- Managers supervising the performance of staff
- Peer to peer support
- Mentoring of less-experienced colleagues

Coaching is widely recognized as a critical competency for leaders and consultants alike, and there are a plethora of approaches and models for this work.

## **Transformational Coaching is distinguished by:**

- 1) **A systemic approach working in an integrated way with all three domains of the Wheel of Change:**

### THE WHEEL OF CHANGE



<sup>1</sup> Institute of Personnel Management, 2009, quoted in <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coaching>

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Leadership and Management, 2011, <http://www.i-l-m.com/research-and-comment/9617.aspx>

- o **Hearts & Minds:**

Utilizing potent transformative processes helps to create breakthroughs in the way people think, believe and feel

- o **Behavior:**

Helping people define and practice new habits of behavior: the actual choices people make to speak or not speak; to act or not to act

- o **Structure:**

Supporting people in making changes in their external social reality

2) **A strength-based approach**

We believe in the capacity and potential of people. The coaching process is oriented towards identifying and nourishing those gifts and talents.

3) **Teaching people to fish**

We help people to solve their own problems, using situations to help people access and develop their own power and capacities.

4) **Helping people “be the change”**

We support people in experiencing transformation “here and now.”

Coaching is a unique encounter between two human beings. Life is rarely compartmentalized or orderly. Masterful coaches typically forgo preplanned formats and intuitively guide their “clients”<sup>3</sup> on an unprogrammed journey of self-discovery.

Still, it's useful to have some kind of roadmap for transformational coaching. ASPIre is a simple three-stage model that gives form to this powerful process:

## The ASPIre Model

Stage I      **A**ttend

Stage II      **S**hift

Stage III      **P**lan

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<sup>3</sup> While coaching may not be taking place in the formal professional coach-client context, for simplicity we will refer to the person being coached as the “client.”

These three stages may take place over the course of a single coaching session or unfold over numbers of meetings. While the stages are depicted as sequential, coaching will often flow back and forth among them. Yet in transformational coaching we do typically see some kind of movement or flow from:

**Stage I:** Attend to the human being. Listen deeply to their aspirations, their concerns, and their challenges.

to

**Stage II:** Help evoke a shift or breakthrough in the way the client is thinking and feeling about their situation, unleashing their inner wisdom and authentic power.

to

**Stage III:** Help client make plans and next steps.

**Let's explore more deeply each of the three stages of ASPIre.**

## **ASPIre Stage I: ATTEND**

The transformational process begins by bringing presence, deep listening and compassion to our clients. We create a welcoming and safe space for them to share their concerns, thoughts, and feelings.

### **Goals of Stage I:**

- 1) Support client in "getting it all out," authentically expressing their thoughts, feelings, and needs
- 2) Build rapport; provide client the experience of being heard and valued
- 3) Clarify and sort needs and issues to be addressed

Many human beings have a strong need to be heard, to experience being attended to. In a surprising number of situations, this may actually be *all* that people need in the way of coaching. Sometimes, people simply need to hear themselves talk and be witnessed. At other times, the most important change people need to make is coming to peace with life as it is. Whatever the situation, attending is one of the greatest gifts we can bring to others.

When more is needed for completion, we proceed to Stage II: Shift.

## ASPIre Stage II: SHIFT

In many if not most situations, clients have the potential inner resources to address the situations and challenges they bring to coaching. With the transformational approach, our objective is to help clients shift into a place of greater self-empowerment and access their own inner wisdom and resources. We are constantly seeking to teach people to fish rather than provide a great meal. Another reason for focusing on this inner shift: if we “give” clients answers, they often do not build the depth of commitment required for successful follow-through and implementation.

In Stage II, we utilize transformative practices to evoke shifts, often dramatic and sometimes almost instantaneous in the way clients think and feel. These shifts in Hearts & Minds can provide new awareness, insights, energy, and the courage to make change. It is this dramatic, immediate shifting that helps to distinguish transformational coaching. To learn about these transformative practices, see our tool: *Coaching the Shift*

If the client either resists or appears unable to make the shift, we gracefully return to Stage I.

### Goals of Stage II:

- 1) Help shift client's relationship to their own situation:
  - from powerlessness to self-responsibility
  - identify and address what's in the way of the client solving their own problems: limiting beliefs, perceptions, emotional triggers, etc.
- 5) Help clients get clear about what they really need (which may be different than the presenting problem)
- 6) Set goals (if needed)

Sometimes the shift is all clients need – their concerns were really in the domain of Hearts & Minds. It is not uncommon for people to feel complete simply due to new awareness, and no decisions or actions are needed. Or perhaps the shift is making peace with life as it is. When the shift is complete, we proceed to Stage III.

## ASPIre Stage III: PLAN

If the first stages have been done well, any needed action planning should go easily.

As always in transformational coaching, we apply the framework of the Wheel of Change to look at next steps to reinforce the shifts in Hearts & Minds and ensure follow-through on changes in Behavior and Structures. We also explore what kinds of additional support may be needed, as well as trying to anticipate potential barriers and ways to meet them.

### Goals of Stage III:

- 1) Assess need for next steps through the framework of the Wheel of Change
- 7) Plan action steps using the POP model (Purpose, Outcomes, Process)<sup>4</sup>
- 8) Test for client's full commitment to action steps
- 9) Anticipate and address potential obstacles and challenges
- 10) Build in support (including possible additional coaching)

The three stages of ASPIre are neither always completely discreet nor sequential. If energy becomes bogged down in a given stage, we would usually return to working with the goals and methods of the previous stage.

For example:

- If in Stage III, the client is having difficulty generating viable options or seems unable to choose, we might again work with shifting energy (Stage II – Coaching the Shift).
- If at any point it seems like the client needs to deeply self-express or our rapport with the client seems off, we likely want to re-engage in the deep listening of Stage I – Attend.

While transformation is a unique and unpredictable journey, the ASPIre model serves as a compass that helps ensure we keep moving toward resolution of the client's needs.

## The ASPIre Model

Stage I	<b>A</b> ttend
Stage II	<b>S</b> hift
Stage III	<b>P</b> lan

*“If the teacher is indeed wise, they do not bid you enter the house of their wisdom, but rather lead you to the threshold of your own wisdom.”*

– Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*

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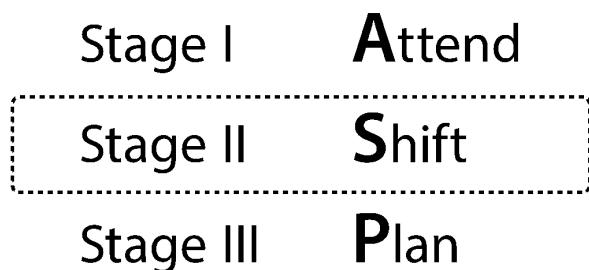
<sup>4</sup> The POP Model is a tool for focusing teams on specific results. Before undertaking any activity, one clarifies:

What is the **P**urpose of this activity? (P)  
 What are the specific **O**utcomes we hope to achieve? (O)  
 And only then: What **P**rocess will we use to achieve these outcomes? (P)

The POP Model was created by Leslie Jaffe and Randall Alford.

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## The ASPIre Model



As coaches in Stage II – Shift, we want to support our clients in accessing their inner resourcefulness so that they feel empowered to deal creatively and effectively with their own situations. We work from the assumption that, with the exception of technical knowledge, people have access to inner wisdom, life experience, and innate capacities that, if liberated, can go a long way towards meeting the opportunities and challenges that life presents. Our job is to help clients shift:

- from feeling powerful or victimized to feeling resourced and empowered.
- from feeling preoccupied with limitations and what they can't do to focusing on opportunities and what they *can* do.
- from feeling frustrated, depressed, or stymied to feeling engaged, curious and energized.
- from feeling stuck in mental frames with limited options to opening new perspectives, liberating new and creative possibilities.

Shifting may occur naturally as a result of attending to clients in ASPIre Stage I. If not, the rest of this paper offers techniques that have the potential to quickly assist people in shifting perspectives, emotion, and energy.

While Stage I specifically emphasizes presence, rapport, and deep listening, these qualities remain the essence of good coaching in all three stages. This article focuses on tools and techniques, but it is important to never lose the essential human-to-human connection that is the heart of transformational coaching. At any point in using these tools, if the client is confused or resistant, simply return to the deep listening and rapport of Stage I.

**There are three primary modes for evoking transformational shifts:**

- 1) Shift mindset
- 2) Shift energy
- 3) Shift consciousness

#### Mode 1. **SHIFT MINDSETS**

In shifting mindsets, we work directly with existing concepts, beliefs, and attitudes to help free clients from limiting perspectives.

##### **TOOL #1: WHAT DO YOU ALREADY KNOW?**

***Almost always a great question. Never a downside.***

Simply ask the client, “*What do you already know about this?*”

Just responding to this question may begin to help shift the client into accessing their own resources. People usually know more than they think they know.

##### **TOOL #2: FEEDBACK**

***When to use: When clients seem stuck.***

Here we use our own insight and energy to offer clients new (and hopefully empowering) perspectives on their situation. In using feedback as a state-shifting tool, we especially want to mirror back to clients their own positive qualities or positive trends that they may not be in touch with. We want to be very careful not to offer feedback in this stage that might trigger clients into feeling inadequate or shameful. Examples:

- “*I want to acknowledge how committed you have remained in the face of such challenges.*”
- “*While this problem has been going on for a while, it seems like you have begun taking some positive steps lately that are beginning to make a difference.*”

##### **TOOL #3: REFRAMING**

***When to use: When clients' existing points of view are limiting, and they seem blocked in finding new perspectives.***

In reframing we challenge clients' limiting beliefs and perspectives by offering new (and hopefully empowering) ways of viewing the situation.

A skillful reframe should be:

- **timely** (not premature in a way that limits or undermines the client's self-expression)
- **believable** (not experienced as "spin" or denying the reality of the client's experience)
- **empowering** (creates new possibilities)

Here are some general categories of reframes:

• **Problems into opportunities**

It's really going to be tough having to fire this person.  
vs.

REFRAME: *"Here's an opportunity to get someone with the upgraded skills and experience you've been needing to implement the new strategic plan."*

• **Individual perspective to social perspective**

A woman manager is having a hard time being heard in the senior team meetings. She's feeling badly, and seeing things completely through the frame of her personal insecurities and feelings of inadequacy.

vs.

REFRAME: *"This is not just about you feeling shy or insecure. There is a gender dynamic at play here. The management team is mostly male, there's a generally fast-paced competitive style to the meetings, and when you do try to speak, your contributions are rarely acknowledged."*

• **Generalization into specifics** (all, nobody, everyone, never)

My staff never meets deadlines.  
vs.

REFRAME: *"It seems like your staff is inconsistent in meeting deadlines – primarily internal deadlines such as work plans and reports."*

• **Negative picture into a positive one**

I'm too sensitive. I get set off by other peoples' emotions, and seem to have a low capacity for stress.

vs.

REFRAME: *"You're empathetic and very tuned into others' emotions and life around you."*

• **Half-empty into half-full**

Here's a classic reframing story about the inventor, Thomas Alva Edison: After months of trying to find a filament for the light bulb, one of Edison's scientists apologized for wasting so much time.

vs.

REFRAME: Edison responded by saying, *"We haven't wasted any time. We now know at least 2000 materials that don't work."*

- **Big and overwhelming crisis into just a situation**

The board is divided, some members don't show up for meetings, and as ED, I can't get the help I need.

vs.

REFRAME: *"Yeah, this board, like many other boards of small nonprofits, doesn't function all that well. You'll get through this. Dealing with board challenges and board development is a normal part of your job."*

#### TIPS ON REFRAMING:

- The energy with which the reframe is delivered is as important as the content in reframing.
- We usually want to begin by acknowledging the validity of people's existing frames. If we fail to do this, we are likely to elicit shame or defensiveness.

For example: *"I can see how it might feel or look this way."*

- Frames are not the TRUTH. Frames are ways of sorting and looking at reality – but not reality. We offer reframes when the existing frames are limiting our clients. As coaches, we offer possible reframes to see if they might be useful. We're not invested in their being accepted. It's not about our being right or having a superior view on reality.

For example: *"Might it be useful to think of it this way?"*

#### TOOL #4: TRANSFORMATIONAL QUESTIONS

##### **When to use: The client is stuck within a mindset.**

Transformational questions invite the client to break out of their existing paradigm into new possibilities. They challenge the client to find their own reframe. We can help evoke shifts by asking questions that surface and challenge basic assumptions, stimulate new and creative thinking, raise energy, and evoke even more questions.<sup>1</sup>

Some examples of transformational questions:

- What else might this experience mean?
- How else could this experience be described? Is there a more positive story you could tell about this same set of events?
- What is the opportunity here?
- What would a real breakthrough look like?
- If you felt completely free to do what you want, what would you do?
- Are there counter-examples to the negative meaning that is being drawn?
- Are you absolutely sure that the meaning you have made of this is completely true?

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<sup>1</sup> See Vogt, Brow & Issacs, *The Art of Powerful Questions*. <http://www.theworldcafe.com/pdfs/aopq.pdf>

## TOOL #5: FORWARD FOCUS

**When to use:** *Clients seem stuck complaining about the past.*

In this simple but impactful process, we ask the client to shift conversation from the past (which we can't do anything about) to the future (what I would like) or the present (what I can do right now).

For example, questions like:

- What do you really want?
- What are your options?
- What choices do you have?
- What might you do?

## TOOL #6: REPEATED STATEMENTS

**When to use:** *Client is stuck in a victim or disempowered mindset.*

Use structured, repeated responses or questions to engage the client in taking responsibility for their situation.

### **Variation A: Repeated Statements**

Have person repeatedly complete fill-in-the-blank phrases – verbally or in writing.

For example:

- If I were taking 100% responsibility, I would\_\_\_\_\_
- If I fully owned my power I would\_\_\_\_\_
- What I really want is\_\_\_\_\_

### **Variation B: Repeated Questions**

For example:

- Ask the client repeatedly, *"If you were taking 100% responsibility, what might you do?"*

Using the conditional tense (such as 'if' and 'might') helps liberate out of the box thinking because the client is freed from the pressure of necessarily having to commit to any of the new ideas.

Clients should be instructed to relax the internal censor. They should speak (or write) whatever they first think in response to the question or statement. Creativity is unlocked by welcoming half-baked and off-the-wall ideas.

**TOOL #7: BRAINSTORMING**

**When to use:** *Client isn't seeing sufficient options.*

Challenge client to list 10 (or even 20) possibilities. As with Tool #6, "Repeated Statements," the key is to relax the censor, not worry about practicality, and encourage the client to be wild and inventive. For example:

List 20 things you would really like to do.

or

List 20 possible ways you could \_\_\_\_\_.

NOTE: It's O.K. for you to join in the fun, especially towards the end of the brainstorm, but suggestions should mostly be coming from the client.

**TOOL #8: THE DOCTOR SAYS**

**When to use:** *Client is stuck in "I absolutely can't \_\_\_\_\_."*

For example:

"I can't cut back on my work load."

"I can't fire this person."

This simple tool often has the dramatic effect of making it clear exactly how the client could resolve an issue if they were committed enough:

Imagine you have a rare and potentially fatal disease and your doctor tells you that your life depends on doing whatever it takes to \_\_\_\_\_.

(Fill in the predicament or situation they are trying to resolve.)

How would you go about accomplishing this if your life depended on it?

Clients almost always come up instantly with an action plan.

**TOOL #9: BE THE COACH**

**When to use:** *Client is stuck in a limiting perspective. You see other potentially liberating frames that often would be apparent to people looking freshly at the situation.*

- Have client sit alongside you.
- Place an empty chair in front of you both.
- Ask the client to imagine that they are the coach, and that they're sitting in the empty chair.
- Ask the client, "If you were the coach, what advice would you give this 'other' person."

Clients almost always give themselves great advice.

**NOTE:** The change in physical position is very important to the effectiveness of this tool.

**TOOL #10: VOICE DIALOGUE**

**When to use:** *Client is struggling with varying or competing feelings and points of view.*

In Voice Dialogue, we help clarify these internal “Voices” by identifying and separating them out, then giving each a chance to speak. As well as helping to clarify thinking, it serves a function of liberating stuck energy.

**Step I Identify the Voice(s) that are present.**

For example:

*“It sounds like you have a Voice in there that judges yourself no matter what you do.”*

or

*“It seems like there’s one part of you that really wants to go for this new position, and another part that doesn’t feel like you can do it.”*

**Step II** Have the client physically move to a different position in the room. From here, have them speak as the internal Voice (or the first of the Voices).

**Step III Dialogue with the Voice.**

You can interview and dialogue with the Voice.

See what it feels, what it wants and needs.

Make sure the client stays “in role.” If they ever want to talk as themselves, have them come back to their original seat.

If there are other Voices, always have the client move to a new physical position, maintaining the separate identity of each Voice.

It’s possible to have Voices “dialogue” directly with each other, but always have the client sitting (or standing) in the proper place.

**Step IV Reflection and Debrief**

Have the client come back to their original position.

Discuss together what you saw and learned.

**TOOL #11: GRATITUDE/APPRECIATION**

**When to use:** *Client is becoming judgmental or negative towards themselves, others, or the situation. Appreciation or gratitude is a potent form of reframing that can quickly shift energy.*

Please tell me 10 (or more) things you appreciate/value/are grateful for about:

- yourself in this situation
- your organization
- this person
- this situation, etc.

**TOOL #12: THE THREE POSITIONS**

*When to use: Client is dealing with an interpersonal conflict.*

Step 1.

- Place two chairs opposite each other.
- Client sits in one chair.
- Client imagines the person with whom they are in conflict to be sitting in the empty chair.
- Client speaks directly and completely candidly to the person in the empty chair, telling them exactly what they think and feel (with appropriate affect).

Step 2. **Client moves to the empty chair.**

- Client switches roles and imagines they are this other person.
- They speak in the way they imagine this other person thinks and feels about this situation.
- Make sure client stays in role, speaking candidly with real feeling and energy.

Step 3. **Client stands behind the two chairs.**

- They now take on the role of consultant/mediator.
- What would you say to each of these two people to help them resolve this conflict?
- Make sure person stays in role.

Their advice and counsel is almost always helpful in gaining new perspective.

**Mode 2. SHIFT ENERGY**

Rather than dealing with the content at hand, here we work directly to shift the client's energy. These tools can be very helpful when mental energy gets overly boggy or confused.

**TOOL #1: EMOTIONAL RELEASE**

*When to use: Client is stuck due to unexpressed or unprocessed emotions.*

Some options for helping clients express and release emotions:

- Simply be present and give attention. Deep listening with an invitation to clients to express their feelings is often sufficient.
- Help people name what they're feeling.

- Give permission; affirm that their feelings are okay and understandable.
- Invite the client to give voice to their feeling: *"If this feeling could speak, what would it be saying?"*
- Guide clients in becoming more present into their bodies. Invite them to become aware of their breathing. Feel what's happening in their body. Be aware of places of tension or holding. Perhaps invite them to see if there are ways their body might want to move to express what they feel.
- Especially if emotional reactions are strong or seemingly out of proportion to the situation, it may be useful for clients to identify the deeper, usually historical feelings that underlie the current emotional reactions.

**TOOL #2: TWO-MINUTE COMPLAINT SESSION**

**When to use:** *Client is having difficulty taking responsibility for engaging in solutions.*

- Invite client to go all-out complaining about their situation.
- They must take *absolutely* no responsibility.
- Encourage full and robust expression of all their complaints and frustrations. Cheer them on!

It's a great and energizing state-shifter.

**TOOL #3: MOVE ENERGY**

**When to use:** *Client seems stuck in their head. Working with ideas and thoughts seem to be going nowhere.*

What creates immediate shifts in energy is virtually anything that increases oxygen flow and heart rate. Making noise is especially helpful. This might look like dancing, exercise, going for a brisk walk.

Alternatively, you might ask the client to express what they think and feel using only sound and movement.

While moving energy doesn't deal directly with the content of client challenges, this tool shifts and renews energy in ways that often lead to insights or breakthroughs when the client returns to looking freshly at the situation.

**TOOL #4: CONSCIOUS EMBODIMENT**

**When to use:** *Client isn't present – lost in their thoughts.*

There are a variety of centering practices that integrate breath and body postures or movements drawn from Tai Chi, Yoga, Chi Kung, and Generative Somatics. Teaching these to clients not only helps them to center in the session itself, but also gives them a practical tool they can use in their work and life.

**TOOL #5: HUMOR**

**When to use:** *To dispel tension, or occasionally at those moments when a little lightening up might dispel some overly “heavy” energy.*

Humor is one of the great healing forces in life.

- It's a wonderful release when people can begin to make light of their situation and their own “stuff.” (Though if over-used, humor can sometimes be used to deny or avoid dealing with painful feelings.)
- Self-humor may arise naturally while using any of these tools. Support it.
- You can also promote humor as a state-shifting technique.  
For example:
  - Ask the client to really exaggerate their feelings, their gestures, their complaints. This often tips things into humor.
  - Ask the client to imagine someone was making a sitcom about their predicament. What's the potential for humor in this situation?

**TOOL #6: PACING & LEADING**

**When to use:** *When a client is feeling overly agitated, tense, or upset.*

- With this tool, we actually use our own energy to evoke a shift in the client's energetic state.
- We always begin by mirroring our client's energy: voice tone, body language, breathing, etc.
- Once we have achieved a state of rapport, like leading a partner in ballroom dance, we subtly begin to shift our energy in the desired direction.
- The client will tend to naturally come along with us. This might be used to help calm an overly agitated client, or help soothe an upset client.
- One wants to be mindful how and when this is used, as it has the potential to be experienced by a client as intrusive.

**TOOL #7: TAKING SPACE**

**When to use:** *Client continues to be stuck. It feels like you're pushing against the river or one or both of you are getting tired.*

The wise change agent knows when to offer space. This should be presented as a creative option rather than a sign of failure. “Sleeping on it” is a time-tested way of gaining perspective.

### Mode 3. SHIFT CONSCIOUSNESS

Our rational mind is only one of our capacities for knowing and problem-solving (and tends to be over-valued and overused in most work environments). The following tools help access some of our other, non-rational, modes of knowing.

#### TOOL #1: INTUITION

***When to use: Frequently. An excellent method for cutting through mental confusion and contradictory points of view. A good check and balance to adding up pros and cons.***

Research at leading business schools has concluded that the two most effective new business tools for 21st century executives are meditation and intuition.<sup>2</sup> In transformational coaching, we deliberately try to engage our clients in accessing and trusting their intuition.

This can be as simple as asking, “*What’s your gut sense about this?*” There’s also a range of more sophisticated techniques for helping others engage their inner knowing.<sup>3</sup>

*“The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.”*

– Albert Einstein

#### TOOL #2: GUIDED IMAGERY

***When to use: To gather non-rational data and/or create breakthroughs for clients who would feel comfortable being led in a closed-eye process.***

Guided imagery is an excellent technique for helping people access non-rational, creative thinking. Some examples include:

- Time travel: Guide client into a future where their issues are resolved – where they have been fully successful. Visualize this desired reality in great detail.
- Have client imagine their organization to be a living entity. Guide them in a process of diagnosing what they need to do as a leader by visualizing and dialoguing with this living creature.
- Guide client in a journey in nature (up a mountain, or on a path through the woods). Have them encounter a wise person or animal who brings them information.

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<sup>2</sup> Chin-Ning Chu, *Do Less, Achieve More*, William Morrow, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> See our article: *Inner Knowing Process*, by Robert Gass

#### TOOL #3: ART

Art is another time-tested method for engaging creativity and non-linear thinking. Common techniques include having clients draw or make collages by cutting and pasting old magazines (this last method is empowering for those who feel “artistically challenged”).

For example: Invite the client to create a picture representing their current situation. Then have them create a picture representing the breakthrough they would like to have.

#### TOOL #4: RITUAL

**When to use:** *When there is a major shift in consciousness needed or a transition to be marked.*

Ritual has been used through history by healers and guides as a way of creating powerful shifts in consciousness. We artists of transformational change want to be bold and inventive in creating such rituals for our clients.

For example: A client is stuck and needing to let go of the past or the way things have been. A simple and often-used ritual is one of burning either symbolic objects or pieces of paper (with words written about what they are letting go of).

#### TOOL #5: HERE AND NOW

**When to use:** *Client is extremely wrapped up in their problems, getting agitated and not thinking clearly.*

We all get lost inside the confine of our own skulls, believing that our thoughts are the “real” reality. It is sometimes skillful to invite people out of the convolutions of their thinking and bring them into the present. There’s not usually any problem right here and now – in the room or on the phone with their coach – other than the suffering being created by their thoughts. Unless people are in physical pain, the current moment is usually fine.

Invite your client to focus on their breath, to place their attention in their bodies, to relax into what’s real. Remind them that nothing’s going on right now, that there’s no problem here, in this moment.

For example:

Client:	<i>“I’m really upset about _____.”</i>
Coach:	<i>“Are you upset right this very minute?”</i>
Client:	<i>“Well no...not right this minute.”</i>
Coach:	<i>“So right now... right here with me in this moment, everything’s okay. You’re not actively upset.”</i>
Client:	<i>“No, I’m okay.”</i>

**Meditation** is another tool that can be used here. Meditative techniques can help shift people out of agitation about their problems and into a state of peace and

well-being in the moment (a much better place from which to generate positive solutions).

#### TOOL #6 PEACE WITH WHAT IS

**When to use:** *Client is making matters worse by resisting/rejecting their own experience.*

Often, much of the problem we're having is not what we're experiencing, but our resistance or rejection of what we're experiencing.

For example, we may be experiencing pain . . . or sadness . . . or anger or anxiety. These are normal human experiences – and usually transitory. But when we judge that we shouldn't be having these experiences, we add another whole level of complexity and mental suffering. Ironically, the attempt to deny or push away what we're experiencing typically exacerbates it, and delays the natural passing away of the experience.

There is a simple but profoundly transformational tool to help bring us into a state of greater peace with what is. We *welcome* it. Whatever 'it' may be.

**Step 1:**

Ask the client to describe whatever they're experiencing that they find unpleasant.

Have them describe the actual felt experience of it.

**Step 2:**

Ask the client to welcome that experience. To let go of any judgment of it . . . any sense of trying to avoid it or to make it stop. Literally . . . to welcome the experience. Most times, a spaciousness opens up inside people.

This can be repeated on and on as different states rise.

*"And welcome that . . . And welcome that . . ."*

### Tips for Coaching the Shift

Make sure that people have the experience of being heard and seen with compassionate acceptance for their circumstances and suffering *before* attempting shift techniques.

It's important to acknowledge the real external challenges people face. This is especially true when issues of social identity are a factor. The focus on self-responsibility must be sensitively balanced with validation for people from oppressed groups, that much of what they struggle with is not their fault but the result of social and economic forces.

People aren't always ready to make the shift to responsibility and problem-solving. If you meet resistance, test a few times, perhaps invite people to talk about what they're experiencing, but don't keep trying to evoke a shift. If you're too pushy, people may experience you as uncompassionate or dismiss you as not understanding the realities they face.

A mentor of my wife and myself once told us, "*There is no such thing as a resistant client – only unskilled helpers.*"

Be mindful of your own impatience, the need to look good, the need to be helpful, and other feelings or dynamics that may actually impede the client's progress.

If you are a leader doing performance coaching with someone with less organizational power, you must be especially careful in doing shift work. Make sure you have the client's permission. You may or may not be the right person to do transformational coaching given the power dynamics at play.

The last task of Stage II is to help the client clarify what they really want.

What is their vision of success?

What are the outcomes they desire?

What goals might they set to help focus their energies?

While some coaching models begin with setting goals, in the ASPIRE Model, we wait to set goals until the client is feeling powerful and resourceful. In this state of heightened capacity, people are more likely to choose the right goals and be both clearer and more courageous in going for what they really want. Several of the Shift tools such as Intuition, Forward Focus, and Transformational Questions can be helpful in establishing client outcomes and goals.

These transformative tools are wonderful. But one can become overly enamored with them. Used in the right time and in the right way, they can provide a powerful boost to the coaching process. But the heart of coaching is everything we practiced in Stage I of ASPIRE:

*Attend to your client. In each and every interaction continue to bring your presence, your finest quality of attention and compassionate, deep listening.*

*This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> article of 3 in the Transformational Coaching Toolkit series.  
You can download the articles in this series, and other tools, at:  
[atctools.org/resources/tools-for-transformation](http://atctools.org/resources/tools-for-transformation)*

When we make choices or commitments, we typically try to mobilize our positive energy in the direction of this choice. This is useful. However, we often carry within us doubts, ambivalence, or resistance to the very thing we have chosen. While much of our energy may be lined up behind our chosen direction, we are often not totally aligned with our own choice.

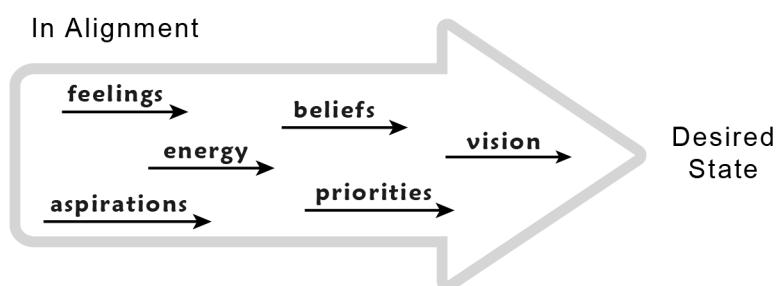
For example, perhaps you have just chosen to take on a new assignment to oversee a new communications strategy. There are several impulses within you aligned with this choice:

- It's an opportunity to advance your own position and standing within the organization.
- A new communications strategy is vitally important to the organization, so it's an opportunity to make a real difference.
- It's an opportunity to develop some new skills.

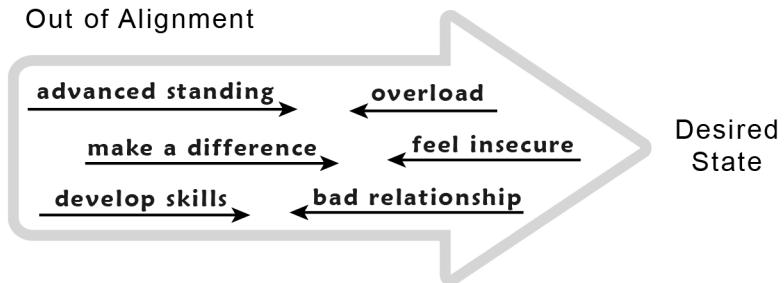
However, you also have other feelings about this new assignment:

- You're already overloaded and stressed, and this adds more on top of what you already can't manage.
- You will have to work closely with someone with whom you have historically had a hard time.
- You actually feel a bit insecure about your skills in communications.

In order to be most effective in moving our energy out into the world, we want to have all our energy available and moving together to do the work. This can be represented by what is called The Alignment Arrow.



Typically, some amount of our energy is out of alignment with our choices, and either unavailable for the work or actually moving in a different direction. In the case of this new assignment, the Alignment Arrow may look something like:



Unfortunately, our instinct in these cases is often to try to ignore or deny the internal countervailing forces. We may try to override the ambivalent or doubting voices, pump ourselves up to get the job done, or make ourselves feel badly about our lack of commitment. None of this helps get the arrows lined up. In fact, denial and repression inevitably create more internal lack of alignment and resistance.

The process of inner alignment is one of skillfully (and sometimes slowly) orienting ourselves around our chosen direction. It involves:

- really giving voice to any unaligned feelings or beliefs
- carefully seeing what is needed to bring each of these unaligned parts into the flow of your chosen direction

In a way, it is similar to building consensus within a group behind a decision. If you don't allow people to give voice to their concerns and disagreements, the group will at best underperform. At worst, you are fighting a running battle with withdrawal, lack of energy, and even self-sabotage.

When we engage with life with a lack of inner alignment, we:

- have less energy and inner resources to bring to bear
- external obstacles quickly become a screen for our own ambivalence. We let ourselves get blocked far too easily because our ambivalence or resistance is triggered.
- we don't enjoy what we're doing

Also, our own resistance tends to create even more obstacles.

In the case of the new communications assignment:

- unacknowledged insecurity about our ability may lead us to limit scope, challenge, or risk
- resistance to working with someone will almost always lead to further difficulties in really partnering with this person
- we've all seen the negative impact of feeling over-stressed

Alignment Coaching is a powerful tool to bring our arrows into full alignment.

## THE ALIGNMENT COACHING PROCESS

### Part I: Creating Your Intention

Create a simple phrase/affirmation that captures the essence of the intention/decision/choice.

#### CRITERIA:

- 1) The phrase should be short. Keep cutting unnecessary words.  
It needs to be easy to remember and easy to say.
- 2) Use positive intent and language.  
Create what you want, not what you don't want.  
For example: "*I will create a successful working partnership with the Board.*"  
not  
"*I will avoid having problems with the Board.*"
- 3) Usually begin your phrase with "I" (I am... I will... I choose...)
- 4) The choice of present or future tense may be important.  
Test which feels more potent.
- 5) Use language of results and self-responsibility  
Avoid words like "try," "attempt," "if," etc.
- 6) Go for what you really want. Watch tendencies to limit or hedge.
- 7) The test is: "*How do you feel when you say it?*"  
Is it inspiring? Does it evoke purpose, energy, and passion?  
It should "zing" with energy.
- 8) It's O.K. if it feels like a stretch. These affirmations are often aspirational.

### Part II Creating Inner Alignment

- 1) Begin by centering.
- 2) Connect with your commitment to this intention.  
Really feel your positive desire for this.
- 3) Repeat your intention out loud, connecting to this feeling.
- 4) In the space that immediately follows, let yourself become aware of any feelings or thoughts that run counter to the intention.
- 5) Give voice to the first doubt/ambivalence/resistance that you feel. Really get into it.  
Exaggerate it. Add gestures! Really express it! Move the energy!

- 6) When the wave of feeling passes, take a deep breath and re-state your intention.
- 7) Repeat steps 5 and 6 until all unaligned energy has been expressed.
- 8) Many of the resistances will pass simply from having been expressed.  
It is critical that:
  - o this be a full-body, energetic process (not purely mental) – it's as much about liberating and aligning energy as it is about the content
  - o err on the side of making sure all unaligned energies are fully expressed
- 9) For those concerns that are highly charged or especially persistent, there are two options:
  - a. Add the concern to the beginning of the phrase, e.g.,  
*"Even though I'm afraid, I will..."*  
or  
*"Even if it's incredibly difficult, I will..."*  
Doing this several times will often diffuse the unaligned voice
  - b. Enter into dialogue with each resisting voice one by one. Find out what each 'voice' might need to be willing to "live with" the chosen course of action. In just the same way one works with unaligned group members in a team, you may need to negotiate, offer compromises, allay fears, or meet certain needs of the "voice" to gain true alignment.
- 10) This entire process of inner alignment may need to be repeated periodically over time.

**NOTE:** It is possible to take the principles or pieces of Alignment Coaching without doing the entire process. For example, if you sense the client has a doubting or ambivalent voice about the proposed plan of action, you can simply ask:

*"It sounds like there's a voice inside that hasn't bought into this plan.  
Could you be that voice for a moment, and speak its concerns?"*

The Alignment Coaching process can also be done on one's own – useful for any major decision or aligning to any new initiative.

### Some tips for Alignment Coaching

- Resolution may not come in a single session.  
Clients may need to further meditate on their options or wish to consult with other important people in their lives.
- Alignment is a critical tool for coaching.  
We sometimes “overlook” signs of misalignment – we fear it may get messy, or it will take too much time, all our good coaching will unravel, etc. Be vigilant. Before you plan, make sure there is true alignment.
- Be mindful of the impact of your own energy on clients.  
An all-too-common pattern is when a client feels very clear during the coaching session, but afterwards starts to backslide or get confused again. This is sometimes a result of the helper inserting too much of their energy into the session. We become like a drug that temporarily alters our client’s state of being. We get too invested in their success, we need them to get clear, we convince them of the “right” decision, or they want to please us or put on their best face for us.

Even while using potent tools like alignment coaching, be spacious. Listen deeply – with all your senses. Remember that it’s their life. They get to live with the consequences of their choices.