

When Is “Good Enough” No Longer Good Enough?

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The third annual Georgia PRISM Award Conference was held Tuesday, April 29 in Atlanta. (See www.georgiaprismaward.com.) Representatives from eleven nominee companies described how coaching has contributed significantly to improvement in their organization’s hard number results.

The keynote speaker, Alan Deutschman, was worth the price of admission! I remember vividly his *Change or Die* article in the May, 2005 issue of “Fast Company” magazine.

Deutschman wrote: “What if a well-informed trusted authority figure [the surgeon who performed your bypass surgery] said you had to make difficult and enduring changes in the way you think and act?....Could you change when change really mattered?”

“Here are the odds: nine to one against you.” Quoting Dr. Edward Miller, dean of the medical school at Johns Hopkins University, Deutschman wrote: “If you look at people after coronary-artery bypass grafting two years later, 90% of them have not changed their lifestyle.” Specifically, Dr. Miller referred to five behavioral issues: not enough exercise and too much smoking, drinking, eating, and stress.

Deutschman set out to find examples where intentional change DOES work—and why. He sought answers from psychology, neuroscience, and cognitive science. What he learned explained why he chose to share his insights at a conference on coaching. He learned why coaching works!

RELATIONSHIP. One physician successfully causes 77% of cardiac patients to sustain healthy lifestyles. Dr. Dean Ornish is founder of the Preventive Medicine Research Institute in Sausalito, California. Each participant in his program is paired with coaches focused on food preparation, exercise, and stress reduction. Each participant attends weekly support groups with other patients.

The focus of the staff’s efforts is on the joy of living vs. the fear of dying. Ornish shows participants in only a few weeks that they can feel better, not just live longer with chronic emotional pain.

Further, Deutschman found research analyzing 400 different approaches to therapy, all of which had been shown to be successful. What was the common denominator? The same as in Ornish’s program: personal relationship. With the proper emotional connection, the client buys into the coach’s unrelenting belief that improvement is not only possible, but essentially guaranteed!

REPETITION. We are creatures of habit. Most people, once they finish school, don’t seek to learn beyond their technical specialty. Learning totally new approaches sometimes causes us to make humiliating mistakes. To try out new possibilities, people need a safe environment, preferably with a nurturing supporter who can encourage the practice necessary to master new habits. A coach not only provides the safe space, but holds clients accountable to follow-through on their intentions.

REFRAMING. Cardiac surgeons, like most of us, presume that giving people the facts will cause them to pursue what’s most beneficial for their own self-interest. But that’s not the way people think. We all have established beliefs and opinions. When we are confronted with new information, we tend to fit the facts into our existing conceptual frameworks.

Coaches listen closely to understand the individual’s existing perceptions, and then help with insights that assemble the facts into a more effective conceptual framework. The coach helps the individual move toward a new way of thinking that enhances the probability of achieving desired outcomes.

Alan Deutschman published these three conclusions about what helps individuals make productive change in his 2007 book entitled *Change or Die*. His conclusion merely affirmed what those in the PRISM Conference audience already knew: coaching helps organizations achieve improvement.

What would cause contributors in your organization to want to move beyond “good enough”?

Dennis Hooper helps organizational leaders seek greater awareness, especially in building the skills of future leaders. Contact Dennis at dhooper2@juno.com or by calling (478)-988-0237.