

- [Business Tips](#)
- [Political and Cultural Observations](#)
- [Personal Notes](#)

Morrie Shechtman

Date: **3/1/2009**

From: **Morrie Shechtman**

Subject: **Monthly Newsletter**



Morrie Shechtman

I recently came across a quote that caught my attention and I wanted to share it with the readers of my newsletter. It couldn't be more apropos of our times.

"Fortunes are not made in boom times...that is merely the collection period. Fortunes are made in depressions or lean times when the wise man overhauls his mind, his methods, his resources, and gets in training for the race to come." ~ George Wood Bacon

The quote is from an excellent article on the challenges of hospital administration – interesting – and was given to me by a good friend, Jim Oliverson, Vice President of Public Relations at our local hospital.

Business Tips

Coaching – Making the Connections that Count

There has been much discussion these days about the role and value of *coaching* for business people. Many questions have been raised. What exactly is coaching? How does it differ from mentoring and training? How "personal" should it be? What can it accomplish?

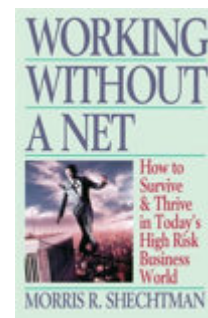
The best way I've been able to answer these questions is to write up case studies that capture my work with some clients, in a modality that I've come to call *Breakthrough Coaching*. The following case study has been particularly helpful to a number of clients:

Breakthrough Coaching is a methodology for achieving sustainable behavior change, by helping people make connections between counter-productive patterns of orchestrating relationships and powerful, but seemingly unrelated feelings. On an emotional-behavioral level, it is analogous to reconnecting neurons whose linkage has been severed, thereby creating an energy and movement that has been frozen and paralyzed. The power and impact of making the connection can best be illustrated by sharing a case study.

A few years ago I was engaged to coach the founder and CEO of a company that outsourced a number of important functions for



[Fifth Wave Leadership: The Internal Frontier](#)



[Working Without a Net](#)

service-driven businesses. He was very bright, articulate, hard-driving, and innovative – so much so that he invented a technology that took his industry to an entirely new level of effectiveness and achievement. In addition, he had a kind of boyish charm and appealing klutziness. The widely shared joke about him was that you could always tell what he had had for lunch by simply looking at his tie.

Unfortunately, he also was a bully who regularly abused those who worked most closely with him. He asked for their input and then ignored it; he demeaned them in public forums; and he constantly compared them unfavorably to their respective predecessors. Like most bullies, he would then unexpectedly and spontaneously turn around and very warmly go out of his way to do something very helpful and caring for one of his direct reports. Before I arrived on the scene, he had had a number of coaching relationships which focused on the negative impact of his abusive behavior on key leaders (and the organization's culture as a whole), the confusion and chaos that his mixed messages created, and the self-talk and rationalizations he engaged in to justify his behavior (i.e. people he depended upon were constantly letting him down and failing to meet his expectations). He knew his thinking and rationalizing were faulty and he was very much aware of the devastating impact of his outburst, tirades, and "lectures." When push came to shove, he just couldn't help himself.

He had worked with prior coaches on changing his self-talk, on keeping silent for prescribed periods of time during senior management meetings (allowing his direct reports to make their contributions without interruption and criticism), and a number of "visioning" exercises geared toward creating a sense of what it felt like to be on the receiving end of his abuse. All of these strategies worked – for a few months. And then, as he put it, an overwhelming rage and venom would just shoot out of him, most often taking him by surprise.

Our first breakthrough occurred when I asked him what the payoff was for his abusive behavior. His first response was that there was none. His key people were angry at him, thoroughly disgusted, and wanted to get as far away from him as possible. They thought about leaving the company, reconsidered, and most stayed for a surprising length of time (an issue for a separate discussion).

I explained that "payoff" had little to do with a positive outcome, but had everything to do with an outcome that had deeply familiar feelings for him. Feelings that he knew well and knew how to deal with. So I asked him how he usually felt after he acted abusively. He first responded that he felt regretful, sorry that he had treated someone else so badly. He then said that after the regret, he would find himself sitting behind his desk feeling alone, isolated, and without a friend in the world. I asked him if he had felt that way at any time earlier in his life. He responded, "a lot."

As we discussed this pattern on a number of occasions, he made a feeling connection that had been a mystery to him, heretofore. He saw and felt the purpose behind his seemingly inexplicable behavior – he abused and mistreated people so that he could



[Love in the Present Tense](#)



[This Ain't Your Parents' Marriage](#)

precisely feel alone, isolated, and abandoned. To say the least, it made no logical sense and it certainly felt awful. But it was predictable and he knew how to deal with it. Without anyone having a clue, he suffered in silence. This was his terrible secret.

You don't have to be a master sleuth to reconstruct my client's personal history. His father was an unhappy, embittered soul – an immigrant fleeing persecution in his native land. He was unhappy with his work, his marriage, and his life in general. And he took out his misery on his children. He abused them verbally and physically, and finally threw my client out of the house when he was fifteen. My client spent the next eight years roaming the country, living out of a very used car, and surviving by his wits. He learned many skills and got an extraordinary life-education. He learned all of this by himself. And mostly, he learned how to be alone.

Our second breakthrough occurred when I asked my client if he would be willing to share the connection he had made with his leadership team. He agreed to try it. It's important to point out that this was not to be an apology. He had done that numerous times. This was a gut level disclosure of a feeling connection that had enormous meaning for him. It was risky and courageous. And the impact on his team was profound. Everyone was emotionally touched and moved. But most significantly, the disclosure closed the gap – the gap between my client and other people. Something became possible that was both feared and desired. Other people could actually get close without posing a threat. And he began to learn that he did not have to suffer in silence and be all alone.

Establishing feeling connections allows people to make different choices. In a sense, they take people off automatic pilot and give them conscious control of their decisions and their lives. My client's abusive behavior significantly decreased. He regressed at times, but what was different was a conscious recognition of what he was doing and why he was doing it. Years later that feeling connection is very much a part of his life and his every decision and behavior.

Political and Cultural Observations

The Dangers of a Painless Society

I am struck, most recently, by the nature of the debate over our economic crisis, and its focus on the amount of money being spent and whether or not it will work. Not that these are inconsequential issues. The amount of money is sobering, if not horrifying. And I join every other soul on the planet in being extremely hopeful that this socioeconomic nightmare ends. But I am equally concerned, if not more so, by a different question – what are the unintended consequences of the underlying values, assumptions, and philosophy driving the totality of all the “rescue” plans?

I have been in the business of helping people and solving problems for almost forty years. In that time, three lessons have

stuck with me the most:

1. All solutions to problems, whether individual, societal, or global, create the next set of problems. Solving problems is not, therefore, the highest human calling. Identifying the next set of problems is.
2. The attempt to eliminate all pain and struggle signals the death knell of a culture. Pain and struggle keeps us alive – physically, emotionally, and morally.
3. The removal of the consequences of taking risks, stunts growth, freezes learning, and completely disables people. Amnesty feels good in the short run, but awful in the long run.

I don't know if the rescue plans proposed by the Obama administration will work. I do know that they are well on their way to creating an even more monstrous sense of entitlement than we currently have. Last week, the administration added three new "rights" to our constitutional tapestry – health care, higher education, and single family housing.

We need to understand that as soon as something becomes a "right," individual responsibility, initiative, commitment, and investment are degraded and abandoned. The receiver of these "rights" is diminished and the provider is exploited. We learned, during the height of our experiment with welfare, that the system created resentment and bitterness in the recipients – not gratitude – and further solidified the culture of poverty. Is this further erosion of individual responsibility, the problem we want to deal with when we recover from this crisis?

Pain and struggle, whether our own or someone else's, is difficult to tolerate.

At times it is so intolerable and intractable that we just want it to end, no matter what we need to do or what the price may be. I learned early in my career as a psychotherapist, a very counter-intuitive lesson. The more I could distinguish between my pain and the pain of my clients, the more helpful I was, and the more rapidly and effectively they took charge of their lives. The more I identified with my clients' pain and eradicated the boundaries between them and me, the less they grew and the less they took responsibility for their lives.

It is extraordinarily painful and humiliating to lose a job, go bankrupt, or lose a house. And all calamities leave us with a gut-wrenching question – "What do I do now and what changes do I need to make?" Having to face this question leaves one with the opportunity to develop the skills that underpin adaptability to change or to give up and become marginal to the culture. You have a fifty-fifty shot. If you're rescued from the situation, you have no shot. You learn nothing and your unraveling is guaranteed.

The same is true for risk. Insulating people from risk and protecting them from failure, guarantees perpetual failure. Even worse, it erodes the soul and flatlines the spirit.

Some years ago, I spent time in two countries that had taken caretaking and social engineering to its zenith – Denmark and Finland. In Denmark, government bureaucrats scoured the streets trying to find people who looked like they had given up and "needed help." They picked them up and gave them

everything they needed. It goes without saying, that this cycle was perpetual. In Finland, life had become so predictable and so free of risk (and possibilities) that bands of *children* roamed the streets of Helsinki, drunk out of their minds. One evening in Helsinki, Arleah and I had dinner with two bankers, a man and a woman. During dinner the woman confided to us that she very much wanted to buy a new car, could afford to do so, and was choosing not to. The reason – her colleagues, her friends, and her family would deeply resent it and shun her, because they couldn't afford it and would feel that her getting one was grossly unfair. I learned from these experiences (and many others) that raising the floor inevitably lowers the ceiling. I also learned that the strength and vitality of the American culture was the opportunity given to our citizens to rise to the heights of success *and* to utterly screw-up and ruin your life, with little or no interference. Both are critical.

So, when you react to and evaluate the proposed solutions to the mess we're in now, don't simply ask yourself whether or not you think that they'll work. Ask yourself, also, what they might create in its place and if that's the next problem you want to deal with.

Personal Notes

The Emotional Side of Tinkering with the Ticker

Right after the first of the year I had one of those sobering, life-changing and fairly unexpected experiences. I went in for a routine treadmill stress test and came out with a suspected cardiac problem. Two weeks later I was the proud owner of a chromium stent in my circumflex artery. I can't say that I was totally surprised, since I suffer from Woody Allen Syndrome – any pain or ache between my diaphragm and neck is a sign of a total heart attack; and all headaches are indicative of brain cancer – but I was shook up and very scared. Being an incorrigible learner, I have kept track of my experience and wanted to share the major impacts it had on me:

1. I had to make one of the quickest, highest trust decisions of my life.
2. I had to wrestle with and reconcile what my body was feeling and what my emotions were telling me.
3. I had to insist that I got to talk about how I felt, in the face of an endless barrage of information about how I ought to feel.

The heart catheterization process (which followed two weeks after my stress test) was one of the weirdest, most surrealistic experiences I have ever been through. I was fully awake, felt very little pain or discomfort (except when my artery was expanded to insert the stent), and was engaged in conversation with my cardiologist, who was looking at TV monitors, explaining to me exactly what he was doing. About halfway through the procedure, he told me where the blockage was, how significant it was, and told me that I had a decision to make. "I can put a stent in right now; you can think about it and we can do it later;

or we can look at other forms of treatment.” I asked him what he would do if he were on the table, instead of me. He replied that he would put the stent in right now. I told him to go ahead. In retrospect, I reconstructed the process I went through to arrive at my decision. Did I trust him? He seemed to know what he was doing and he had never given me any reason to doubt him. (I knew him personally as well as professionally.) Then it dawned on me. This had only partially to do with him. The real question was – did I trust myself to be able to deal with however this might change my life? The answer was affirmative. Arleah and I have written about this definition of trust in our discussions of adult intimate relationships and it now hit me that it’s true for all of life’s big decisions. Is it really about other people, or is it about you?

Within minutes of being taken to my recovery room, my body felt pretty good and felt progressively better as the time went on. Except for the nasty catheter inside me and a dull ache in my groin (where the sheath had been inserted that allowed access to my heart), I felt surprisingly alert and energized.

My emotions, on the other hand, were a wreck. I felt like I had been irreparably altered and was very frightened about the future. I was receiving tons of information, written and verbal, about blockages, stents, recovery, lifestyle, diet, ad infinitum. I remember distinctly one interaction with my cardiologist, who was telling me how lucky I was that I had only one “distinct blockage,” and that the rest of the artery (as well as the other two), looked great. He also said that I’d be not only as good as new, but better than new and that I’d have a lot more energy (which has certainly proven true). However, that’s not what I was feeling. I had two strong, overpowering feelings – I had never felt so fragile and vulnerable before; and I felt like damaged goods. Like everyone important to me – Arleah, my kids, my friends, and my clients – would all look at me differently and not positively.

I tried sharing some of my feelings with the nurses and the aides. They wanted no part of it. Some actually acted like I wasn’t even talking. I finally blurted out some of what was going on with me to the cardiologist. He actually listened and thought that it would be a great idea to have a kind of “emotional or psychological protocol” for patients recovering from heart procedures. After this interaction and many talks with Arleah, I not only feel better, I feel whole. My new physical energy level is now accompanied by an emotional optimism that I’ve not felt in quite a while. The lesson for me, and I hope, many of you – Don’t let those feelings stay disconnected, no matter what’s happening with the rest of you. Arleah has a great saying – “You don’t always get your way, but you always get your say.”

Morrie

Tell us what you think – [click here](#) to send us an e-mail with your feedback.

We’ve had a number of requests for materials about our work. Here’s the link to our online store: <http://www.fifthwaveleadership.com/store.cfm>

This newsletter is a service of Fifth Wave Leadership

To ensure delivery of this newsletter to your inbox and to enable images to load in future mailings, please add info@fifthwaveleadership.com to your e-mail address book or safe senders list.

Fifth Wave Leadership

www.fifthwaveleadership.com