

## **To Be a Great Wellness Coach, Learn How to Change a Client's Paradigm**

A man woke up one day to discover he was trapped in a 10-foot by 10-foot by 10-foot wooden box with no windows and only one door. Inside the box was nothing but the old, beat-up chair upon which he sat, and he felt overwhelmed with despair and emptiness. Outside the box was the rich fullness of life, replete with love, family, friends, purposeful work, and all the successes and joys that are part of our earthly lives.

The man sat on the chair, paralyzed by the deeply disturbing, yet vague, sense that during the night a group of dangerous men had abducted him and informed him that he must live the rest of his life in this box. They said they would give him enough food to survive, but if he ever tried to escape, he would be shot and killed immediately by the armed men who stood outside the door day and night.

The man struggled with his thoughts. Was what he remembered true? Was the threat real, or was his mind playing a trick on him? Was he destined to live trapped in the box for the rest of his life? Did the mere possibility of living a free, fulfilling life make escape worth the tremendous risk? He sat in gut-wrenching fear, unable to make a decision on what to do.

Too often, our personal paradigms bind us in a no-options way of thinking. Within such a mental box, we make choices and live out our lives. While constricting, the box becomes familiar and comfortable over time. We know its contours and its boundaries.

Although the potential for a splendid, freedom-filled life exists outside the box of our paradigms, dangers lurk as well – or so we fear. We worry about losing our sense of certainty and stability, our very identities, and that others might ridicule or reject us. We worry about becoming failures. Our inner abductors “protect” us from these possibilities and simultaneously block us from identifying a more expansive set of choices.

Everyone is in a box of some kind. Living a fuller, more satisfying life requires that we expand beyond the narrow confines of that box. When someone comes to you and asks for help, they desire and at the same time fear real change. Helpers often prescribe a solution, without thinking too deeply about it, based on their personal experience. And yet this person's current situation is likely to be a confluence of individual factors, multi-faceted by definition and bordering on the intractable. Quick and easy solutions to problems are unlikely to stick, no matter how sensible they seem. A deeper breakthrough is needed.

The beginning of the breakthrough occurs when the person realizes that their problem has been created within the personal paradigm through which they relate to the world. If the paradigm created the problem, and the paradigm is invisible to the person asking for help, then the coach's job is to help the client see their paradigm. Einstein said it well: “You can't solve today's problems from the same level of thinking that created them.” Once someone sees how their

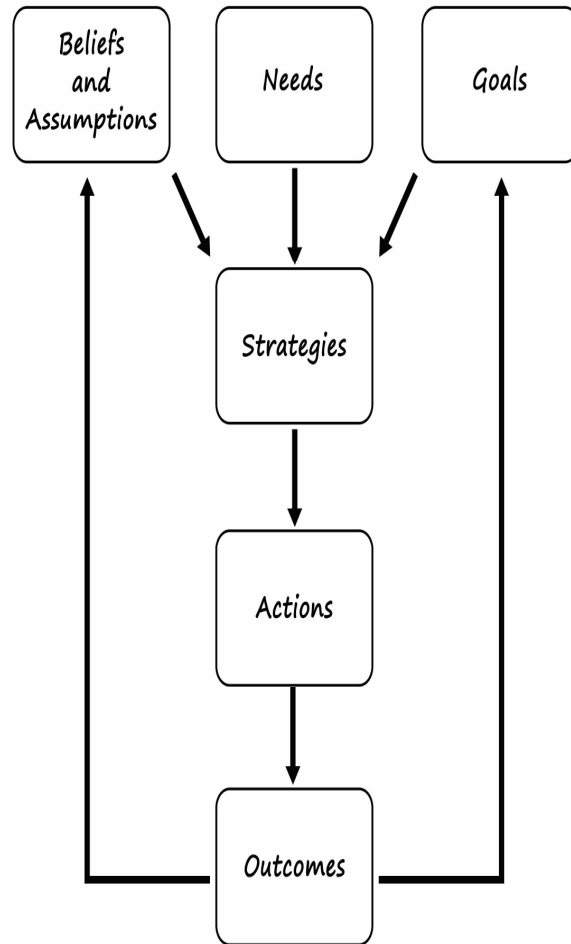
problem (their box) was created, then and only then can images of an enduring solution become available.

Too often coaches, especially health and wellness coaches, scratch the surface when working with clients. They recognize that their client is in a box but then focus on treating the symptoms and not the deeper underlying causes. As a result, the client, with a lot of help from the coach, gets better, but is wholly reliant on the coach to boost them up or keep them accountable to their own rigorous behavior changing plans. As long as the coach is there guiding, cajoling, and demanding behavior change, then the client will stay on a healthy path, but remove the coach from the equation, the client will eventually revert back to their old patterns. This is, in part, because the coach did not work with the client on the underlying paradigms that create the problem for the client in the first place. Too often we believe that insight and even catharsis are enough. These may be necessary, but they're not sufficient to produce enduring change. Old habits rarely die easily. They require diligent attention and effort to produce enduring change and they require we look at the underlying paradigms that created the pattern in the first place.

### **What is a Personal Paradigm?**

A paradigm is a mental model that shapes our understanding. The word itself comes from the Greek word, παράδειγμα or *paradeigma*, which means "pattern, example, or sample." A paradigm is, in effect, the patterns in our minds that shape what we see and how we understand. Our paradigms shape the parameters for how we act in the world, what we should or shouldn't do, and what we can or cannot do. In the realm of culture, our paradigms shape how we *collectively* see, understand, and act in the world. In the personal realm, it is how an *individual* sees, understands, and behaves in ways that become life patterns.

In my view, a paradigm is made up of beliefs and assumptions, needs, goals, strategies, actions, and outcomes. The totality of this makes up the paradigm.



Any action we take is shaped by and shapes our personal paradigms. More importantly, whenever someone is stuck – like the man in the box – a personal paradigm is at play and that paradigm is almost foreordained to keep them stuck. Only when they become aware of and understand their personal paradigms can they shift them and adopt new practices. In this sense, the process of transformational coaching is not an event – it’s a journey.

If a client comes to a coach and says, “please help me lose weight/eat healthily, repair my (fill in the blank), they are asking for a different outcome. Too often the coach then focuses on the strategies and actions that the client employs that creates these outcomes. The problem is that there is something that drives the strategies the client has been using and unless these drivers are addressed, the change in strategies will likely not take root. The key is transformational coaching rather than skill building coaching.

### **How Transformational Coaching Is Different**

The primary goal of transformational coaching is to shift the deeply held personal paradigms we’ve been discussing. The term “transformation” itself is

instructive. It means, in literal terms, a shift in form. In our case, it means shifting an existing personal paradigm that is marked by limiting beliefs to a new paradigm that is more expansive, and effective, and that will open up new opportunities to live life fully and well. Stephen Covey said it well. "If you want small changes in your life, work on your attitude. If you want quantum-leap changes, work on your paradigm."

To learn more about how you can increase your effectiveness as a coach by helping clients shift their paradigms, see my workshop called, The Art of Transformational Coaching. Here is my website for more information: [www.artoftransformationalcoaching.com](http://www.artoftransformationalcoaching.com) .

(place information about Keith here)