

# Growth Coaching International: October 2021

## IT'S A RELATIONAL WORLD

Our experience these last eighteen months has put a strain on many relationships. For many, almost all connections have been mediated via electronic devices. Of course, that has its challenges and frustrations. However, I wonder how different, and worse, the last eighteen months might have been if the pandemic had taken place in the 1980s without Zoom, Facebook, Email, WhatsApp, and Twitter. (Perhaps with no internet, we would have been less exposed to the steady flow of misinformation, but that's another story.)

Our human need for connection is in sharp focus. Families and friends are kept apart, communication is less frequent and less spontaneous, and we have become more guarded around strangers, who have been transformed from potential neighbours into aliens by the facemasks we have had to wear.

In the midst of all this, it's been worth revisiting some of the core foundations of healthy positive relationships. The work of the Relationships Foundation in the UK has been at the forefront of 'relational thinking' in recent years. When we think about relationships and how to enhance them, we often think about interpersonal communication skills, like listening and being present, which are undoubtedly important. (We give considerable attention to these skills in all our coach training courses). However, the Relationships Foundation's framework brings a different and complementary perspective to relational thinking, emphasising five essential pre-conditions for healthy relationships.

These five pre-conditions are described as:

### **1. Directness: the quality of the communication process**

This element covers the amount of face-to-face time, the level of access to each other, the levels of openness and honesty. The more of this, the better the quality of connection is likely to be.

### **2. Continuity: the amount of shared time over time**

This element includes the history of the relationship, the anticipated future of the relationship, and the extent that it is more than a 'one-off' or short-term exchange. (This is one aspect of coaching that is particularly helpful. Coaching provides a development approach that offers much more continuity than single workshops with no follow-up support). This prospect of continuity in the relationship changes the dynamic considerably in positive ways.

### **3. Multiplexity: the breadth of knowledge of each other**

This element refers to the various points of contact in any relationship. Greater breadth serves to enrich the connection and the level of understanding about what each person brings to the relationship. For example, suppose I work alongside someone, and I also come

across this person in another context outside work - at our childrens' sporting events. In that case, the relationship has greater breadth because of this additional point of contact.

#### **4. Parity: the use of power in the relationship**

This is an important dimension in any coaching relationship and any supervisory relationship. For example, questions of power and how that is used (or misused) will critically influence how any coaching unfolds. This element also addresses concepts like fairness and the level of influence each party has in the relationship.

#### **5. Commonality: the extent of common goals and purposes**

Common sense would suggest that when two people in a relationship are looking forward in the same direction, sharing a common purpose and goals, then the quality of that relationship will be enhanced considerably. Of course, sometimes people can assume this 'commonality' or goals can change, so it usually helps to keep making these things explicit. However, this does not mean that high-quality relationships can only occur between people who share common goals and interests. It is, however, important to acknowledge where differences might occur, to see differences in a positive light, as things to be expected and welcomed, and to manage them in constructive ways.

Relationships are at the heart of good leadership, good coaching and, well, just about any context where people come to be together, or to work together. Of course, getting them 'right' is a never-ending journey, and the pathway is often tricky. However, these foundation elements can help provide a way to negotiate this pathway in helpful and positive ways.

#### **Reference:**

Schluter, M. and Lee, D. (2009). The Relational Manager. Lion Books