



Three Questions to Ask Next-Level Leaders

By Scott Eblin, PCC, 2007 ICF Conference Presenter (USA)

In this political year of 2008, I am reminded of the closing scene in the 1972 movie, *The Candidate*. Robert Redford plays Bill McKay, an environmental activist put up by the California Democratic Party to run against the entrenched incumbent U.S. Senator, Crocker Jarman. McKay builds momentum over the course of the campaign and wins the election. The movie concludes with the candidate sitting on the bed in his headquarters hotel room. As the crowd builds outside urging him to come to the ballroom to declare victory, he looks up at his campaign manager and quietly asks, "What do we do now?"

Those of us who coach leaders have seen comparable scenes play out in offices around the world. All too often, talented leaders reach the top rungs of their organizations and then feel like they haven't a clue what to do next. The recurring pattern is that the expectations surrounding top-level leadership roles are very high, but are rarely explicitly stated. The result is that talented leaders are often left to figure things out on their own which contributes to a failure rate for new executives that approaches 40 percent.

This is where we, as coaches, can come in to help. In researching my book, *The Next Level: What Insiders Know About Executive Success* (Davies-Black, 2006), I did what coaches do, I asked questions. In interviewing dozens of successful executives, I asked, "If you were mentoring a new executive, what behaviors would you encourage he or she to either pick up or let go?" What they described was a model of leadership presence that is comprised of three key elements:

- **Personal Presence** – how you view yourself and how others view you.
- **Team Presence** – how you lead and leverage your functional team.
- **Organizational Presence** – how you lead in the broader organization.

Let me share with you three coaching questions that can help leaders answer the question of "What do I do now?"

What's Your Swing Thought?

With his amazing performance, Tiger Woods is an inspiration not just to golfers but to all of us seeking to raise our game and the games of others. While his physical gifts are among the best in the world, the mental aspect of Tiger's game is a key element in what sets him apart. Tiger is probably the best ever at organizing his swing thoughts. A swing thought is the process of determining the outcome one is trying to generate and then visualizing how one needs to show up (in Tiger's case, swing) to create it. That simple process of determining the desired outcome and how one needs to show up can be adopted by anyone in any field. It can help enormously with building the confidence needed to demonstrate positive personal presence.

Try it with your clients. Explain the swing thought idea to them. Help them get in the habit of visualizing outcomes and the actions needed to create them. Get your-

self in the habit of asking them, "What's your swing thought?"

What Is It That Only You Can Do?

This is a question that helps leaders get clear about the short list of things that, given their role and the resources that come with it, create the leverage needed to effectively lead their teams. Regularly ask your executive clients this question. Remind them that their list should be short but high impact. It's not a list of things they could do or are good at doing. It's the list of things that only they can do in the role that they're in. That's where the leverage is.

Who Else Do You Know?

This is the question that helps build organizational presence. Help your clients tie their relationships and networks back to the new results that are expected of them. Encourage them to expand their perspective by looking beyond the "usual suspects" in considering who else they know who could help them in generating the new results that are expected of them. Who else can they go to for fresh perspective, ideas and knowledge?

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