

## How Coaching Works

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In fall 2008, for presentation at the first [Coaching in Leadership & Healthcare conference](#) delivered by Harvard Medical School, I worked with a design team to produce a YouTube animation we call: [How Coaching Works](#). This 4-minute video has been watched by more than 1.5 million people around the world since then. Here's what we want to convey about coaching, aka the art and science of change and transformation.

### **Desire for self-actualization**

Many people have a dream or vision for their future, the expression of a deep yearning for [self-actualization](#), oft described as realizing one's full potential. Getting from here, point A, to the imagined future, point B, is easier said than done. The road ahead can seem like a tangled knot of possibilities and challenges with no clear path and without clean sight of the destination. Adult life doesn't come with an instruction manual, and often our dreams and visions get paused or go to sleep in the absence of a roadmap.

*To start, **the conversation** with **a coach** (listen, reflect-reframe, ask questions) clarifies and simplifies the client's dream, turning it into a compass that magnetically pulls him/her in a true direction.*

Most of what separates us from our dreams is a lack of dedicated investment in finding and transcending what can seem like an endless parade of blind spots and growth edges. Not a journey for the faint of heart. Working with a coach makes the journey lighter and faster. Sometimes the impossible is made possible.

### **Constructive development**

The journey can be considered a construction project, creating a path from Point A to B. Inspiration for the construction metaphor is the field of [constructive development](#), or adult development, beautifully laid out in Harvard professor Robert Kegan's book – [In Over Our Heads](#). We learn that one's perception of reality - self, other and the world - is self-constructed and continues to evolve over a lifespan.

In the video, the coach gives the client **a big pencil** to draw or construct each step toward his/her desired future. In real life, **the skilled facilitation of a coach** (listen, reflect-reframe, questions) brings deep focus and wide

exploration to each step. A higher level of competence and consciousness emerges in [generative moments](#). The journey is energized by growing awareness and abilities.

*The best part of growth is the true pleasure that comes from **expanding one's worldview**, outgrowing current constructs.*

## **Growth edge**

The video portrays a [growth edge](#) as a fall from a ladder constructed by the client. However, the growth edge manifests, things do not proceed as hoped. These moments call for a coach to reach into his/her toolbox. The larger the number of tools, the greater the likelihood that one will work. The right tool will enable a transformational shift, a sudden realization or ah-hah. In the video's **ladder metaphor**, the **client takes too large a step** loses balance and falls back. Then the coach **enables** the client find creative inspiration and climb to a new step that does work; a small leap in development (**listen, reflect-reframe, questions**).

## **Best self**

A big leap up to the next stage of development, portrayed as one's best self for this stage, is a wonderful moment for a client, perhaps just as special for a coach. It's a different kind of achievement than the external kind, e.g. some form of personal or professional milestone.

*The real progress is one's inside development, a rewarding growth in wisdom, perspective, and new satisfaction with the experience of navigating a human life.*

## **To be continued**

And of course, this milestone today will tomorrow be a new plateau. Then the next construction project begins, guided by the inner compass pulling us closer to our dreams.

Onward and upward

Coach Meg