

Chapter 1

What's the Opportunity in Coaching for You?

Coaching is for highly talented, successful people who seek an edge or advantage.

Chances are, since you have picked up this book, you are a talented person with a proven track record of success and a desire to create an extraordinary future for yourself and your organization. Is this mere flattery, an attempt to win you over? Absolutely not! It is a living, breathing fact of life.

We have learned through years of experience that it is highly talented, successful, ambitious people who are likely to recognize the opportunity in coaching. “You know, this might give me an edge in reaching my goals and aspirations,” or “an advantage in changing the face of things.”

People who see the opportunity in coaching are those who in sports have the profile of a champion, or who in the performing arts see their picture on billboards outside concert halls, or who in business show up in the pages of *Fortune* or *Fast Company*. They are the kind of people who want to take their game to a new level and to do so seek out the world's most masterful coaches.

People who are not so talented, successful, or ambitious tend to have lower goals and aspirations, avoid change, and adopt what we call the “Home Depot Do-It-Yourself” attitude. They keep trying to work the same old golf swing, get down the ski bumps with the same old ski techniques, grow their business by the same old business model, or get ahead by being a good soldier. They tend to be terminal intermediates at everything.

*You have a hunch perhaps that coaching can take you
to the next level of the game, or maybe change the game
you are playing altogether.*

Now that you have opened *Your Coach (In a Book)*, congratulations! You have just distinguished yourself from more than 95 percent of humanity. You are looking for a breakthrough in your career, your leadership ability, your business results, and more—and you relish the opportunity to get some great coaching, even if you don't exactly know who we are.

So what are you doing here? And what are we doing? Instead of thinking that you are opening a tome written by a couple of coaching gurus from far away, imagine that you are meeting us in your office, or a great restaurant, or a nearby Starbucks coffee shop for an extraordinary conversation.

You've got something on your mind that you would like to talk to us about—and we have something for you, too. All your life you may well have been told to genuflect before authority, to temper your personal dreams and aspirations, or to set predictable goals that could be achieved with a simple and obvious plan. Instead of being taught to think like a revolutionary, you were taught to think in terms of continuous improvement.

Let's sit down and talk . . . right there on those leather club chairs. What are you passionate about? What are your goals, aspirations?

What we are here to tell you is that it is time to widen your horizon of possibility—for yourself and your business, to unshackle your imagination from what you learned from the neighbors, from what they taught you in bean-counting school, and from what you absorbed in the white-collar towers of the typical Fortune 500 company.

Over the past two hundred years, millions of people came from the old country to the New World to create an impossible future for themselves, leaving caste and calling behind and succeeding beyond their wildest dreams. All great accomplishments started with a dream to accomplish something that looked impossible. This came to be known as the “American Way.” Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Ben Franklin understood it. Andrew Carnegie,

Thomas Edison, and Horatio Alger understood it. Today, Andrew Grove, Jack Welch, and even Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, a weightlifter and actor from Austria, all understand it.

Think back to 1950 and ask yourself, Who would have thought that by the year 2004 we would put a man on the moon, that the Soviet Union would be brought to its knees, that we would find a cure for the polio, or that 150,000,000 people would be communicating instantaneously via their own computers? Today, within just a few minutes or miles from you, people just like you are creating an Impossible Future, people who have thrown off caste and calling and dared to re-imagine themselves and their careers, people who are ready to take a stand that will make them stand out as leaders, people who are coming up with revolutionary ideas that will make their world—and yours—wobble on its axis.

Dare to Dream an Impossible Dream

What would you like to accomplish that looks impossible, but if it could be achieved, would change everything?

This book has one underlying theme—dare to dream about an Impossible Future and commit to making that the big game you play in life. For example, how about making the shift from “bag rat” (that is, “executive aid”) to CEO of your company? From a good to a great leader? From a resigned to an inspired organization? From bankruptcy to profitable growth? From boring to fun! Coaching is about expanding your ability to take something that looks difficult or impossible and actually bring it to pass. It is not about getting coaching on something you already know how to do. Here is the picture frame:

- You don’t need anyone’s permission to begin.
- Everything is possible.
- Everything is likely.
- Every situation is transformable.
- There is always a path forward.

We say this because this is the context that we coach every leader, manager, human being that we work with, and we find it re-

markably successful—much more successful than the alternatives: “My boss is a member of the ruling class around here and will never support this because it’s too revolutionary.” “It can’t be done for a thousand and one reasons.” “You can’t transform people.” “We’re stuck and there is no path forward.”

Our strength as coaches is to take people who have extraordinary talent and ability, but who often show up as ordinary under the circumstances found in most organizations, and help to free them before they reach their expiration date. One day while working on this book, we got an e-mail note that said, “If I didn’t meet you guys, I might have wound up like the guy played by Jack Nicholson in *About Schmidt*.” That piqued our curiosity enough that we went out and rented the movie.

The movie opens with Warren Schmidt, a sixty-six-year-old assistant vice president, sitting waiting for the clock to strike 5 o’clock on his last day of work at an Omaha insurance company. His colleagues’ reflections of him at his retirement dinner spur Schmidt’s own reflections. As he steps back and looks at his risk-averse life, he becomes increasingly distraught as he finds so little that has been meaningful.

When his wife unexpectedly dies, Schmidt decides to set off on a journey of self-discovery to explore his roots, going across Nebraska in a thirty-five-foot luxury motor home. One evening, he has a revelation and decides that the one thing he can do of importance is to talk his daughter out of marrying a guy he sees as an unworthy suitor. But his daughter fobs him off, and he participates in her wedding, playing the hail-fellow-well-met role and biting his tongue just as he has done all his life.

During this time, his “coach” or confidant turns out to be the six-year-old Tanzanian boy he is sponsoring for \$22 per month through an outreach organization. His letters to the boy reflect all his suppressed dreams, unsaid thoughts, and withheld communications over the years. As he returns from his trip in the motor home, in his narration of the story Schmidt comes to the conclusion, “I never did one thing in my life to make a difference.”

After watching the movie, we got into a conversation about what would have happened if Warren Schmidt had called us five, ten, or even twenty or more years earlier. We would have gone to

meet him and talked to him about what mattered to him in his life, how he saw his dreams and aspirations, and how we felt about his present set of circumstances. Then standing in his greatness, we would say something like, “Schmidt, you strike us as a bright, talented guy, with a good character and personality. But you seem to have forfeited your dreams. Is this all there is for you?”

Then, after he muttered something half-inaudible, we’d say, “Schmidt, let us ask you some other questions. What would be an Impossible Future for you? Is it to be president of this company or division of it? Is it to create a truly inspired organization that combines compassion and edge? Is it to launch a new brand marketing campaign that takes your company to the top, based on the notion of, for example, ‘Don’t sell insurance, sell speed?’ Is it to create an empowering management culture that enriches the lives of your employees?”

Schmidt’s likely response? “Thank you, gentlemen. Those are truly inspirational thoughts . . . and I appreciate the sentiment. You’re right! I would love to stand out as a leader and get promoted to president of the Omaha region, I would love to create an Impossible Future for the company, to transform this organization and maybe kick some butt. And I would love to make a difference, but I don’t have the power.”

Our likely response? “Fuhgeddaboutit! Can you imagine Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, George Washington saying, ‘I don’t have the power’? Can you imagine Abraham Lincoln, FDR, Jonas Salk saying, ‘I don’t have the power’? Can you imagine, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela saying, ‘I don’t have the power’?”

“You get the power in the process of taking a stand for an Impossible Future for yourself and your organization, and then speaking, listening, and acting from your stand—which then results in other people standing with you. You get power in creating a structure for fulfillment that will deliver on the Impossible Future. And you get power from mastering the corporate chessboard, which we can show you how to do.”

To which Schmidt might say, “Yes, but . . . I am used to setting goals that I know I can achieve and where there is a straightforward and obvious plan. It sounds like what you are talking about is something that may be impossible.”

*Coaching will give you access to a new kind of power,
the power to make the impossible happen.*

To which our response would be, “Look, in the normal course of events, most people have the power to accomplish the predictable. What we’re talking about with coaching is a new kind of power, the power to make the impossible happen. It starts with defining clear leadership, business, and career challenges for yourself, creating a structure for fulfillment as we just said, and then working shoulder to shoulder with us on these on a month-by-month, week-by-week basis.”

Now let’s assume Schmidt signed up for coaching. In the first month or so, standing in a commitment to his greatness as a leader, we would give him some powerful 360-degree feedback from the people closest to him and create a leadership development plan that would support him in standing up for his world-shaking ideas and acting more like a revolutionary or at least an activist than like a foot soldier in history’s long march. Further, somewhere along the line we might have said, “Schmidt, to make a difference, you need to be authentic and to stop making things undiscussable. Here is my cell phone, go call your daughter (or wife, or whoever) and deliver the communication you have been withholding.”

*You may discover yourself miraculously emerging as
an extraordinary leader in being coached to pursue
extraordinary results.*

Then we would start working with him on creating a *Source Document*—a blueprint for the future—for his organization that tells people what really needs to be done and how to achieve it. Schmidt would soon start coaching his organization on the Source Document, touching people with his vision and timeless values while at the same time driving on results and having some significant bottom-line impact. Soon thereafter, you might read in the Omaha paper how Warren Schmidt, that once-gray manager, had risen to CEO and turned the company around.

This process of emergence is one that has happened countless times for our coaching clients who realized that there was more in their business life than they were currently experiencing, and they discovered the opportunity in coaching. It always reminds us of the way the sculptor Michelangelo worked on his great statue of David—“liberating the figure imprisoned in the marble,” to use his own words—chipping away at the stone to reveal the masterpiece inside rather than trying to impose a design upon it. This is what we would like to do with each person we coach.

You Have the “What”—Here Is the “How”

We will inspire you to master the trickiest leadership, business, and career challenges you will ever face.

We said in the Introduction that this volume is designed to help you meet your own challenges. These challenges represent the “what.” Let’s take a moment here to give you the lay of the land with respect to the “how.” Figure 1.1 outlines the how of coaching. Read the following sections with an eye to discovering the opportunity in coaching for you.

Declare an Impossible Future and Design a Structure for Fulfillment

Let’s talk about your highest goals and aspirations, the world-shaking changes you want to bring about in your enterprise, and the things that are frustrating or even infuriating to you. We ask the

**Figure 1.1. The Opportunity in Coaching
for You: Our Promise.**

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1. We will coach you to declare an Impossible Future and design a structure for fulfillment that will help you reach it.
 2. We will coach you to master the intricacies of the political chessboard, the vagaries and mysteries of the game.
 3. We will help you to step back, give you perspectives, and see the big picture.
 4. We will empower you to take creative and effective action.
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people we coach, just as we are asking you, the reader: *What would be an impossible future for you? Do you have a burning personal ambition? What would be a “man on the moon” goal for you or your company? What’s the one thing that you would like to change in your enterprise that, if you could pull it off, would change everything?*

Once we help people get clear about their highest goals and aspirations, we then work with them as coaches to create what we call a “structure for fulfillment” for realizing their goals. It is amazing how often we run into people who have created stretch goals and objectives that are based on unrealistic assumptions or where the actions do not add up to a realizable plan. Also, people tend to use more time-tested approaches and forget the importance of creativity and innovation.

Our approach at Masterful Coaching, which asks you to set some breakthrough goals for yourself as a leader and as a business, is distinct from the normal goal-setting process found in most companies. At the same time, we ask you to create a structure for fulfillment for those breakthrough goals, which is distinct from the normal planning process practiced in most organizations.

You will be hearing about this later, but to give you a quick overview, our approach involves setting some breakthrough goals, looking at where you are now with respect to them, and identifying what is missing that, if provided, will produce a breakthrough. Once we come up with what is missing, we ask people to create a route map and relationships map for getting there.

Master the Intricacies of the Corporate Chessboard

It’s essential to master the political chessboard wherever you are, keeping in mind that what is frustrating and infuriating for some is an exciting human puzzle for others.

It was said of Lorenzo de Medici, grand master of Florence in Renaissance Italy, that he would sit down to dinner at his court with one hundred agendas and get up from dinner with each of these agendas accomplished. Medici was a great chess player. The dictionary defines chess as a royal game of strategy in which one tries to master one’s opponent through skill and artistry. When we (the authors) play chess, we are often not very brilliant at all and, in fact, Michel’s twelve-year-old son, Etienne, can easily clean the board with either of us in just a few powerful moves.

Part of the reason is that we tend to see the chessboard as a big enterprise controlled by kings and queens, where rooks and bishops can move diagonally or horizontally across the chessboard and pick us off at will. This causes us to play the game of chess not so as to maximize winning but rather to avoid losing. Thus we make one cautious move at a time.

Most of us push pawns on the corporate chessboard; we make one move at a time, naively hoping to get to the other side of the board and be crowned.

One of the things we like about chess is that a mere pawn can be transformed into royalty, and so we tend to push pawns across the board, one move at a time, with this single goal in mind, hoping to make progress, paying scant attention to anything else. Now the difference between pawn pushers like us and grand masters is that grand masters see the board from many different angles. It's almost as if they are playing on three to four chessboards at once.

If you have ever watched a grand master at work, you will see that such players take into account not just the individual pieces and all the complexity of their interactions but also the changing openings for possibilities and the constraints and the underlying patterns and connections. They grasp the game's evolving structure, anticipating opportunities to advance, and search for dangerous variables in the wide array of forces, grasping the mysteries and contingencies of the game.

Coaching can transform you from a pawn pusher on the corporate chessboard to a grand master.

What does this have to do with coaching, you might be asking yourself. What a masterful coach does is interact with you in such a way that transforms you from a pawn pusher to a grand master (masterful leader or high-impact player). The coach works with you to discover and express your personal and organizational aspirations, to map the chessboard, and to craft a master strategy necessary to succeed in your organization with colleagues amid change, complexity, and competition.

The following might help you think in terms of what you need to do to master the corporate chessboard:

- What are your most important personal and organizational goals and aspirations, the ones that are truly motivating you?
- Who are all the key pieces on the corporate chessboard—the players that you need to strategically influence?
- How can you engage both power wielders and power seekers in conversations where you listen loudly for what their positions are and where their interests lie?
- When you have clarity on the first three questions, ask yourself, How can I get where I am going by helping them get where they are going? See if you can come up with creative solutions.
- What contingency plans can you develop in case your idea doesn't fly?

Step Back and See the Big Picture

Most people we coach at some point lose all their perspective. They can't see the forest or the trees. They are stuck looking at the knot in the tree.

In the fifth century, Sun-tzu, the Chinese political and military strategist who wrote *The Art of War*, said essentially that during an engagement, a leader should not be in the heat of the conflict but a small distance apart, else his perceptions may be distorted and he will misjudge the situation as a whole. We have found with the people that we coach that once they set clear goals and aspirations and a path forward and begin to take action, they may get so embroiled in day-to-day issues and problems that they cannot see the forest for the trees.

They might lose sight of the goals and aspirations they are most passionate about and become a victim of the calendar. Or they may get so hung up in their relationship with their boss that they stop being focused on what they want to create. Or they might get entangled in turf wars and political battles with colleagues about the

change initiatives they want to bring about. Sometimes it's worse; they may wind up staring at one small knot and not even see a tree at all. What we do is help people step back and see the big picture. We focus on giving people an alternative view, one that is more accurate, insightful, and empowering.

Robert encountered a vivid example of this when coaching Ron Rosette, a regional vice president of a Fortune 500 firm, who was incredibly passionate about his vision and very driven. The problem was that he often pushed himself to the point of exhaustion and then started to take even the slightest criticism personally. Ron had put together a great strategy presentation for the CEO, seeking capital investment for his group. The CEO said that, although the substance of his presentation was along the right lines, he didn't like the style of Ron's presentation; it didn't energize anyone and was too detailed.

However, he made the mistake of telling Ron his criticism publicly. Ron called me during the break so embarrassed and upset that he was ready to quit his job on the spot. "Ron," I said, "as far as the affront to your leadership style, get some rest and get over it. On the substance side, you got 80 percent of what you wanted in that presentation. Go back and get the other 20 percent tomorrow." I was able to return Ron to what it was that he wanted to create and he went back into the meeting cracking a few jokes. I also urged him to take a vacation in the next couple of months.

Take Inventive and Effective Action

We've got to take our hats off to the leaders we coach because for the most part they are extraordinary human beings. They are usually so smart and knowledgeable about their business that they would stand out in any crowd, so tough and determined to reach their goals that they often work long hours for months on end, and so compassionate that they bend over backward to be fair.

And yet despite all of these superlatives, there often comes a point between formulating an Impossible Future and realizing it that these people become absolutely stuck and have no ideas as to the path forward. It is at this point that they call us up and bitch and moan for a while and then ask, "What should I do? What action should I take at this point?"

Frankly, we often don't have an easy or obvious answer. Imagine what you would say to Jack Welch after working on the GE Honeywell merger for over a year and being told by an official of the European Union, "No dice; go home, Mr. Welch." Imagine what you would say to Martha Stewart after she was indicted for securities fraud. Imagine what you would say to George W. Bush about how to find a noble way out of the quagmire of Iraq.

The situations that our coaching clients are in often involve changing times, enormous complexity, and competitive challenges. What we do is follow a process that you can follow by appointing a thinking partner in your own home or workplace.

- We assert that there is always a path forward, no matter how stuck things appear to be at the moment.
- We listen long enough to both empathize and make sure we understand the person's situation. We listen for goals and intentions and the person's strategies for realizing them.
- We ask some provocative questions that allow us to surface, challenge, and alter assumptions that could be resulting in the feeling of being stuck.
- Next we brainstorm alternative possibilities to the current course of action. (There are always more openings for action in the situation than the person is aware of.)
- We try to get three to six new alternatives on the table and ask the person to choose one or two that make sense. Then we suggest jumping into action to test which one of these approaches will work.

The Opportunity in Coaching for You

Before you engage in a coaching relationship with us, it is important for you to see the opportunity in coaching for you. One of the first things to consider is whether or not you have set high goals and aspirations that cause you to stretch your definition of yourself and your business, and thereby are likely to look at coaching as an opportunity or gift. If your goals are too low or if you don't have enough at stake in them, you may not see coaching as an opportunity at all.

Second, you may have high goals but may be frustrated or infuriated in the process of reaching them because you have not yet figured out how to master the political chessboard. If so, you'll have some burning questions on your mind and no idea how to answer them. For example:

- How do I keep from letting my temper get the best of me at the next big meeting and focus on making a great presentation instead of going in there wanting to strangle my boss?
- How do I get exposure to power wielders in this organization or others that could take my career to new heights?
- How do I build a coalition before the City Board of Zoning that speaks to three different special interest groups?

Third, if you are honest, you—like other leaders and managers today—are probably facing a number of problems, situations, or events where you could benefit from a coach, mentor, or thinking partner. Just take a look at the table of contents and see which topics jump out at you as something that you are dealing with. And ask yourself, What are the problems, issues, dilemmas that I am facing and what is the opportunity in coaching for me?

If you recognize that you have at stake your future and the future of your organization, are you willing to take a stand to create an extraordinary career for yourself and not settle for less? Are you willing to commit yourself to being an extraordinary leader and producing extraordinary results? Are you ready for a breakthrough in effectiveness?

If you are, you will find that we (the authors) will be like the wind at your back, supporting you 100 percent in everything we say in these pages and beyond them. In fact, you can even test that for being something more than hot air by sending us an e-mail note describing your goals, issues, problems, and so forth. We will do our best to provide an answer to your questions or a word of advice.

We wrote *Your Coach (In a Book)* with a particular commitment to you. We wrote it with a passion to save you time and make you rich in the insights needed to gain power and velocity in reaching your personal and organizational goals. We wrote it to help you gain the insights to crack open the problems, puzzles, and dilemmas that

have been confounding you. We wrote it to make sure you receive the championship-level coaching you need to be super-successful.

We would like you to come to *Your Coach (In a Book)* with a particular commitment as well. We ask you to come to this book with a commitment to suspend any notion that you are a super-successful person who can do it yourself and to surrender to the idea of being coached for a while. We ask you to come to this book from a commitment to empower us as your coaches by being a committed listener and taking on the teachable points of view offered here. And we ask you to come from a commitment to taking these ideas and putting them into action. If you are willing to do that, then a great deal can be accomplished here.

Getting the Most Out of *Your Coach (In a Book)*

Before we begin our journey together, let us offer you ten things that we believe will help you make this book work for you.

- Write down your organization, business, leadership, and career challenges—and repeat the process several times within the next month to improve them, making sure they are something that will stretch your mind and skills.
- Compose a request for coaching. Write down your coaching objectives: goals you are struggling with, issues and dilemmas you need resolved.
- Read *Your Coach (In a Book)* with gusto. Dog-ear favorite pages; shamelessly underline valuable passages or even rip them out.
- Take the teachable points of view here and try them on for size. For example, for the next three months focus on creating the business instead of on running the business.
- Take the templates for action we provide seriously. Get going! Right now! Immediately, and just do it!
- E-mail us with the subject line “Request for Help” at Robert.Hargrove@MasterfulCoaching.com or Michel.Renaud@MasterfulCoaching.com.
- Create a “deputy coach” or “thinking partner” in your organization who can give you ongoing coaching and feedback, and get your first three to four meetings on the schedule.

- Buy a copy of *Your Coach (In a Book)* for your deputy coach, thinking partner, or team.
- Create “Coaching Circles” with people in your team. Meet every Monday morning for half an hour about a particularly relevant passage in the book.
- Keep asking yourself, Is the coaching relationship extraordinary or ordinary? If it’s ordinary, what do I need to do to make it extraordinary?