# DMC Coaching with John McCormick

## 9 Key Coaching Themes

Select a focus by clicking on the icons below.

DMC COACHING

Purpose

Communication

Leadership

Conflict

Coaching as a
tool for professional growth

Performance

Relationships

Balance

Resilience

Complexity

# Purpose: Understanding yourself, what you want and how to get it

## What is purpose?

Purpose can be defined as the reason why something exists, or why certain things are done, made or used. A philosopher might ask us why we exist - what is our raison d'être? In a corporate or commercial sense, this question translates to: if we closed tomorrow, who would miss us – or the service we provided? The answers to these questions are what guide us to our purpose.

Think of your purpose as a compass to the vision for your business or personal life. It's a force as strong as gravity, but instead of pulling down, it pushes forward, guides us and gives us reason to believe in something greater.

Disney called it magic. Kennedy called it putting a man on the moon. Whatever you call it, your purpose is your 'why'.

## The relationship between purpose & strategy

**Purpose gives you direction.**

**Strategy gives you *the* direction**

If we imagine that strategy is a direction; then purpose tells us why we exist, and directs every single Who, Where, When, What and How.

A purpose driven strategy provides your employees with both a dream and the roadmap to get there. When the two come together it makes for an unstoppable combination and, truly, they must always go hand in hand.

**Strategies are timely, but purpose is timeless.**

## The importance of purpose

Purpose is about putting humanity back into business – it means something to all people. Purpose is no longer confined to private reflection; it liberates teams, businesses and communities. Without purpose, businesses, teams and individuals find themselves lost and directionless. As a leader, your purpose provides you with a moral compass on which every who, where, when, what and how hinges. What's more, purpose is a core differentiator in a customer centric organisation. Purpose understands that our customers are our future. And without loyal customers, we have no meaningful purpose. It builds brand loyalty, consistency and relevance for both customers and stakeholders alike, and evolves with an organisation to bond its people together.

## Purposeful leadership

Purposeful leaders tend to work on their 'why' in order to get the 'wow'. If we accept that the brain runs everything; and the heart runs the brain; think of what could be achieved if our purpose, vision, values, ethos, culture, strategy and tactics were entirely aligned – we would be unstoppable.

### A top down approach to identifying your purpose

**Purpose**
What is most important to you?
What do you want to be?

**Vision**
What are your ambitions?

**Values**
What behavioural norms and culture do we need?

**Strategy**
How do we execute this vision?

**People**
who's involved, and do they have what you need to drive forward?

**Actions**
What are the actions required to execute the strategy, in order to realise the vision and in turn to fulfil our purpose?

## Practical, purposeful actions and behaviours in the C-Suite

**CEO:** It's not just about talking the talk, it's about walking the walk—identify your purpose, promote it through words and actions, and help build it into the fabric of your organisation. Help your employees to find their own meaning in their work by communicating how your purpose connects to what they do each day.

**CFO:** Identify new metrics for living out the company's purpose; be willing to play the long game and take risks to embed your purpose in financial decision-making.

**CIO:** Be authentic and genuine about how data is leveraged for storytelling around the impact your brand creates.

**CHRO:** Embed purpose in job descriptions and approaches to hiring. Deploy purpose-driven outcomes in how people are managed and evaluated to ensure authenticity is upheld.

Back to top

**How to manage the requirements of captaining your ship**

## What makes a good leader?

Successful leaders can be identified by their understanding of the connection between their leadership and their followership. They know that the hopes and aspirations of the company must be grounded in logic **(logos)**, so they must speak to their followers' minds.

Respected leaders also recognise that their followers need to relate to the company's purpose, so they engage with their followers' hearts **(pathos)**.

Enduring leaders recognise that the company's and employees' activities and behaviours will be scrutinised by a range of stakeholders in terms of ethical standards and 'doing the right things' **(ethos)**.

> **Good leaders understand that combining the heart, the brain and a sense of ethics in a call to arms can mobilise followers to go above and beyond the call of duty.**

## No one is an island…

Despite often finding oneself in the company of others, leadership can be a lonely business. It can be challenging to obtain candid feedback from employees, and takes a special culture within which the senior executive team can (and is expected to) give robust feedback to the boss.
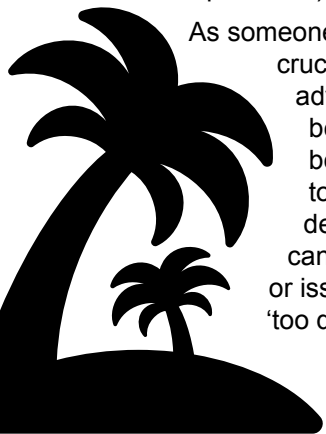
As someone others look to for guidance, it is crucial that leaders seek out impartial advice. An experienced mentor can be a trusted confidant and sounding board, providing a safe environment to explore challenging issues and debate options for change. A mentor can help to address sensitive topics or issues which employees file in the 'too difficult to deal with box', and by sharing the burden experienced by many leaders, you reduce both personal and business risk.

## Servant vs Lord

It is not uncommon to find that leaders of profitable and sustainable businesses tend to be humble and self-effacing, choosing to promote the company and the brand ahead of themselves or their senior team. Despite their modesty, leaders such as this are highly capable and willing to make tough choices on people, products and strategy, yet choose to see themselves more as 'servants' than 'Lords'.

Above all, the purpose of a leader is to achieve *'big hairy audacious goals'* (Collins & Porras, Built to Last, 1995) and to leave a meaningful legacy after they have left the company.

## The importance of building your 'tribe'

One of the most important ways in which a leader can add value and leave behind a long-lasting impact within a business is to hire well and to retain and develop talent. It takes a certain level of courage and confidence to hire people that are better than us, however it is a leader's job to have one eye on the future – a skill not possessed by all. It is a necessity that the Board and Nominations Committee Chair regularly review leadership development and succession plans, thus creating movement in middle and senior ranks, promoting positive tension and competition in the company. This allows aspiring talent to have a line of sight to greater responsibility and career growth, decreasing the likelihood of their leaving or diverting their energy and ideas elsewhere. In essence, succession planning is the lifeblood of any successful business. It's what creates buzz and motivates teams.

But a step up can be daunting for new recruits. Executive coaching and mentoring helps to prepare emerging talent for the additional responsibilities of senior leadership roles and how to deal with the sometimes abstract or nuanced demands of 'having more gravitas' or a 'better profile'. Delivering good results is never enough. Beware!

## Horizon scanning

Effective leaders operate in the now, but think in the future. From a risk and innovation perspective horizon scanning allows us to test multiple upside and downside scenarios – the vast majority of which never happen, nor would they be allowed to happen due to effective risk management. It's a leader's job to take calculated risks with an eye to the implications for customers, staff and shareholders, backing the judgement of their people and using failure as a chance to learn, rather than place blame.

## Managing paradoxes

As outlined by Christine Thornton in her book, Group & Team Coaching (2010), leaders are constantly being asked to do more with less, ultimately juggling two competing agendas. We are asked to be innovative, yet avoid mistakes. Think long term, but deliver immediate results. And cut costs while increasing quality. With many leaders having to manage these conflicting requests in unprecedented times, such as the 2008 financial crash or the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, it's important to take the time to weigh up your options and make the decision that's best for you, your team and the business as a whole.

## The importance of performance

Competitive people want to win, whether as an individual or as a team. As Vince Lombardi, the American football coach to the Green Bay Packers used to say - 'winning is 100% fun'. High performers will endeavour to 'tilt the odds in their favour' through superior preparation, knowledge, tools, data, allocation of resources and skillsets that allow them to understand how to 'play the game'.

But in the end, it's all about your mindset. Think of the elite sports teams who make winning a habit, for example the All Blacks men's rugby union team or the Australian Ladies Hockey team. Although they expect to win - when they lose, they learn from it. Coaches will often remind athletes, and it's a phrase universally adopted, that 'failure to prepare means you should prepare to fail'. That's where an effective and supportive mentoring relationship can add so much value. It provides a safe environment to explore your own or your team's performance and identify what can be done to improve it.
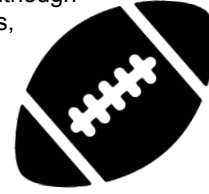
When asked why we keep score, competitors will tend to answer, 'because it matters, we need to know who won!'

## What drives performance?

A company with a clear purpose, vision, values and culture is already ahead of the competition. If the leadership can then develop a good strategy, underpinned by sensible business plans, with an optimal organisational structure and the right people, it's the perfect recipe for a business to outperform and win market share.

Metrics within the business plans will allow leaders to monitor, measure and manage performance. They say that 'what gets measured, gets managed and what gets managed, gets done'. Using the right performance metrics allows managers to adapt, change and hold both themselves and their team to account, prompting timely and tactical modifications which reflect the market and client needs.

**An experienced mentor can ensure that you're measuring the right things – i.e. the real value drivers in the business.**

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent; it is the one most adaptable to change."
– Charles Darwin.

## How to measure it

*High performance in business is a by product of organisational clarity.*

It's important for roles and job descriptions to be clearly outlined – this ensures staff understands what their role entails. A well-crafted, mutually agreed upon set of performance objectives ensures confidence and clarity in what is expected from the employee. When a leader creates focus and clarity of the organisation's overall goals, employees then have a clear line of sight; they are empowered to take personal responsibility and become accountable for delivery of their goals in pursuit of the organisation's vision. This is powerful

In recent years there has been a growing movement in favour of removing formal semi-annual and annual performance reviews in favour of more continuous assessment and coaching. Many businesses prefer 'check ins' and 'agile feedback' after a project or delivery of a smaller set of tasks. They have separated performance reviews from the compensation reviews. The jury is still out on which approach works best, as some employees feel that their contribution is not always fairly recognised and rewarded.

A key leadership responsibility is differentiating the performance of an individual who's operating within a team context, a task that requires clarity within the objective (quantitative) and subjective (qualitative) measures.

## The role of culture in driving performance

The culture and 'unwritten rules' of an organisation play a major role in a successful environment - one in which those who are not behaving in a way which is acceptable or expected are taken aside and spoken to. The culture of a business must be protected, meaning that employees whose attitudes or actions are inconsistent with the culture must be asked to leave the team or firm. Tasks such as these are not pleasant for many leaders, and often the knowledge of when to draw the line doesn't come naturally. A mentor can help you to develop these skills that enable you to measure and manage performance through 'critical conversations' with your top team - sometimes referred to as 'tough love'.

## What makes a high performer?

High performers understand that they will need to pay a price for success – they expect to make sacrifices in order to attain their goals. Not everyone is willing to do this, which is a key driver for the gaps so commonly observed between winners and those in second place. Putting in the effort, the preparation, the training, the visualisation and the 'hard yards', even if no one sees it, is the only way to be better on the day.

Aside from this, a high performer's toolkit will consist of many other characteristics: competence, character, sheer grit and determination, the ability to bounce back from failure and setbacks, a sense of humour and a willingness to accept that someone else was simply better at the end of the day. Equally, they avoid other attributes which might jeopardise their success, like complacency, laziness, diffusion of focus, an attitude of good being good enough, or not turning up at all.

High performers take risks. They understand what it takes to win, and they know that they may fail – but when they do they go to great lengths to learn from it. When entering the 'crucible' they are armed with the tools and confidence to give a great performance, and they have the stamina and 'stickability' to keep going. Never ones to leave the game early, high performers approach their role and tasks with ruthless simplicity and prioritisation. People such as these are all in, because they understand that this is the price for success.

For those that meet the above criteria, one crucial fact must always be kept in mind: nobody can perform at their best 100% of the time. A mentor can help you to establish, develop and maintain a healthy work/life balance, so that when it truly counts you continuously hit the mark.

Back to top

## Stress, anxiety & imposter syndrome

We often hear of busy executives aspiring to have a better work/life balance – it's widely recognised as being crucial for our health and well-being. Major contributors to this healthy goal lie in a good diet, regular exercise, and setting aside ample time for rest and relaxation.

Our downfall, however, is that we use our principles and values as a lens to evaluate our progress where, more often than not, we hold ourselves to impossibly high standards. Quite soon, imposter syndrome sets in – ultimately culminating in stress and anxiety. Imbalances like this have the potential to develop into more serious issues such as panic attacks, mental illness and, over time, long term health concerns. It's my job as a mentor to help you address these imbalances by discussing, relating and unpacking these real or perceived issues which may be troubling you. Examples include managing conflict with a boss or a peer; preparing to deal with a difficult or sensitive issue or situation; preparing for a media onslaught; coming to terms with embarking on a redundancy program; or letting a close colleague go.

## Fixing faulty thinking

Busy senior executives always have a wide range of issues to deal with, so it's no wonder that it can be a challenge to retain balance in your thinking style. It doesn't take much to be overrun by a tsunami of issues, or relentless pressure to deliver under exacting circumstances or environments. As such, decisions made under pressure may not get the attention or depth of thought that you ordinarily would have given them. My role means I can offer a degree of realism and perspective to help challenge this 'faulty thinking'.

For example, when it comes to matters of the mind, we may use tools from the world of psychology to help this process. Techniques (including helpful questions and clarifications) from within Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) can offer useful ways of helpfully challenging an entrenched position or unrealistic thinking. At its core, CBT focuses on how your thoughts, beliefs and attitudes affect your feelings and behaviour, and teaches you coping skills for dealing with different problems. I can offer this 'challenge' in a safe and private environment, where new possibilities can be explored, and different options can be developed, thereby reducing the risk for both you as an individual and the wider company.

**A wise person once said that 'things are never quite as good as they seem, but equally they are never quite as bad as they seem'. This perspective is a useful tool for reducing anxiety and tends to break problems down into what's controllable and what's not. Tactics and strategies can then be developed to move forward, thereby offering new possibilities rather than a 'fait accompli'.**

## The importance of taking responsibility

When hit with a stressful or chaotic scenario, senior executives tend to either deny their situation, or blame someone or something else – both of which only serve to make the situation worse. Taking control will, at a minimum, engender confidence, which often acts as a mechanism to regain one's momentum or 'mojo'.

The key is to anticipate and plan for any situation. Management of resources, delegation of tasks and organising more effectively for stressful periods can help to alleviate some of the stress. This, coupled with the development of coping strategies, can help maintain balance and perspective. For some executives, the act of taking downtime can cause more stress than it relieves, but ultimately it is imperative that we learn to relax, if only for the attendant health benefits it can bring.

## Overcoming competing agendas and opposing views

It can be difficult to stay composed and in 'balance' when there is tension or dissension in a conversation or meeting. As the senior executive or chair of that meeting, it falls to you to provide the balance, wisdom and skill to ensure all voices are heard and that no one's voice has been stolen by a dominant other. In moments such as these, your ability to balance these competing, and sometimes opposing, agendas can allow for adjustments in the future without embarrassing U turns or volte face by the chair or members of the board.

In steering the meeting, it is the balance with which you put forward an argument, a proposal or a 'call to arms' that is a highly valued skill in the board room. To be capable of containing competing agendas or opposing views simultaneously is an endlessly useful ability that will serve to help you reach congruence on even the most difficult of matters. As someone who has experienced this first-hand, it is my role to help you to heighten your self-awareness so that you may learn a tolerance for ambiguity and the abstract.
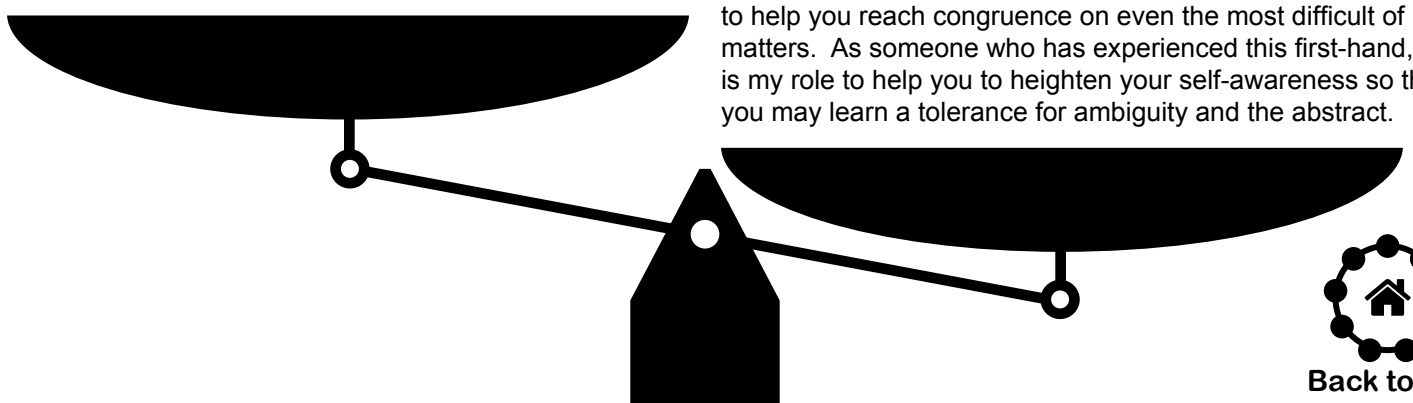
## What is complexity?

> On a general level, one could describe complexity as a large number of elements, such as specific technologies, raw materials, products, people and organisational units, that have many connections to each other.

Complexity is sometimes viewed as a tangle - tangled ideas, tangled wires, tangled set up. As companies grow, they have a tendency to add new products, processes, channels or locations, each one adding additional degrees of complexity as new linkages and interdependencies develop. This invariably increases cost by adding more layers of process across elements and demanding enhanced audit, risk and control reviews, to prevent things going wrong in production, portfolio management or after sales.

Complexity can, however, offer strengths to a company. It can increase a business's resilience by making it difficult for competitors to easily replicate products, systems or processes, and provides a competitive advantage by being able to adapt quickly to changing markets and consumer tastes. Complexity allows us to test market appetite by experimenting with varied product offerings and mobilising resources based on live feedback.

Where interdependencies are well managed, successful companies can make conscious choices to provide bundled products and offerings to customers, in some cases cross subsidising elements based on client volumes and needs across the client franchise. This understanding of complex customer needs and how to deliver them profitably can confer inimitability.

Despite these advantages, organisational complexity gets a bad press. The costs of complexity frequently outweigh the benefits because cutting it out is harder than adding it.

### How complexity impacts our customers

In financial services, there has been a significant rise in banks being fined by regulators due to mis-selling. Much of this is a function of the asymmetry of product information between banks and their customers where the cost, fees or performance of a product was not fully understood by the customer at the start. It's important to keep in mind that adding complexity or additional flexibility can decrease a customer's ability to understand the product or service, no matter how useful the initial intent was.

In extreme cases, companies simply become too big and unwieldy to manage. As companies grow, leaders have less understanding of how each element is intertwined with others, or the potential impact of removing any one element. Internal power struggles within large complex companies occur when one divisional head or product line leader has too much sway over company strategy or allocation of scarce resources. This becomes especially poignant when large global companies need to contract and, in the process, overlook the linkages that are the very rationale for customers who use the company in the first place.

### Complexity antidotes

To counteract these issues, leaders and managers should strive for a modular organisation, where components and connections conform to a small number of simple operating principles. Embedding a bias for and openness to change will help create an environment which is conducive to creativity and innovation, without too many rules or constraints on your people.

Striving for ruthless simplicity is often a good antidote to complexity. Simplicity leads to clarity of focus and is therefore understandable by more people – including customers. Like a garden, companies need constant pruning, repair and fixing.  Steve Jobs was a student of Japanese aesthetics and design, and this is reflected in Apple's design philosophy.

An external customer focus with an emphasis on using market data will inform managers on what is working.  This cuts to the heart of why companies exist; to serve their customers.

Simplicity is always at the heart of good design. This is what the Japanese call 'Ma' – looking at what is not there in the context of what is there, and also 'Wa' – that elements need to create harmony in the context of their very existence. In this approach beauty and functionality sit happily side by side.

# Resilience:
Learning to overcome challenges and build confidence in your abilities

## What is resilience?

## Resilience is the ability to overcome or recover in the face of adversity or misfortune.

It's an important factor in our long term personal and professional success. Executives can put in place mechanisms which build resilience into their environment, their health, their thinking styles and their teams. This permeates many facets of how we operate; for example how we define our vision, our purpose, our goals and ambitions, as well as how we collaborate, use networks, profile ourselves and manage our general perception. Resilience can even impact our demeanour, how we regulate our emotions, manage our biases, and how we analyse situations, solve problems, organise and plan. It can even have an effect on how we manage our health, for example our rest, sleep and exercise, which has a direct impact on how tenacious we are – our persistence, realism and ability to 'bounce back'.

## What do resilient people do differently?

Resilient people, more often than not, tend to be confident, and do not shy away from asking for support and help from their team, families and community. They willingly take on challenges and are comfortable taking risks, trying new things and bearing the consequences of the results.

They are generally adaptable and are comfortable with being pushed out of their comfort zone, using these experiences as an opportunity to learn. They look for solutions and not excuses. And even if a solution is not apparent in the early stages, they possess an inner sense that they can shorten the time to find that solution by staying focused and applying themselves to the job in hand. In short, they are persistent, possessing plenty of grit and determination.

Those with resilience are positive and clever enough to avoid traps, always remaining realistic when the going gets tough. They carry mantras and beliefs to remind themselves that they will get through adversity – that whatever challenge they're facing is merely a set back and nothing more. When they come out the other side they are stronger, more confident and their resilience builds as a result of that experience.

Resilient people are often grateful. They have a habit of maintaining a hopeful and positive outlook, making them great role models for others, and great candidates for senior leadership roles. They maintain perspective through reflection, and they create time and space to think. They possess a strong sense of purpose in what they are doing and hope to do in the future. A mastery of skills and techniques underpin a resilient person's mindset. They want to move on from conscious competence to being intuitively excellent.

Consistent winners develop mental and physical stamina. They understand the correlation between commitment, persistence and discipline. They are willing to pay the price for success and they know that winning is a habit.

## Building this level of 'game time' resilience requires experience and practice. It is only through the act of doing, and having to bear responsibility for the outcome, that we learn resilience.

## Building resilience through mentoring

As an experienced mentor, my role is to share experiences with you to help co-create options that allow us to address new challenges and issues. With my relevant business experience, I can support you in a succession plan, or prepare you for the transition into a CEO role or new company. It's my job to ensure that your self-awareness is heightened, and that you have the right resilience tools to perform in your role.

# Relationships: Managing relationships and the art of compromise

## The importance of good relationships

Having meaningful and rewarding relationships in our personal and professional lives is arguably one of the greatest assets we can hope for. That said, investing in and managing relationships takes time and effort to ensure proper balance, vitality, honesty and endurance. Long lasting relationships tend to be built on credibility and integrity. Sometimes, however, we inadvertently allow a relationship to become imbalanced, and if not corrected, the situation may persist, leading to behaviours and expectations on both sides which can become unhelpful, unfair, negative or even destructive.

The challenge for many of us is that there are no rules or codes by which to 'manage' a relationship. The unwritten code that we are all aware of comes through conscious and unconscious reactions in the moment, and through these experiences we build up knowledge of how the other person will react – leading us to communicate in line with our expectations.

## Tools for effective relationship management

Our interactions can be greatly affected by the frame of mind we are in at the time, and ultimately determines our behaviour that in turn will elicit responses in others. As your coach and mentor, my role is to help you deal with issues caused by interpersonal interactions, allowing you to better understand your frame of mind at the time the issue developed. I outline two of the tools that I use below: transactional analysis and the drama triangle.

## Transactional analysis

Transactional analysis uses the term 'ego states' to describe the three states of mind which produce certain behaviour and subsequent responses. For instance, most people have at some time, been on the receiving end of a childish tantrum, be it from a junior colleague, a peer or someone in a senior position. So too have we ourselves behaved childishly and realised (more often than not) that our behaviour was inappropriate.

At times, we may catch ourselves sounding like our parents as we give out our views on how things should be done, which can have the adverse effect of promoting a childish response from others.

### Transactional analysis and ego states

Every adult was once a child, and those who make it to adult life will have experienced a functioning parent, or someone 'in loco parentis', to some degree. Therefore, we can easily be taken over by these opposing ego states – which, complexly, can also exist side by side. Simply put, the mind does not have a mechanism which depicts a finite beginning or end to the transitions from child, to adult, to parent – and thus we are always capable of reverting into one state or another under the right set of circumstances.

### The three ego states

1. **Parent:** authoritarian, in charge, loving, wise, critical, severe, nurturing, approving, disapproving, judgmental
2. **Adult:** equal, rational, analytical, logical, non-emotional, respectful, objective
3. **Child:** childish, creative, playful, irresponsible

There are many consequences – both intended and unintended – that occur as a result of accessing different ego states within personal and work relationships. Recognising and understanding these states can provide valuable and vital insights.

## The Drama Triangle

The Karpman Drama Triangle models the connection between personal responsibility and power in conflicts, highlighting the destructive and shifting roles people play. Karpman defined three roles in the conflict: Persecutor, Rescuer (the one up positions) and Victim (one down position). He placed these three roles on an inverted triangle and referred to them as being the three aspects, or faces, of drama.

### 1. The Victim
The Victim's stance is "Poor me!". This person feels victimized, oppressed, helpless, hopeless, powerless and ashamed, seeming incapable of making decisions, solving problems, taking pleasure in life or achieving insight. The Victim, if not being persecuted, will seek out a Persecutor, but also a Rescuer who they will rely on to save the day while also perpetuating the Victim's negative feelings.

### 2. The Rescuer:
The rescuer's line is "Let me help you." A classic enabler, the Rescuer feels guilty if they don't come in to save the day. Yet their rescuing has negative effects. It keeps the Victim dependent, denying them permission to fail and experience the consequences of their choices. The rewards derived from this rescue role are that the focus is taken off of the rescuer. When they focus their energy on someone else, it enables them to ignore their own anxiety and issues. This role is also pivotal, because their actual primary interest is really an avoidance of their own problems disguised as concern for the victim's needs.

### 3. The Persecutor: (a.k.a. Villain)
The Persecutor insists, "It's all your fault." The Persecutor is controlling, blaming, critical, oppressive, angry, authoritarian, rigid, and superior.

As a qualified coach, my role is to help you understand the role that you may be consciously or unconsciously playing in your relationships, supporting you so that you may shift the dialogue (or conflict) towards 'an adult to adult' exchange.

Back to top

# Conflict:

**Building the courage and know-how for dealing with conflict and 'getting to calm'**

## What is conflict?

**In business and in life, conflict can be defined as any situation in which your concerns or desires differ from those of another person.**

Overt and covert conflict in companies is a costly issue to have, losing you time, efficiency and collaboration. We have all, at some time or another, experienced conflict in our lives – directly or indirectly – at home, school, work or in the community.

Leaders who handle conflict well have a tendency to view conflict as a process, rather than a personal battle. The learning that comes from well managed conflict enables leaders and their teams to sustain high performance over an extended period of time.

## The importance of managing conflict

To be an effective leader, one needs to be able to resolve conflict on many levels. Successful leaders use learnable tools to help them manage conflict. High performing teams appreciate that there is great value in being able to challenge each other constructively so that they may raise their level of performance and deliver even greater value to both their organisation and their customers.

It is my role to equip leaders with the tools, wisdom and knowledge to improve your conflict handling skills, empowering you to strengthen relationships, increase effectiveness, reduce stress, improve morale and save time and money.

## Tools for managing conflict

### 6 steps for resolving conflict

1. Identify the source of the conflict
2. Look beyond this point of conflict
3. Ask for suggested solutions
4. Clarify potential solutions that everyone can support
5. Help create and connect to the common ground for all involved
6. Ask for a commitment beyond a simple agreement, i.e. actions, not just words

### 5 tips for communicating through conflict

1. Make clear the value of your relationship
2. Communicate slowly and deliberately
3. Seek to understand the position of others
4. Actively listen to what others are trying to communicate
5. Confront the situation, not the person

## The Thomas Kilman Conflict ™ (TKC) model

This can be a useful way to consider one's approach to managing conflict issues. Talented conflict managers use a range of 'conflict modes' from their repertoire to address tense situations.

**There are two basic aspects of all conflict handling modes = assertiveness & cooperativeness. Your conflict mode is your skill plus the situation, and will reflect your background and upbringing, the environment, job responsibilities or position, social and communications skills, past experience and cultural norms.**

**TKC ™ Summary:** Conflict handling modes tend to fall in one of these categories: competing (win), collaborating (win-win), compromising (find a middle ground), avoiding (delay) and accommodating (yield). Overuse and underuse of each of these styles will have an impact on the results in a conflict.

Knowing your own style, and that of the other side, in a conflict can have a major bearing on your ability to influence the outcome. For example, the positive implications of a collaborative style are your ability to listen, understand and empathise in a non-threatening manner; to seek input and critically analyse and to identify underlying concerns.

That said, overuse of a collaborative style can create potentially negative situations. For example, you may find you're spending too much time on trivial matters, you've diffused responsibility, and people are taking advantage of your willingness to concede and collaborate. This inevitably increases your workload as the collaborator. Juxtapositionally, underuse of a collaborative style will lead to mutual gains deprivation, lack of commitment, low empowerment and loss of innovation.

**Back to top**

## The importance of communication

It goes without saying that communication is nothing without understanding. The finest orators, speech makers and communicators have had to learn their craft. They draw on a variety of tools and science to ensure that their message lands and, more importantly, makes sense. They know that if you can move the minds of others with your language and expression, they will recognise in you the ability to get things done.

When communicating, effective leaders understand that when they connect the intellectual with the emotional, it's the jewel in the crown. Greek orators used rhetoric in delivering their speeches at the Pantheon – combining empathy (pathos), rationale or logic (logos) and doing the right things (ethos) to persuade their colleagues of the merits of their proposition.

### The importance of communication

Communication is not only about speaking – in fact, it's far more about listening. An extreme example of this is evidenced by specialist training for world class hostage negotiators who listen for facts, emotions, motivators, values and beliefs – all of which contribute to their 'currency'. In other words, the driving force behind why someone does what they do. They listen to understand rather than to respond. They are capable of listening for what is not being said, for words denoting sentiments, and confirm this by matching with the hostage taker's eye acuity and body language. This information becomes the key to identifying levers for dealing with the situation. The hostage negotiator uses this to persuade, influence, manipulate or sell to the hostage taker. The intensity of their focus is remarkable and often exhausting in execution.

More broadly than this, great listeners have a highly developed sense of self awareness. They don't talk when others are speaking. They listen with their eyes, as well as their ears, and include interactions that build a speaker's self-esteem. They never highjack a conversation, and always know when to take their turn to speak. They strive for a co-operative conversation and create a safe environment within which to talk and share. They stay attuned by making gestures which signal that they are listening with interest, and that they are making meaning from what the speaker is saying. They know that it matters what someone says, but what matters more is why they say it.

## The 'grapevine' and other vacuums

In general, there tends to be a grain of truth in what the grapevine tells us. Critics feast on management silence. They hold court in local coffee shops and bars. Effective leaders should not compete with the grapevine, but rather get alongside it and fill a 'new grapevine' with facts and success stories. This is what will ultimately slow the growth of rumour and gossip.

We can have confidence in our employees who tend to be rational and smart. They can 'see and smell' the BS! Our people gravitate to clarity and so we must be clear. Messages must resonate and be credible, using language and metaphors that the audience will understand – this means no 'corporate waffle'! Any voids we leave will be filled by fence sitters, nay-sayers and doom & gloom merchants.

Competitors are taking advantage of the confusion and conjuring up a downside message for anyone who will listen. It is remarkable how naive and gullible smart people can be when things are in flux. To address this issue, leaders must flood the communications channels with targeted messages. We need to take care of the 'fog index' and 'content free communications'. Where there may be bad news, strong leaders should be upfront and clear. Leadership needs to supply honest answers to the tough questions that our best people ask when they are in the dark and worried. This builds credibility and people will listen.

Using communications champions helps to share the workload, as they tend to be closer to the front line and have pre-existing relationships with those who are culture carriers and advocates. This adds to the credibility of the messaging.

**Public speaking is the number one tool of leadership, because when you get people in a room to hear the same message at the same time you have the greatest chance of moving them to action.**

## How to communicate in the boardroom

Accomplished Chairs often share these honed listening skills and attributes and are often great summarisers. They are able to repeat, in fine detail, what a board has discussed. They tend to ask helpful and supportive questions which allow the presenter to refine their focus and add qualifying commentary or helpful statements. They are comfortable with silences and understand the 'power of the pause'. This in turn informs the board and helps them to make better decisions, increasing the overall efficiency of the board and reducing risk in corporate governance.