

Circles of Life

By Robert H. Owen

Preface

For much of my working life, people have come to me for assistance, support, and advice in their business and personal issues. Sometimes these people report to me or are part of my overall organization. Many times they have nothing to do with my organization and are seeking a low risk ear to listen to their issues and concerns. Issues range from personal or family issues, career, functional relationships, bosses, and the many other things that concern us all from time to time. I feel honored and fortunate that people search me out.

I always approach the opportunity with complete honesty and confidentiality. It takes a lot to approach someone on these issues and total integrity is the only response. For most of my years my approach was to listen and offer help. I always searched for what the person wanted to achieve. I never felt my role was that of a counselor. I've always been prone to the action and achievement that the person approaching me wanted to achieve. This always seemed like common sense to me.

The Influences in our Lives

Over a period of several weeks I reflected on as many of the influences in my life that I could think of. As I use my laptop as my notepad, I would think of something and note it in on my computer. I was in and out, contemplating, debating, self-reflecting, and becoming more and more convinced that I was on to something. My approach was to draw a circle and label it for whom or what it referenced, such as Mother, Father, school, work, family, children, friends, etc. I can go on and on about how many circles there were and all of their labels. Ultimately they all revealed the same thing.

Within each circle I put up to 3 symbols: a plus "+" sign, a minus "-" sign, and a neutral sign where I used a zero "0" to indicate such. For example:

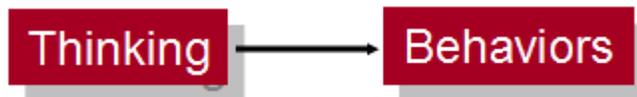


When I reflect on my high school football coaches, I remember a lot of negative influences. In part of this is due to where I lived and generally negative motivation techniques of the times. This was Theory X time. You see, I came from strong farm parents in the central US. My high school days were in the late 60s. Most sports motivation was negative and fear based. I was scared most of the time; vomiting before, during, and after practice; and generally felt worthless. You can most likely guess, these reflect the minus “-“ sign in my circle. However, I was a first-string starter because I worked harder than anyone else. The negative motivation worked on me as it was interspersed with a few moments of pleasure with “good hit Owen”. These reflect the plus sign “+” in my circle. In the case of my coaches, I was unable to reflect on a neutral influence. These guys didn’t just “be”, I allowed them to either kick me, figuratively, or pat me on the head like a little puppy looking for the latest treat of recognition.

What I Discovered

I can go on and on telling you about every circle and every sign. This might be interesting for a book, but not very timely for a brief introduction to the concept.

What I discovered is that I did not have one single circle with only a plus “+” sign in it, or someone totally dedicated to my positive advance. This is not intended as a statement of good or bad, it simply is. Parents, schools, friends, family, employers, bosses, peers, employees, children, social organizations, religious bodies, and all others have agendas that are self-serving. They also have their own personal weaknesses such as lack of trust, closed points of view, fear of competition, egos that don’t allow others to succeed, etc. This is not bad or wrong, it just is. A business exists to provide products and services and make a profit. Every day is not committed to my fulfilling advancement and development. Human interactions don’t exist for my singular benefit. I was unable to even put only a “+” in my own self-circle. I can be too negative and overcome by others; I am not always a positive influence on myself! Unfortunately our own thinking can be a huge deterrent as



Thinking drives behavior, or our actions. We are all a product of our thinking. Negative thinking drives negative behaviors such as denial, blame, neglect, self-degradation, inaction, fear, risk avoidance, etc. Many of our disappointments are simply a product of our thinking and resulting inaction or negative action.

What I discovered is the potential of a personal coach. If they are doing their job, they are only there to serve and help you achieve. They should have

no personal intention or predetermined game plan for your life. The International Association of Coaches, a certifying agency, states 9 basic precepts for a coach:

- ✓ **Establishing and maintaining a relationship of trust**
- ✓ **Perceiving, affirming and expanding the client's potential**
- ✓ **Engaged Listening**
- ✓ **Processing in the present**
- ✓ **Expressing**
- ✓ **Clarifying**
- ✓ **Helping the client set and keep clear intentions**
- ✓ **Inviting possibility**
- ✓ **Helping the client to create and use support systems and structures**

A qualified coach has many tools available to them to assist you with positive intent. There is significant evidence available through Behavioral and Humanistic Psychology supporting the use and value of such tools. A sample of these tools includes:

- Action communications
- Action learning
- Adult development theory
- Adult learning theory
- Appreciative inquiry
- Behavior Analysis
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Consciousness theory
- Dialog
- Emotional intelligence
- Humanistic psychology
- Inquiry
- Management, Leadership, Organizational Behavior and Development
- Owner/Victim analysis
- Priority management
- Self-reflection

For the first time in my life, I have a personal coach. His name is Steve Chandler, noted coach, teacher, and author (www.stevechandler.com). He assists me by doing the above precepts and by being a solely positive influence in my life.

Why Does It Takes Us So Long?

Better said, why did it take me so long to discover a personal coach? First, I assumed it was only for the rich. Every CEO I've know had contacts, mentors, and many have paid coaches. I've always learned from others and looked for mentors from which I can learn and grow. I've also sought out

teachers and sport coaches many times in my life. As a small child my Father was my coach in everything from baseball to golf. As I grew and attended school, coaches were a natural part of sports. Too bad many were so negative and solely motivated by their needs versus mine. They actually don't meet the definition of "coach" as I'm using it in the context of this paper. I had musical instrument instructors, college professors, student mentors, and just this past year, a private golf coach/instructor.

So, why do so few of us seek out a coach for the most important parts of our life: career and personal/professional development? It makes no sense whatsoever! The industry has professional education, standards, guidelines, books, articles, researched body of evidence, professional organizations, and quality certification standards. I became so interested that I obtained an Evidence Based Coaching certificate through Fielding Graduate University (www.fielding.edu), a highly regarded institution dedicated to graduate level education.

Take Action

I encourage you to seek out your own coach. Seek your single positive influence. By the way, single positive influence does not mean simply agreeing with everything and letting you be. It means encouraging a great deal of self reflection and self analysis. It may mean motivating, goal follow-up, and questioning actions relative to desired outcomes. It may be challenging and make you look at actions that may be contrary to your stated directions. It isn't always comfortable; it should always be with your singular positive regard.

If you recognize the value in your advancement and success, then take action and invite someone into your life with your singular positive regard. You may propel yourself to a new level of joy and success.