

Welcome to the tenth edition of Jennifer Selby Long's *Traveling Light*. *Traveling Light* is a newsletter exploring how those blessed with the talent and opportunity to lead can be more effective and lighten the load inherent in their lives, based on the work of executive coach and management consultant Jennifer Selby Long. Copyright 2008 Jennifer Selby Long. All rights reserved.

## **I've Completed My Coaching Program. Now What?**

Executive coaching is one of the most powerful tools available to increase your value to your employer and grow your personal impact and satisfaction in your leadership role.

But the benefits may be fleeting unless you take steps to avoid going back to old habits and to keep growing.

Sure, once you're my coaching client, I'm your coach for life (or at least until I retire). You can always pick up the phone to ask me a question, bounce an idea off of me, or ask for my advice -- without opening a PO.

What I'm talking about, though, is more than that. I recently created a "Leadership Success and Happiness" list of recommendations for a VP of Engineering who was completing his coaching engagement. As I reflected on it further, I realized that with a little modification, there's value in it for anyone who's ever completed a coaching program. Here it is:

1. *Monitor your self-talk on a routine basis.* We all have voices in our heads that tell us positive, constructive stories and others that tell us negative, destructive stories about ourselves, other people, and whatever situation we are in.

Nearly all of my clients got to where they are because they are very critical people. They have always set a high bar and worked hard to jump over it, along the way noticing and correcting everything that interfered with that goal.

However, it's a true case of "whatever got you here, won't get you there," because once you are either a VP-level executive or a small business owner, you see the inherent messiness of all businesses and all markets. It's not even clear what exactly that high bar should be or what it should be sitting high above. You just have to accept the risk that you're wrong and take your best shot at it.

Besides crippling decision-making, remember that an overly critical attitude will also squelch the motivation of the many people who now count on you for inspiration.

When critical internal voices start screaming (as opposed to objectively assessing trade-offs and progress), this is about fear, nothing more. The primitive part of your brain is doing its duty, trying to save you from danger, but it can't tell the difference between the light threat of on-the-job overwhelm and the serious threat of a ferocious lion about to eat you, so it screams.

Try reversing the negative message into a positive interpretation, because this is really not about the facts; it's about how you interpret them:

- "I'm growing, so some growing pains are to be expected and are perfectly normal."
- "We have a long way to go, it's true, but I'm correcting my past mistakes and we will get there."
- "I am completely confident that even though I don't know the answer, I am perfectly capable of figuring it out."
- "Things may be tough now, but soon I will look back on the journey and its challenges with joy and satisfaction."
- "Perfection is for people with too much time on their hands." ☺

You can also simply step back and ask, "What am I afraid of?" Then decide if your fear is justified.

2. *Fiercely guard your happiness.* Spend time with positive people who believe in you, have faith in you, and genuinely build you up. Disassociate yourself from negative people or those who don't believe in you. If you can't disassociate yourself from them (for example, if they're your in-laws), minimize your exposure and maintain firm personal boundaries when you are together. If you consider yourself an extrovert, in particular, know that the company you keep will have a substantial impact on your happiness.
3. *Continue to explore and develop the parts of your personality that you underutilize and work with the insights you gained about your natural style and habits at work.* For example, let's say you've learned that your natural style is to not say things more than once (because you value efficient communication), and to do most of your communication one-on-one (because you hate meetings).

You've also learned through the feedback process that your natural style is hurting your organization because employees need you to more openly share and promote your vision, and not just through email, but through face-to-face brown bag lunches and all-hands meetings.

It's one thing to read the feedback and say, 'o.k. I can change that.' But what you need to do is set a plan in place to behave differently, and be rigorous about executing the plan throughout the year, not just during the months when your coach will hold you accountable.

By gently working with the parts of yourself that are underutilized (in this example, the outgoing part of you and the part of you that is willing to give up communication efficiency in exchange for communication effectiveness), you will find new insights into your beliefs, your attitudes, your assumptions, and your relationships. You can then use these to approach and address vexing work challenges from a broader and less personally biased viewpoint.

4. *Involve another person for mutual support.* A mentor who has achieved what you want to achieve, a peer who is also on a growth path, a good friend, or even your coach, under certain circumstances.

As with Tip #2, this is particularly true if you are an extrovert. You will get farther and grow faster by literally speaking out loud with another person than by working on your own. This is not a character flaw! Let me repeat that. The fact that you need to work with someone across time in order to not get stuck is not a character flaw! Stop those darn critical voices from Tip #1. It's just a matter of personal style. This is how outgoing people propel themselves forward.

### **Jennifer's Calendar**

March 8 – 9

Out of the office attending practice development training (I practice what I preach about professional development!)

March 15 and 22

Teach *Coaching for Performance* class in the UC-Berkeley Extension Business Management. Not much theory, tons of practice. To enroll, go to <http://www.unex.berkeley.edu/cat/course76.html>.

March 31

Last day to enroll in Private Coaching Program:  
[http://www.selbygroup.com/coaching\\_individual.html](http://www.selbygroup.com/coaching_individual.html).

May 8 – 26

On vacation in Spain

### **For Cisco Only**

A reminder: my Cisco ID is up and running. For security reasons, I can't point my Cisco ID to my Selby Group ID. This means I'll only see your [jeselby@cisco.com](mailto:jeselby@cisco.com) emails when I'm in my office using my VPN connection. Bottom line: unless your email or OL request can wait a day or more, please send it to [jennifer.selby@selbygroup.com](mailto:jennifer.selby@selbygroup.com).

Contact us for further information at: [lighten@selbygroup.com](mailto:lighten@selbygroup.com).

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