The Power of Positive Coaching

The Mindset and Habits to Inspire Winning Results and Relationships

Lee J. Colan, PhD
Bestselling author of Engaging the Hearts and Minds of all Your Employees

Julie Davis-Colan
PRAISE FOR

The Power of Positive Coaching

“Lee and Julie deliver powerful lessons with simple, concise language. As inspirational as it is practical. A vital tool for leaders at any career stage. An extraordinary book!”

Dr. Marshall Goldsmith
The Thinkers50 #1 Leadership Thinker in the World

“Lee Colan keeps it simple and impactful! His employee engagement concepts have been deeply embedded into our organization for years. I am excited to apply these practical coaching concepts and tools from The Power of Positive Coaching, and I have no doubt they will benefit our legacy company for years to come.”

Frank Dulcich
President and CEO,
Pacific Seafood Group

“Leaders everywhere would derive great rewards from the specific, impactful, and helpful guidance that Lee and Julie deliver on effective coaching. The Power of Positive Coaching provides what all of us need to ensure that we nurture successful mentoring relationships and effectively steward the next generation of leaders in our organizations and communities.”

Charles L. Iacovou
Sisel Distinguished Dean of the School of Business,
Wake Forest University

“The Power of Positive Coaching describes the daily challenge of coaching in simple terms and brings it to life with engaging examples. The authors’ encouraging style and practical tools empower leaders to take positive action for their teams... and inspire positive results.”

Daniel L. Jones
President and CEO,
Encore Wire Corporation
“This book has a great effort-to-impact ratio. The Power of Positive Coaching is an easy, engaging read while it cuts through the clutter to deliver impactful tools. It resonates with new and seasoned leaders to help them elevate their coaching game.”

Kevin McManus
Head of Sales, North America Services, SAP America, Inc.

“The authors cracked the coaching code! They simplified the art of coaching into five easily communicated and applied steps. Thank you, Lee, for being an inspiring leader and coach!”

Jerry L. Crawford
CEO, Jani-King International, Inc.

“Lee Colan and Julie Davis-Colan provide a timely and relevant book every leader and aspiring leader should read. As the authors so aptly point out, ‘You must get your mind right before you can get your team right.’ A good first step would be to read this book.”

Joel T. Allison
Senior Advisor to the Robbins Institute for Health Policy and Leadership, Baylor University

“The authors know it’s not about complex competencies or innate skills—it’s about the simple and clear things we THINK and DO every day. No scripts or flow charts to remember—just powerful tips and behaviors paired with proven tools to boost team performance.”

Dean Carter
Vice President, Human Resources and Shared Services, Patagonia

“After almost 20 years of being coached by Lee on many of these principles, I am thankful that he has put them in writing. As a coaches’ coach, Lee delivers great and practical insights to help every leader be a better coach. Consistent with their previous books, Lee and Julie write to the point and deliver practical tools that leaders can apply immediately.”

Barry E. Davis
Executive Chairman, EnLink Midstream

“Three cheers to Lee and Julie. They’ve done it again! The Colans are reliably inspirational and practical! When they speak, I listen.”

Denis G. Simon
Senior Executive Vice President, Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.
“Lee Colan really, really gets it. He has a unique skill of converting complex leadership concepts into an easy-to-understand, practical approach. He has done it again in *The Power of Positive Coaching*. His blend of experience and know-how is hard to find. If you want engaged, or better yet, inspired leaders—he is the man!”

**Dave Loeser**  
Chairman and Executive Vice President,  
New Day Financial

“The *Power of Positive Coaching* is a handy field guide for every leader. The authors deliver simple but powerful tools that you can put to work with your team right away. It is a quick-read, high-impact resource!”

**Terry Looper**  
CEO, Texon LP

“I have enjoyed and applied Lee and Julie Colan’s leadership ideas for years. *The Power of Positive Coaching* is an instant classic! This book presents simple coaching strategies that feel accessible and actionable. As a result, I feel better equipped to lead my team with the right mindset and the right habits.”

**Valerie Freeman**  
CEO, Imprimis Group

“Colan always finds the right balance of inspiring and equipping his readers, audiences, and clients. I have benefited in all three categories. *The Power of Positive Coaching* is on point again. It compellingly presents timely research and timeless strategies that are relevant and actionable for any leader.”

**Dr. Stephen L. Mansfield, FACHE**  
President and CEO, Methodist Health System

“Ever since I met Lee Colan and read his and Julie’s book, *Sticking to It: The Art of Adherence*, I have been a fan. Their ability to reduce the complexity of leadership to a simple, concise set of habits and principles sets them apart. Even more importantly, by reading this book, a good leader can become an excellent leader by focusing on their five coaching habits. Any team and company will benefit by implementing the reliability advantage.”

**Dennis McCuistion**  
Television host and Executive Director, The Institute for Excellence in Corporate Governance,  
The University of Texas at Dallas
“Lee and Julie articulate that great leaders choose to meet the needs of their team over any personal discomforts. This choice is made through first knowing yourself and then having clarity in establishing priorities in business and life. I highly recommend this leadership journey for anyone who wants to improve themselves and their team.”

Craig Dunaway  
President, Penn Station East Coast Subs

“Lee has written another insightful coaching book that will be an excellent resource for new or seasoned business leaders. I’ve utilized Lee’s talents and tools over the years. Whether coaching new or experienced leaders, I’ve found Lee’s coaching style and methods to be extremely effective. Well done!”

Chuck Jerasa  
Group President, Gibraltar Industries

“The Power of Positive Coaching is EXCELLENT! What a fantastic reminder of the fundamental value of a positive mindset and habits, personally and as a coach to your team. This is clearly the most straightforward and immediately usable treatment of this topic available today.”

Scott C. Florence  
Sales Vice President, AdvoCare International

“Positivity is, indeed, the most fundamental element of differentiation. The authors have captured this essential ingredient and incorporated the steps for winning in The Power of Positive Coaching. The book itself has achieved differentiation through actionable advice you can count on!”

Jim Keyes  
Former CEO, 7-Eleven and Blockbuster

“The Power of Positive Coaching is filled with powerful insights and practical tips. It’s a must-have guide for leaders at all levels. Kudos to Lee and Julie for providing yet another powerful tool for the leader’s toolbox!”

Sharon Goldstein  
Campus Operating Officer, Berkeley College Online
Other Books by the Authors

107 Ways to Stick to It: Practical Tips to Achieve the Success You Deserve

7 Moments . . . That Define Excellent Leaders

Engaging Minds and Hearts of All Your Employees: How to Ignite Passionate Performance for Better Business Results

Getting the BEST from Yourself and Others: How to Orchestrate Your Attitude

Inspire! Connecting with Students to Make a Difference

Leadership Matters: Daily Insights to Inspire Extraordinary Results

Orchestrating Attitude: Getting the Best from Yourself and Others

Power Exchange: How to Boost Accountability and Performance in Today’s Workforce

Stick with It: Mastering the Art of Adherence

The 5 Coaching Habits of Excellent Leaders: How to Create the Reliability Advantage for Your Team

The Nature of Excellence

Winners Always Quit: Seven Pretty Good Habits You Can Swap for Really Great Results
The Power of Positive Coaching

The Mindset and Habits to Inspire Winning Results and Relationships

Lee J. Colan, PhD
Julie Davis-Colan
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For those of us in the coaching arena who help others change their lives for the better, a positive outlook is imperative. Lee Colan and Julie Davis-Colan bring this fact to light and explore the importance of our mindset and habits as coaches to inspire our clients to get better, enjoy great results, and have better relationships.

Today, with all the pressures of life and work, we’re busier and working harder than we ever have. Sometimes life can be difficult, things happen that we don’t like, and we get down. This is just a fact. As a coach, this can have a hugely detrimental effect on your team. If you aren’t living a happy, healthy life, how can you expect your team to?

I take a cue from my wonderful friend Frances Hesselbein (former CEO of the Girl Scouts and recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom), who has a saying that I love. She says, when asked what her blood type is, “Be Positive!” This is her philosophy and it helps her navigate challenges in a positive way.

I love her outlook and I look for it in others as I travel around the world. How do people meet challenges and view change in a positive way? Here are some of the comments I’ve heard from friends, leaders, coaches, and
students about how to view and manage difficulties in a positive and constructive way.

• “There is no use dwelling on the past. In hindsight, would I have done some things differently? Of course! I cannot change that now. I am focused on creating a great future.”
• “In a strange way, my recent ‘disasters’ have made me better. I now realize that what matters is my health, friends, and family. I am grateful for the fact that I now understand what really matters.”
• “I have a good job. I used to gripe about all kinds of minor annoyances at work. I recognize now that there are a lot of people out there who are much worse off than I am. All the little things that bothered me so much don’t matter anymore.”
• “I have time to invest in my future. I am using it to do what I always said I wanted to do. I am glad that I have a chance to do this.”
• “My family is closer than ever. Some of us aren’t doing so well. We are doing whatever we can to help each other. We love each other and support each other when times are tough.”

Personally, I’m very grateful to have the opportunity to communicate with you, the readers of this wonderful book. And, I want to share with you that I am so thankful to continually learn from you and such exceptional and
insightful authors as Lee and Julie. I hope that you will take the teachings of this book to heart and elevate your coaching game!

Life is good.

Dr. Marshall Goldsmith
INTRODUCTION

Elevate Your Coaching Game

Everyone needs a coach. It doesn’t matter whether you’re a basketball player, a tennis player, a gymnast, or a bridge player.

—BILL GATES
FOUNDER, MICROSOFT

It wasn’t too long ago that having a business coach was like having a scarlet letter on your professional suit. Back then, most coaching was remedial—there was a problem that needed to be fixed. Today, having a coach has been elevated in status. Business leaders have realized what professional athletes have always known—having a coach produces better results. That’s a significant and necessary paradigm shift. Instead of symbolizing a problem, having a coach symbolizes a leader’s willingness to develop and grow as a person and a leader.
Research from the Korn Ferry Institute supports this paradigm shift in perceptions about coaching. The research found that most people rate “coaching and developing others” among the top three most important leadership competencies, according to 360-degree assessments. Although this competence is rated highly, it is consistently the least practiced competency worldwide. Why does this knowing/doing gap exist? Leaders say it is because they do not have enough time; they do not know a proven process; and/or they feel it will slow down their immediate performance.¹ These reasons—dare we say excuses—carry serious risks. If you don’t take the time to coach and develop team members now, you will pay for it later—guaranteed. Using a haphazard, gut-feel coaching approach, only when it is convenient, yields haphazard results. If you neglect coaching to drive short-term results, you will handicap your team’s ability to sustain performance over time. Coaching your team is the ultimate pay-me-now or pay-me-later leadership proposition. Applying a consistent approach to coaching others is fundamental to leadership excellence today.

A commitment to coaching also signals an organization’s willingness to invest in its people. In today’s environment of high-velocity change, factors like technology, product innovation, and unique distribution channels are fleeting advantages. In fact, the only sustainable competitive advantage is an organization’s talent and how well
that talent delivers its product or service. The coaching value chain directly links a leader’s ability to coach his or her team with sustained growth and profitability:

Inspiring leaders coach teams to
   Build winning relationships internally and externally and
   Generate winning results that
   Produce sustained growth and profits.

Unfortunately, not every organization has the resources to hire external coaches. Therefore, it’s critical for business leaders to be equipped as effective and inspiring coaches to their teams. We wrote this book to help you elevate your coaching game with an easy-to-apply approach, communicated in simple terms and supported with actionable tools. We have been privileged to have helped more than 100,000 leaders elevate their coaching games since 1999. Our passion is helping leaders become better coaches who inspire levels of performance their teams could not achieve by themselves.

Real-Time Coaching

We love watching the Olympics. In fact, we were thrilled when they started alternating the summer and winter
Olympics, so we would only have to wait two years instead of four years to see the games. The Olympics embody all that is good and inspiring about the human spirit. We are in awe of how these athletes practice day in and day out, week in and week out, year in and year out for that one moment to perform when it really matters.

As we watched the most recent Olympics, we had an aha moment. Olympians spend 99 percent of their time practicing, while they perform just one percent (or less) of the time. Your team members have the opposite challenge. They must perform 99 percent (or more) of the time taking care of customers, analyzing reports, developing their teams, generating sales, etc. In business, there is precious little time for your team to “practice” all these tasks. The vast majority of your team’s learning and development happens on the job rather than in formal development programs.

Those who coach Olympic athletes literally spend years training their athletes during practice and typically can only sit and watch as they perform. Business coaches, on the other hand, have the opportunity to coach their team members, day in and day out for years, in real time as they perform. That is a powerful distinction.

Even though we are hardly Olympic athletes, we experience the power of a coach to elevate performance in real time whenever we go to an exercise class (Zumba® dance for Julie and TITLE® Boxing for Lee). The moment
the trainer/coach walks within eyesight, we predictably elevate our intensity, exert more energy, and check to ensure our form is correct. This predictable and natural human reaction has been long established. In fact, the first study to demonstrate this effect was conducted by Norman Triplett, a psychologist from Indiana University, way back in 1898. The fact that we perform better when we are coached in real time is referred to as social facilitation, which is defined as “an improvement in performance produced by the mere presence of others.”

Do you coach your team in real time? Imagine the performance improvement if you consistently instructed and encouraged your team daily while they were performing their jobs. What are the possibilities for offering feedback, adjusting on the fly, tweaking execution, changing plans mid-game? Doesn’t your team deserve an engaged, inspiring coach to help them realize their full potential?

**Power of the Positive**

We have all seen different types of coaches in action. The angry, red-faced coaches who yell at their teams for their...
failures; the disengaged, flat-line coaches who are physically present but not actively engaged in coaching; and the positive, exciting coaches who inspire their teams to strive for more despite the circumstances. Which type of coaching produces the best results?

The benefits of positive coaching carry “face validity,” meaning that even without research evidence, most people would agree that positive coaching generates real benefits (although as you’ll see in the next chapter, there is plenty of research to support the validity of positive coaching). People in general, regardless of generation or culture, respond better to positive interactions. We do more for those who appreciate us and invest in us simply because it feels good. Since we are creatures of pleasure, we repeat the behavior that created that good feeling. This creates a self-perpetuating cycle of reinforced positive behavior and positive results. As we see too frequently, an equally powerful negative cycle can be created. Although some leaders argue that a negative response motivates people to perform, it also creates anxiety and triggers disengagement. A negative approach to coaching

A positive attitude causes a chain reaction of positive thoughts, events, and outcomes. It is a catalyst and it sparks extraordinary results.

—WADE BOGGS
Hall of Fame Professional Baseball Player
typically does not sustain long-term performance because people respond to negative leadership with compliance versus commitment. To be clear, we are not saying to avoid tough conversations. Rather, we recommend coaching for performance improvement with a positive mindset and habits to increase the chances of positive results.

Positive coaching is not a soft approach. To the contrary, it leverages insights about human dynamics and performance to generate hard results. Positive coaching leads to:

- More focused effort (and less wasted mental and physical energy) because you and your team are aligned on expectations.
- More discretionary effort from your team because they are fully engaged.
- More ownership behavior and innovation because your team is involved in creating solutions.
- Greater accountability because your team knows their personal performance score.
- Deeper commitment from team members because your team feels genuinely appreciated and valued.

The results are a more productive team, improved relationships, and sustained positive performance.
Positive Mindset and Habits

Inspiring winning results and relationships is a two-dimensional challenge that involves a positive coaching mindset and positive coaching habits. Having either one is insufficient to equip leaders to coach effectively and inspire their teams optimally. Most coaching books and workshops focus on skills and habits, which are essential. You can perform all the right skills, but without the right mindset those skills and habits will not yield the response and results you want from your team. On the other hand, the right mindset is crucial, but without corresponding coaching habits, you will never see that mindset translated into coaching behaviors. A positive coaching mindset and positive coaching habits go hand in hand, and they have more than a proportional relationship. Your coaching mindset has a multiplier effect on your coaching habits. This relationship between mindset and habits can be expressed in a simple equation:

$$\text{Positive Coaching Mindset} \times \text{Positive Coaching Habits} = \text{Winning Results and Relationships}$$

Business coaching is an inside job. It starts with your knowledge and clarity of who you are; then it emanates
outward to your coaching skills and habits. In the first part of this book we will discuss the four levels of knowledge that build a positive coaching mindset. Your mindset will either limit or expand the possibilities and results you will achieve by applying the coaching habits. That’s why we will address your mindset first. Next, we will outline the five positive coaching habits—the skill set—with supporting tools for each one. Equipped with a positive coaching mindset and positive coaching habits, you can inspire winning results and relationships.

Investing in your team produces a positive return just like the interest you earn on a financial investment. And like a financial investment, your investment in others compounds over time. Start investing in your team today. Every day you miss is a performance loss that you cannot recoup. In the words of Zig Ziglar, an inspiring coach to millions, “You don’t have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great.” So, let’s get started.
PART I

Positive Coaching Mindset

“You must get your mind right before you can get your team right.”

—JULIE DAVIS-COLAN
Your mindset has significant influence on how you perform, lead, and coach. Psychologist Carol Dweck asserts, based on decades of research, that how we see ourselves is a major factor in what we ultimately achieve.¹ You will rise to the level of expectations of yourself. What is your current mindset? Do you think you can change, improve, achieve, lead, and coach with excellence?

Your mindset also has a dramatic impact on those you coach. People rise to the level of your expectations for them. A recent study by Korn Ferry Institute found that 65 percent of female chief executive officers (CEOs) from large companies realized they could be a CEO only after someone told them they could be a CEO.² At first glance, this statistic might seem shocking. But consider how often you have observed an average employee under an average leader begin to flourish once he or she is assigned to an inspiring leader who sees the potential in that employee. Just like these female CEOs, you and those you coach will rise to the level of expectations. Your mindset about yourself and others is one of the very best predictors of the winning results and relationships you will inspire. It is the coach’s mindset and expectations that make all the difference.
Assume the Best

It is a common design principle to build systems and plans for the norm instead of for the exception. So why not design your mindset the same way?

To embrace a positive coaching mindset, assume the best of others. If you choose to protect yourself from disappointment by always thinking the worst, you have also chosen disappointment as the filter through which you view all things and people . . . and that’s just what you will get. Alternatively, you can choose to think the best all the time. Choose to make a positive mindset your norm. Sure, you might be disappointed occasionally but, most of the time, you will be programming your mind and others to achieve their best.

Your mindset predisposes you to see behaviors that reinforce your mindset, negative or positive. No doubt, your employees can be frustrating and noncompliant at times. That’s why it is so important to bring a positive mindset into the relationship. If your mindset is, “This team member is difficult and not collaborative,” you are already predisposed to look for, and predictably find, behaviors that reinforce this negative mindset. If your mindset is, “I think this employee can stretch herself and really lead this project successfully,” you will likely look for and find skills and behaviors that support your mindset. This is known as confirmation bias, which is the tendency
to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms your preexisting beliefs.

As a coach, consider what you will see and the different outcomes you can expect if you choose the positive coaching mindset on the left versus the negative one on the right.

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<tr>
<th>POSITIVE MINDSET</th>
<th>NEGATIVE MINDSET</th>
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<tr>
<td>She can change and grow.</td>
<td>She is stuck in her ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He has not mastered this yet.</td>
<td>He just doesn’t get it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He really wants to succeed.</td>
<td>He just wants a paycheck.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He wants to do the right thing.</td>
<td>He will probably cheat and steal for his own benefit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She wants to help.</td>
<td>She just cares about herself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She has several natural gifts.</td>
<td>She has several weaknesses.</td>
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Researchers illustrated the power of mindset by proving that managers who used a strength-based approach with their employees helped to improve employee performance by 36.4 percent. On the other hand, managers who focused primarily on the employees’ weaknesses helped to decrease their employees’ performance by 26.8 percent.\(^3\) If you are committed to winning

Your mindset today directly influences your results and relationships tomorrow.
results and relationships, then choosing a positive coaching mindset is an easy choice because it is the only choice.

**Positivity Broadens Possibilities**

Does a positive mindset actually make a difference in your coach approach and effectiveness? The answer is an emphatic yes! The field of positive psychology has blossomed with practical findings over the past decade. Research by Barbara L. Fredrickson, for example, reveals that positive thoughts help you see more options and solutions for solving problems, a skill set which is at the core of an inspiring coach and winning teams.⁴

Our brains respond to negative emotions by limiting the options we consider. For example, when you’re in a conflict with a colleague or a loved one, your anger and frustration might consume you to the point where you can’t think about anything else. Also, if you are feeling stressed and overwhelmed with a long to-do list, you might find it hard to take one small action to get started. Your negative emotions can prevent your brain from seeing the other options and choices that surround you.

Fredrickson tested the impact of positive emotions on the brain by dividing her research subjects into five groups and showing each group film clips. The first two groups were shown clips that elicited positive emotions;
the third group saw images that were neutral; and the last two groups saw clips that created negative emotions. Then, each participant was asked to imagine themselves in a situation where they would experience similar emotions and write down what they would do.

Fascinatingly, participants who saw negative emotions wrote down the fewest responses. Meanwhile, the participants who experienced positive emotions wrote down a significantly higher number of actions, even when compared to the control group. The results revealed that when you experience positive emotions, you see more possibilities. This has big implications for leaders. The coach with a positive mindset is better able to see more opportunities for growth and improvement. Plus, the employee who is being coached is better equipped to solve problems and expand his or her capabilities as a result of being coached with a positive mindset.

Building a Coaching Mindset

Our company logo is a group of three stacked L’s, which represent the three levels of leadership: personal, team, and organizational. The logo represents our belief that personal leadership drives team leadership which in turn drives organizational leadership. Excellence, like leadership, is built from the inside out. Your organization’s
excellence will rarely exceed your team’s excellence, and your team’s excellence will rarely exceed your personal excellence. Therefore, the most important question a leader should ask is: “What am I currently doing to improve my personal excellence?” Inspiring coaches work on themselves before they work on their teams. It starts inside with an understanding of yourself. A positive coaching mindset is built on a foundation of self-knowledge. Inspiring coaches intentionally, courageously, and consistently deepen four levels of self-awareness to build a positive coaching mindset:

1. Know Your Thoughts
2. Know Your Purpose
3. Know Your Values
4. Know Your Emotions

Keen awareness at these four levels enables you to be more personally effective, authentic, and credible. Just as importantly, seeking greater self-awareness creates a culture that is conducive to coaching and a team that is more responsive to your coaching.
Watch your thoughts;  
*they become your words.*
Watch your words;  
*they become your actions.*
Watch your actions;  
*they become your habits.*
Watch your habits;  
*they become your character.*
Watch your character;  
*it becomes your destiny.*

—FRANK OUTLAW  
Founder, BI-LO supermarket chain
CHAPTER 1

Know Your Thoughts

Change your thoughts and you change your world.
—NORMAN VINCENT PEALE
AUTHOR, THE POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING

The greatest form of knowledge is knowing yourself. Knowing yourself starts with knowing your thoughts. Your mindset is nothing more than a compilation of your thoughts. Your thoughts have incredible power to shape your life and the lives of others, because your thoughts and interpretations of circumstances directly influence your beliefs, and ultimately, your actions. Henry Ford said, “Whether you think you can or
cannot, you’re right.” In other words, what you think is what you get. That is why it is critical that you know your thoughts.

You draw into your life that which you constantly think about—good or bad. If you are always thinking about why you can’t seem to get a break, or when the next shoe will drop in your relationship, or why you don’t get as much recognition as your colleague, then you are programming your mind (and those around you) to turn these thoughts into your reality. Negative thoughts are landmines along the pathway to being your best. Fortunately, the reverse is also true. If you consistently and intentionally nurture positive thoughts and expectations, you paint a picture of future success on the walls of your mind. Some people ask, “How can I be positive when negative situations are a reality—they just show up in everyday life?” Bad things do happen and they sometimes “just show up.” However, it is your interpretation that makes a situation negative. A situation doesn’t drag you down or lift you up, but the way you think about it does.

The great news is that you are in control of what you think. No one else has this power unless you give it away. You are the conductor of your own thoughts. Inspiring coaches choose to understand, control, and change their thoughts to form a positive mindset, which helps them elevate their coaching game.
Your Ultimate Computer

Your mind is your ultimate personal computer. Just like your laptop at home, sometimes you might forget to turn on your mental virus protection program, allowing negative inputs to invade your mind without even realizing it. The old computer database adage “Garbage in, garbage out” as it applies to your mind should really be “Garbage in, garbage stays.” Whatever your mind hears from others, and especially from you, it records and files away. If you hear something often enough, you will tend to believe it and act upon it. Unfortunately, the mind doesn’t discriminate between input that is good for you or harmful to you; it collects and stores all input. Consider three of the most common sources of input into your thought life. They have the potential for a positive or negative impact on your thoughts, and ultimately, your results: other people, media, and you.

Choose to surround yourself with people who offer positive input. The best strategy is to make a conscious effort to get to know and spend time with people who have a positive outlook and offer you constructive input. Notice that we use the word “constructive.” Constructive input is presented with positive intentions, although constructive input might still feel uncomfortable to receive. The key is that it is meant to build you up versus break
you down. There will always be negative people and perspectives. Since you cannot hide from them, learn to filter out nonconstructive input to minimize “garbage” in your thoughts. Fred Smith was a student at Yale University when he submitted a paper about the impact of a computerized society and the changes he envisioned for traditional distribution and delivery systems. It is reported that Smith’s professor returned the paper commenting, “The concept is interesting and well-formed, but in order to earn better than a ‘C,’ the idea must be feasible.” Just five years later Smith figured out a way to make it feasible and named his company Federal Express. He filtered the negative input from his professor and chose to seek out more positive input, and ultimately, a positive outcome.

Media is omnipresent in today’s world. Your cell phone, computer, billboards as you drive, the floor tiles in the grocery store, banners at a ballgame, taglines on a t-shirt—we take in media impressions minute by minute instead of only during the evening news in pre-Internet days. The subconscious mind is most receptive five minutes before you doze off at night, still a common time for watching the broadcast news on television.

Unfortunately, much of the news today shows the worst side of people and the world. When you hear a news story, remind yourself that it’s considered news because
it is unusual. Doing so will help you balance potentially negative input with more uplifting thoughts.

So how can you remain well informed and maintain a positive outlook? Monitor what you watch. Make the choice to watch more programs that are educational, artistic, spiritual, or sports- and comedy-oriented. These types of programs stimulate positive thoughts. Before you start reading or watching a news feed or broadcast, take a quick inventory of all the things you are grateful for. Additionally, make it a habit to finish your reading with an inspiring story so that your mind is primed for a positive day.

The most important and pervasive source of input is you. No one is with you as much as you are. You have an opportunity every day to consciously give yourself positive input and reinforce your own positive actions. Julie has a practice of giving herself mental high fives. That is, she frequently tells herself (often out loud), “Great job, Julie!” You talk with many people each day, but the most important conversation is the one you have with yourself.

Your mind can be your greatest ally or your worst enemy. Input from others, media, and yourself plants expectational seeds of success or failure in your mind. Seek positive inputs and you will improve your chances of producing positive outputs and responses. The choice is yours.
Look for Cannoli

We have a special family tradition with our children. For their 12th birthday, they can select any city in the continental United States to visit for a special celebration with just Mom and Dad, with no siblings. Our middle child decided on New York City to celebrate her 12th birthday. Having been there many times ourselves, it was fun to see the wonderment in a first-time visitor’s eyes as she took in the lights of Times Square, the windows of the shops along Fifth Avenue, the view from the Empire State Building, and the ethnic richness of Chinatown and Little Italy.

Since our hotel was near Times Square, we walked a well-worn path down Broadway during our stay. Times Square really is the ultimate in sensory overload. During nearly a dozen trips down the same street, we noticed something new every time. Whatever item we were looking for seemed to magically appear even though we had previously walked past it numerous times without noticing—a souvenir shop, a deli, a street vendor selling scarves, a hot dog stand, live musicians, or Italian cannoli.

This experience reminded us once again that the things we pay the most attention to reflect what we think about most. If we change what we think about, what we notice in our surroundings will change. We call this connection between our thoughts and our attention “The
Yellow Car Phenomenon.” For example, when was the last time you saw a yellow car that wasn’t a taxi? Maybe last week or last month? Now that we have made you aware of yellow cars and you are thinking about them, you will start seeing more of them. The same is true when you buy a new car; suddenly you see the same make, model, and color everywhere you look. Julie says the phenomenon also occurs for a pregnant woman; everywhere you look, you see other pregnant women. Is there a sudden invasion of pregnant women? Of course not; they’ve been there all along, and so have the yellow cars and the same make and model car you purchased. The difference is, because you are thinking about them, you more readily notice them.

This phenomenon is rooted in neuroscience. The reticular activating system (RAS) is the brain’s filter between the subconscious mind and conscious mind. Without you being aware of it, the RAS sifts through the millions of pieces of information, stimuli, and data coming into your brain from all your senses. The RAS then filters out the irrelevant and brings only the relevant information to your conscious mind. So, the RAS decides what you put your attention toward, and allows your conscious mind to focus only on that which you’ve determined is useful right now. This explains why, on our walks down Broadway in New York City, we didn’t notice the Italian cannoli when we were looking for scarves. But once we were hungry, we saw cannoli galore!
The things we focus on create a magnet for our lives. If we focus on the negative, we tend to see more negatives. For example:

- Focus on problems, and obstacles are plentiful.
- Focus on things outside of your control, and you will easily throw in the towel and give up in frustration.
- Focus on fear versus faith, and you will be paralyzed with inaction.
- Focus on weakness instead of strengths, and you will miss your natural giftedness.
- Focus on the drama that life offers, and your life will be a soap opera.

What does the RAS have to do with coaching? Inspiring coaches use “The Yellow Car Phenomenon” to focus on the positive:

- Focus on opportunities, and doors seem to open.
- Focus on forgiveness, and you will find the world forgiving.
- Focus on the comedy life offers, and your life will be full of laughs.
- Focus on what is going well, and you build your team’s confidence.
- Focus on learning and moving forward, and stumbling blocks are converted into stepping-stones.
The world reflects your view of it, so if you change the way you look at things, things change the way they look. When coaching your team, look for “cannoli.” In other words, look for the good stuff. The more you focus on the positive, the more you will create positive outcomes for you and your team.

Check Your Blind Spot

Knowing your own tendencies, preferences, personal limits, natural gifts, and weaknesses helps you be more personally effective, and as a result, a more insightful, honest, and inspiring coach. You must know yourself to coach others most effectively.

Self-aware people and inspiring coaches intentionally work to minimize their blind spots. Blind spots are behaviors, traits, or tendencies that others see, but you are unaware of. Picture the friend who thinks he is a great listener, but everyone knows he just never shuts up.

Researchers David Zes and Dana Landis analyzed 6,977 assessments of managers and executives to identify blind spots. They compared the results to the financial data of the 486 publicly traded companies in which the subjects worked. After tracking stock performance over 30 months, the researchers found that organizations with
a higher percentage of self-aware leaders (fewest blind spots) had the strongest financial performance. Companies with the least self-aware leaders (most blind spots) had the lowest financial performance.\textsuperscript{1}

It is no coincidence that a leader’s self-knowledge helps him or her lead and coach more effectively. This higher quality of coaching has a greater positive effect on the performance of the leader’s team, which in turn creates a ripple effect throughout the organization. This ultimately reveals itself in winning results and relationships.

How can you become more self-aware of your blind spots? If you have taken a 360-degree assessment in the past, refer to the feedback report. It’s a great place to start uncovering blind spots. Look for areas where you rated yourself significantly higher than your team or your team leader rated you. If you haven’t taken a 360-degree assessment, the best way to minimize blind spots is to ask your team what you can Start, Stop, and Keep doing to help them succeed . . . and carefully listen to their answers. It is simple on the mind, but it can be tough on the heart. It takes courage to ask for feedback and potentially uncover blind spots, but the cost of low self-awareness is your leadership and coaching credibility.

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Coaches have to watch for what they don’t want to see and listen to what they don’t want to hear.

—JOHN MADDEN
Pro Football Hall of Fame Coach
Inspiring coaches *prevent* blind spots by making concerted efforts to listen for unfiltered truth about challenges, opportunities, and most importantly, about their leadership. This is particularly important because the higher you are in an organization, the more filtered the information you receive. It’s a natural and predictable phenomenon, but it’s also a precarious position to be in. No leader wants to be “the emperor who wore no clothes.”

**Create Mental Space**


Accessibility through technology can be a double-edged sword. It is a blessing in terms of your productivity, but it is a curse on your peace of mind and your ability to know yourself. You can end up being a “human doing”
rather than a human being, which leaves no time for awareness. When you’re busy being a “human doing,” you’re usually too focused on your job to look outside at the big picture or look inside at your thoughts.

So, how, exactly, in today’s hyperactive and attention-demanding world, can you spend more time thinking about your thinking? Quit moving and be still. Relax. Be quiet. Look around. Listen. Our youngest daughter has a special area in her room where she can chill and relax. She calls it her “chillax zone.” Although your “chillax zone” might not have big pink pillows and a fluffy white carpet, you also need to make a time and place that offers mental space. Your space can be your car as you drive home after work, a reading or meditation corner in your house, your bathtub, your gym, a nearby park where you walk; your space can be anywhere you can be alone with your thoughts. The thinking, planning, and reflection you do in this space helps you get off the treadmill and rise above the hurly-burly of your everyday world to gain a better perspective on yourself, your purpose, your values, your team, etc.

You don’t have to go on vacation or head for the spa. All you have to do is change the scenery in your mind. Instead of trudging along the dusty trail following the ruts of the wagon train, fly yourself to the top of the

A quiet mind enhances our hearing.
mountain where you can be still, relax, and dream while you gaze out over the world below.

When you stop moving, your world gets quieter. You don’t hear the babble of people working all around you, the rustle of information, the pinging of emotion, the roar of the wind past your ears. All that noise is gone, and then you can truly listen. As Indira Gandhi said, “You must learn to be still in the midst of activity and to be vibrantly alive at rest.” So, try being still to be more aware of your thoughts so you can intentionally form a positive coaching mindset.
CHAPTER 5

Positive Coaching Habit #1:

EXPLAIN
Expectations to Gain Alignment

Unclear expectations lead to unclear destinations.
—LEE J. COLAN

Many of today’s leadership practices are rooted in historical military testing, application, and refinement. But what can business leaders gain from current-day military, specifically Navy, leadership practices that have been honed for years and now are used with today’s more complex, competitive leadership environment? A lot!

The next time you hear a business leader complain about “the new generation worker” and how they cannot motivate them and how they take no initiative, consider this:
Lee, coauthor of this book, had the privilege of spending a weekend aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln, about 100 miles offshore as it prepared for a deployment. This aircraft carrier is the proud flagship of the Navy’s fleet and is a floating city. Over 5,000 sailors live and work on it. They perform the most complex flight operations in the most tumultuous conditions, day and night, with zero degrees of freedom. The cost of error is tens of millions of dollars in damaged Navy assets or even loss of life. No Top Gun movie scene here. This is the real-life danger zone!

This type of environment demands nothing less than fully synchronized teamwork, passionate selflessness, relentless effort, and consistent execution. All this is delivered by sailors with an average age of 20 years old. So, this peak level of performance is achieved with thousands of 18- and 19-year-olds, most of whom did not have a clear direction after graduating high school, let alone have an MBA. It is mind-boggling when we couch this against clients who are frustrated with their highly educated team’s performance while they are working in nicely appointed, air-conditioned, land-based offices. At the core of this level of Naval performance is crystal-clear expectations.

At the most basic level, the job of a coach is to equip team members with knowledge and tools to be successful. A leader is only successful if his or her team is successful. That includes educating team members on organizational systems like budgeting, goal setting, and authority levels
for spending and training. The leader must also educate his or her team on informal “learning the ropes” things like company culture norms during working hours, lunchtime, meetings etiquette, attire, how presentations are made, key people to keep in the loop, and how decisions are really made, regardless of what the policy states. Equipping your team by explaining these aspects of the job is not a one-time thing you check off your leadership list. Inspiring coaches continually explain, educate, and equip their team with tips, tools, training, and insights.

Just like winning a sports game starts at the beginning with good practice, winning in business starts at the beginning of the performance process. If you wait until the end, then you are simply imposing consequences rather than inspiring positive performance. That’s why aligning on expectations is a good predictor of winning business results. Expectation gaps lead to execution gaps. The large majority of performance frustrations stem from not communicating clear expectations up front. Therefore, the coaching key is to front-end-load clarity. You and your team should be able to easily align on the answer to this question: “How will I know if I have met expectations?” We cannot rely on others’ perceptions of our expectations. The imperfect nature of human communication requires us to be more specific than we think we need to be. Lack of clear expectations is the most common reason for performance problems. There is not really
a close second. Gaining alignment through clear expectations is job No. 1 for inspiring coaches.

The Fundamental Four Questions

To gain alignment, explain your answers to the following Fundamental Four Questions. These are questions that every employee asks, regardless of whether you hear them:

1. Where are we going? (Goals)
2. What are we doing to get there? (Plans)
3. How can I contribute? (Roles)
4. What’s in it for me? (Rewards)

Like any aspect of leadership, gaining alignment does not just happen. It must be intentional. Our late friend and inspiring coach Ron Rossetti liked to say, “Awesome-ness is never accidental.” Our clients who paint a clear picture for their teams are intentional about answering the Fundamental Four Questions. They use the questions as a checklist to ensure that the content of significant company communications addresses each question. The alignment in their organizations is notably greater and their results are notably better. Answering the Fundamental Four Questions creates a bridge that connects today’s tasks to the broader team purpose.
Inspiring coaches help their teams see and understand the longer-term, downstream impact of their personal performance on team results, on the organization, on customers, on shareholders, and ultimately on themselves (What’s in it for me?). When employees see how their actions help or hinder others, it aligns their performance with clear consequences. The personal impact to an employee might include opportunities for promotions, development, exposure to executives, public recognition, expanded responsibilities, flexibility in the job, oversight of others, ownership of projects, and/or financial rewards.

In addition to formal communication, explain expectations for your team with each informal communication. For example, you can pop into their workspace or call remote team members to see how they are doing. With today’s information-overloaded workplace, it can be challenging to decide what to communicate to employees and what to withhold. It’s easy to say (usually to yourself), “They don’t really need to know all that,” or, “My team won’t really understand,” or, “I don’t think they can handle that news right now.” Be cautious because those who underestimate the intelligence of others tend to overestimate their own.

When employees don’t get the necessary information to perform their jobs, including the answers to the Fundamental Four Questions, they tend to “fill in the blanks” with their own assumptions, and their assumptions are often worst-case scenarios. This is not necessarily a
reflection on the leader. It’s our natural human insecurity. We often assume the worst in the absence of evidence to the contrary. Lack of information and unanswered questions can start the silence spiral:

Silence leads to doubt;
Doubt leads to fear;
Fear leads to panic;
Panic leads to worst-case thinking.

The silence spiral undermines trust and puts a damper on passion. It can take five minutes or five weeks to play out, but in most cases, it happens more rapidly than we would imagine. A closed office door, a vague reply to an honest question, an unreciprocated greeting as you pass in the hallway, or a canceled one-on-one meeting can all trigger the silence spiral.

Prevent the silence spiral by proactively explaining expectations. Nothing compares to hearing the facts directly from the boss. For example, if you learn about a new project or change that won’t affect your team for a few months, go ahead and give them a heads-up now. They can start preparing, or at minimum, they won’t be caught off guard or be inclined to listen to and perpetuate rumors. Inspiring coaches realize they are not really protecting their teams by keeping them in the dark. Employees will either find out on their own or may make assumptions that are worse than reality. More importantly, silence chips away at
trust and your leadership credibility. So, use every interaction, meeting, and communication to explain expectations.

**The 3 W’s—What, Who, and When**

Inspiring coaches help their teams by clearly and specifically defining the actions, timing, and results they expect from others and from themselves. For each member of your team, make certain you communicate the 3 W’s—What, Who, and When.

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We use this simple format with our coaching clients to help them drive millions of dollars in improvement. The power is in its simplicity. To ensure clear expectations when using the 3W form, identify only one “Who” per action. This will avoid “two-headed monsters” since a “We” is unowned and undone. This simple 3W form is even more powerful when you carry it with you as a mental template to bring closure to daily conversations and interactions. We each bring our own perceptions,
experiences, and assumptions to every interaction, so the chance that we will be in sync after a discussion is quite low. Since human communication is much more art than science, clarifying the 3 W’s after even short conversations helps identify perception gaps and ensure both parties are aligned on respective actions.

Although aligning on clear expectations can be tedious, if you take the necessary time to do it, you will end up spending less time dealing with performance problems and more time executing your plan. A broad and persuasive series of studies confirms that specificity of goals dramatically increases the likelihood of success. For example, in one study, participants were asked to write a report on how they spent Christmas Eve, and then to write that report within two days after Christmas Eve. Half of the participants were required to specify when and where within those two days they intended to write the report. The other half was not required to give specifics. Among those who had to provide specifics, 71 percent handed the reports in on time. Only 32 percent of the second group did so.¹

**Explain the Fourth W—Why**

To ensure alignment, inspiring coaches do not shy away from discussions of consequences, but they use a broad
definition of consequences. We tend to think of consequences in terms of the short-term, immediate impact of our performance (positive or negative). That’s the easy part of defining specific consequences. But it still leaves a lot to the imagination. As the Circle of Consequences below illustrates, you need to help employees see and understand the longer-term, downstream impact of their performance on team results, on the organization, on customers, on shareholders, and ultimately on themselves. This helps you align with your team by explaining the fourth W—Why.

**Circle of Consequences**
When employees see how their actions help or hinder each of their various constituents, the personal consequences of their performance become self-evident. External performance is ultimately a reflection of internal commitment. The personal impact to an employee might include opportunities for more (or fewer if the performance is substandard) promotions, development opportunities, exposure to executives, public recognition, responsibilities, flexibility in the job, oversight of others, ownership of projects, and/or financial rewards. It is fair and appropriate to bring personal performance full circle back to these consequences. Our clients have found it useful to follow the Circle of Consequences with respect to their own leadership behavior, particularly when they face tough situations. It illuminates the impact of their actions (or lack thereof) on various constituents and usually moves them from complying with the task to being committed to it.

Learn Along the Way

Let’s say you’re taking a road trip for your family summer vacation. You’re going to your favorite beach that is a 1,000-mile drive. You’re aligned on the destination. Even though the driver knows the destination, he or she must still check in with the navigator (coach) at each turn,
merge and exit on the highway to ensure you stay on course. The same is true when you coach a team member. It is necessary, but not sufficient, to explain expectations up front. To help him or her win and arrive at the right destination, several course corrections, or at least course confirmations, might be required along the journey. This means debriefing interactions, meetings, presentations, etc. with the employee. Even if they are someone else’s interactions, meetings, and presentations, it helps the employee learn what should and should not be done to be successful by observing others. Use every opportunity as a chance to align on expectations and coach for future success. Don’t confine your mid-course feedback to directions only. Discuss how the driver (employee) is driving—the manner of performance. Is he or she staying in the lane (remaining focused on the task), checking blind spots (seeking feedback from others), and going the right speed (maintaining a sense of urgency)? Explaining expectations is not a one-time coaching event. Inspiring coaches see it as a continuous cycle of explain-observe-coach-adjust-align. It’s a cycle of victory.

People can’t live up to the expectations they don’t know have been set for them.
—RORY VADEN
Author, Take the Stairs
POSITIVE COACHING HABIT SUMMARY

1 EXPLAIN Expectations

• Answer the Fundamental Four Questions (goals, plans, roles, and rewards).
• Align on the 3 W’s—What, Who, and When.
• Explain the fourth W—Why, using the Circle of Consequences.
• Learn along the way: debrief after interactions, meetings, presentations, milestones.

“We must explain the game plan to win the game.”

—LEE J. COLAN
TAKING ACTION

EXPLAIN Expectations to Gain Alignment

1. How can I intentionally share my team’s goals, plans, roles, and rewards (i.e., answer the Fundamental Four Questions) in my daily interactions and meetings?

2. How can I institutionalize the use of the 3 W’s (What, Who, and When) as a follow-up to our meetings?
Lee J. Colan, PhD is a high-energy leadership advisor, engaging speaker, and popular author. He was nominated for the Thinkers50 Award for best management thinker globally. Lee has authored 15 popular leadership books, including two bestsellers that have been translated into 10 languages. His cut-through-the-clutter advice is anchored in his corporate leadership experience and robust consulting business.

Lee earned his doctorate in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from George Washington University, in Washington, DC, after graduating from Florida State University.

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Consulting: Our top-notch consultants deliver cut-through-the-clutter insights that drive results for your team.

Executive Coaching: Our advisors help executives boost team and personal performance.

Speaking: Engage your team with passionate delivery and equip them with practical tools.

Resources: Rapid-read books, multimedia training tools and leadership assessments.

Training: Rely on our certified facilitators (English- or Spanish-speaking) or use our just-add-water training kits for internal delivery.

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