

THE MINDFUL COACH



*Seven Roles
for
Helping
People Grow*

Douglas K. Silsbee

Praise for The Mindful Coach: Seven Roles for Helping Others Grow

“Silsbee’s approach is both practical and profound. This is a must-read for everyone concerned with people and learning.”

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PHILANTHROPIST; CO-FOUNDER, THE HOME DEPOT; OWNER & CEO, ATLANTA FALCONS

“The development of people is a key competency for business leadership. *The Mindful Coach* provides an inspiring and practical roadmap for developing masterful coaching skills on-the-job.”

Karen Wunderlin

CONSULTANT, FORMER VICE-PRESIDENT/MARKETING, GE APPLIANCES

“A useful book facilitating the growth and development of individuals and groups. His approach reaches deeply into human consciousness and experience where meaningful change and growth occurs.”

Harrison Owen

AUTHOR, *Open Space Technology*

“The tools of coaching that Silsbee outlines, with an emphasis on mindfulness and service, provide the fundamental basis for holistic and integrative physicians to work with patients.”

Patrick Hanaway, M.D.

CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER, GENOVA DIAGNOSTICS

“A welcome addition which teaches us that we can apply the deep spiritual knowledge of traditions like Buddhism to our modern business lives, in such a way that even our career becomes spiritually uplifting and a service to others.”

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AUTHOR, *The Diamond Cutter*

“This book has broad appeal not only for coaches, but for managers, executives, and consultants. Leaders of all kinds can benefit from Silsbee’s clear and caring process for bringing out the best in people. This is a must read book.”

Diana Whitney, Ph.D.

AUTHOR, *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry*

“All of us who lead, manage or teach are often in the role of the coach, whether we think about it that way or not. *The Mindful Coach* provides a framework that works for the professional coach as well as the everyday manager.”

Bill Coleman

SENIOR VP/COMPENSATION, SALARY.COM

“A clear and integrated model to assist people in understanding and applying the important skills in mindfulness and coaching. Executives from diverse backgrounds will find *The Mindful Coach* an insightful and practical guide.”

Hannah S. Wilder, Ph.D., M.C.C.

PRESIDENT, ADVANTARA EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT WORLDWIDE

“I loved this book! *The Mindful Coach* is personal, spiritual, systematic and insightful. This is mandatory reading for anyone who has the responsibility of helping others learn and develop. My trainers will all be receiving a copy. This is Thich Nhat Hanh meets Stephen Covey!”

Barbara Fulmer

DIRECTOR OF TRAINING, JENNY CRAIG INTERNATIONAL

“In serving others, we can get overly focused on specific strategies or tactics and lose perspective of the larger, broader dynamic. *The Mindful Coach* delivers on clarifying, organizing, and contextualizing what it really means to be involved in a coaching relationship.”

Joe Jotkowitz

PRESIDENT, ESSESSNET

“*The Mindful Coach* captures the very essence of what coaching can be. Silsbee marries the art and science of human dialogue, of compassionate listening and advice giving without creating dependency. He guides the reader gently through the seven distinct roles of a true helping relationship. This is a process to be internalized and lived every day.”

Rod Napier, Ph.D.

PROFESSOR, CONSULTANT, AUTHOR, *The Courage to Act* AND TEN OTHER BOOKS

“*The Mindful Coach* is not just another coaching model. It is a frame of reference for anyone involved in developing people. This highly readable book should serve as a reference for anyone genuinely concerned about helping others. It has had a significant impact on the way I coach.”

James N. Bassett, M.Ed.

EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT, INSTITUTE OF NUCLEAR POWER OPERATIONS

“In his hands-on new book, *The Mindful Coach*, replete with artful and challenging exercises, Doug Silsbee models the mindfulness depth from which he springs in order to impart a valuable new coaching model based on professionalism, integrity, and dedication to service.”

Maggie Lichtenberg, P.C.C.

PROFESSIONAL COACH

“*The Mindful Coach* is warm, sensitive and intuitive, while at the same time clearly written by a scientific mind. The book provides a simple and cohesive model for the development process, coupled with practical strategies on how to become a more conscious practitioner.”

Alejandro Bolaños, Ph.D.

CONSULTANT, CENTRAL AMERICA

“*The Mindful Coach* is a book that anyone who is serious about coaching must read. It is comprehensive and compelling and will give you insights that will help you be the best coach you can be.”

James A. DeSena

AUTHOR, *The 10 Immutable Laws of Power Selling*

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Fully formatted versions of all Chapter 13 exercise templates can be downloaded quickly and easily from <http://septetcoaching.com>.

- Chapter 1, “Coaching,” is built around a definition of that term that is broad enough to cover many helping relationships. Here we take a look at the dynamics of power and relationship that influence how coaching works.
- In Chapter 2, “Mindfulness,” we’ll begin by looking at the nature of experience and consciousness, and at the origins of our habits of mind, especially those that can take us away from being present and attentive in the moment. Drawing on both Eastern and Western traditions, we’ll also offer a number of practices that can support the development of mindfulness.
- In Chapter 3, “Service,” we’ll talk about what it means to place ourselves in service and dedicate ourselves to the benefit of our clients.

Part 2 introduces and explores the Septet Coaching Model, and describes the seven distinct Voices through which the coach does his or her work. Chapters 5 through 11 define each Voice, and offer sample dialogues to illustrate its various Aspects. In these chapters we’ll also identify common pitfalls and suggest guidelines for using each Voice wisely.

- Chapter 4, “An Overview,” provides a big picture of the multiple roles a coach plays in relationship with a client—the Voices in which the coach may choose to speak at different times.
- Chapter 5, “The Master.” This is the role that underpins all the others. The Master is the coach practicing his or her own mindfulness and presence, listening attentively and choosing the most effective Voice for the benefit of the client at each point in their relationship.
- Chapter 6, “The Partner.” In this role the coach works with the client to set up the parameters of the relationship, create a responsive structure for their work together, and involve the client in the coaching process.

- Chapter 7, “The Investigator.” As an investigator, the coach asks questions about the client’s situation, the outcomes he or she desires, and the possibilities for action. These lines of questioning are at the core of the coaching process.
- Chapter 8, “The Reflector.” In taking this role, the coach serves as a mirror, supporting the client’s self-awareness by providing feedback and helping the client develop the capacity for self-observation.
- Chapter 9, “The Teacher.” As a teacher, the coach provides information to augment the client’s own experience. The Teacher also challenges the client’s thinking process and assumptions as a way to open up new possibilities.
- Chapter 10, “The Guide.” As a guide, the coach points the way, encouraging the client to take action, or offering ideas and suggestions that have proven successful in other, similar situations.
- Chapter 11, “The Contractor.” This Voice provides a bridge from the coaching conversation to the rest of the client’s life, defining areas for follow-up action and translating new perspectives and energy into concrete, substantive next steps.

Part 3 focuses on the practical application of the ideas presented in Parts 1 and 2 of the book.

- In Chapter 12, “An Integrated Model of Coaching,” a practical roadmap of the coaching process is presented as we look at the relationships between the Voices, the role of the coach’s intuition in guiding the conversation, and the development of mastery in both client and coach.
- Chapter 13, “Development Strategies for the Coach,” discusses specific and concrete strategies for developing the coach’s mindfulness and competence, and presents exercises for each, including references to an on-line directory of supporting tools, downloadable and customizable formatted versions of the exercises and a self-assessment survey.

- Chapter 14, “Mindful Service: A Pathway to Mastery,” ties together the concepts of self-mastery, service, and accountability to clients. The book closes with a discussion on the nature of practice and the spirit of inquiry.

I encourage you to take nothing in this book on faith. Experiment, test the ideas and exercises, try them on. *The Mindful Coach* extends an invitation to discover for yourself how to make your coaching relationships deeper and more fulfilling for both parties in the conversation. There are no prescriptions here. Some of what’s presented won’t suit your needs; other ideas or practices may be transformative. That discernment is your discovery work.

No coaching serves the client if it causes him to override what he knows to be true and right. The client is ultimately responsible for his own choices; the coach is a catalyst. Similarly, no coaching model serves the coach if it causes her to ignore what she knows, to give bad advice, or to disrespect the client in any way.

Please consider the material here as a series of testable hypotheses. Open yourself to these ideas, try them out as rigorous experiments, and observe the results closely. Through observation, you will quickly learn which practices suggested here enhance learning for you and your clients. You are responsible for the choices you make about using what proves itself. Let go of the rest.

Beyond this book, a community is developing around these ideas. You are invited to join this community by sharing your own reactions, ideas, new exercises, and experiences.

Finally, the creation of this book has been quite a learning process for me. Many others have shared their wisdom and ideas along the way. I’ve learned more from writing it, from discussing these ideas with friends and colleagues, and from watching myself in the process than I ever could have imagined.

May your own discovery process be as rewarding!

These thoughts and feelings arise from the seeds in our unconscious, watered by sensory input and perceptions. Over time, they solidify into patterns of attachments and aversions that are particular to individuals or to social groups. As we become aware of these habits of mind, we can make a choice as to whether they are helpful or not. We can choose to continue to “water” them, or we can choose to let them go.

In coaching, our role is to help our clients recognize and act on the real choices that are available to them—to see the limitations in their own thinking and move beyond them to new possibilities. To be helpful to our clients in this process, we must first learn to see our own limitations. We must become familiar with our own attachments and aversions, our own drives and cravings and fears.

In my practice, I’ve encountered what I’d call certain attachments and aversions that are specific to the coaching profession. I offer the list below so that you can consider which of them arise in you as you work with your clients, as a first step toward determining whether they are helpful or not.

- We want to be seen as competent by the client / we want to avoid being seen as ineffective or unhelpful.
- We value a personal connection with the client / we try to avoid tension or conflict in the relationship.
- We look for a sensation of aliveness and creativity / we are impatient with rote conversation.
- We like the security of coaching according to a specific template or model / we try to avoid being seen as uncertain.
- We want to earn additional fees or appreciation/ we fear being fired or taken for granted.

To the degree that our actions and behaviors are shaped by our own attachments and aversions, we are responding to our own desires to attain pleasure and avoid suffering rather than to the client’s needs. By cultivating mindfulness we become better able to make wise choices about how we can best serve our clients.

Table 4: The Voices and Their Aspects**Master**

- M1 Maintains self-awareness
- M2 Listens with focus and presence
- M3 Models learning and growth
- M4 Embraces the client with compassion and respect
- M5 Chooses which of the operational Voices to use at a given time

Partner

- P1 Establishes and honors an explicit structure for the coaching relationship
- P2 Makes explicit, clear choices with the client about the coaching process

Investigator

- I1 Asks questions that deepen a client's understanding of the situation
- I2 Helps the client articulate desired outcomes
- I3 Asks the client to generate courses of action

Reflector

- R1 Provides direct and honest feedback
- R2 Directs the client's attention toward his/her capabilities and potential
- R3 Encourages self-observation and reflection

Teacher

- T1 Provides "expert" information, tools, and language
- T2 Challenges and stimulates client's thinking process

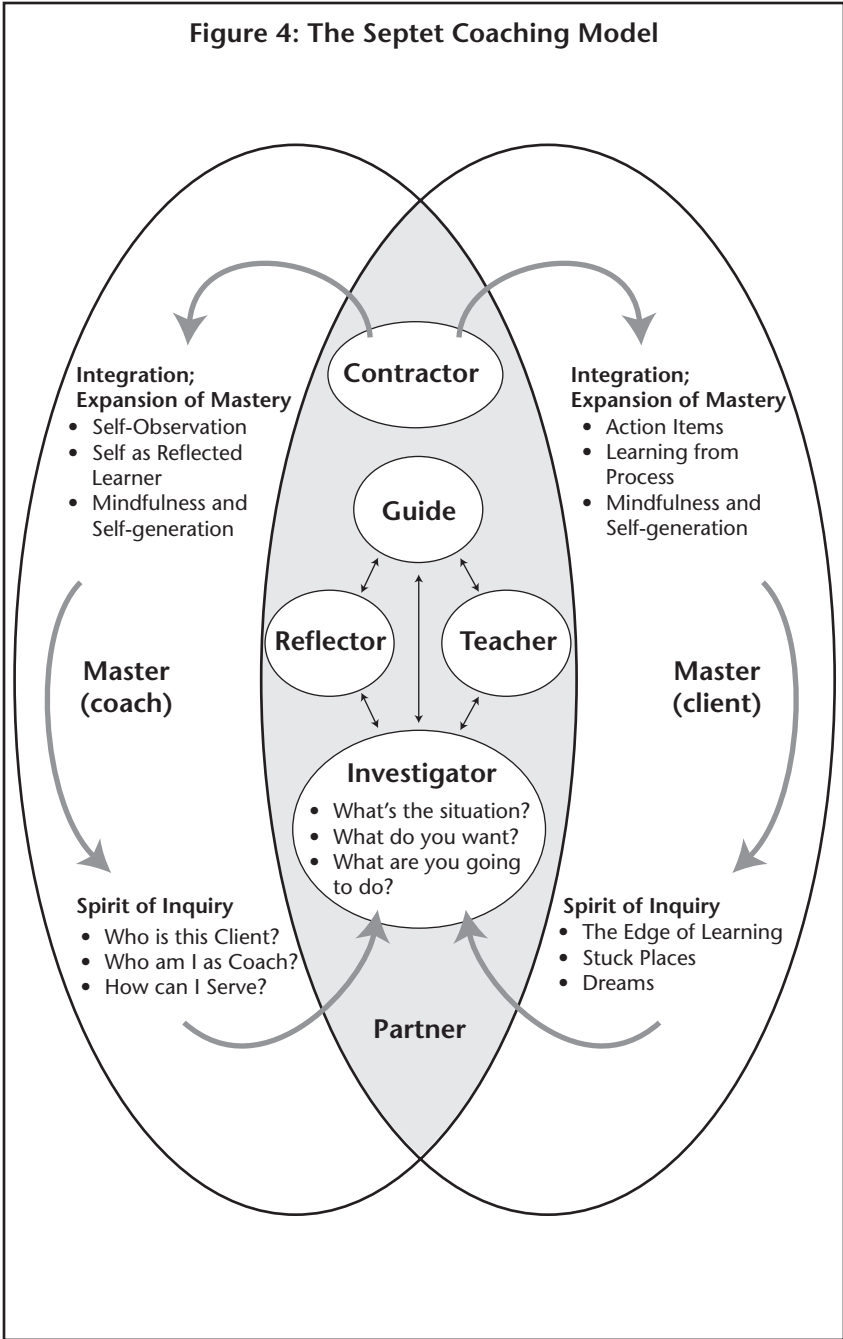
Guide

- G1 Encourages the client to take action
- G2 Offers options and/or recommends courses of action

Contractor

- C1 Establishes clear agreements about actions
- C2 Explores and resolves client doubts and hesitations
- C3 Follows up with client about agreed-upon actions

Figure 4: The Septet Coaching Model





The Master

My music is the spiritual expression of what I am—my faith, my knowledge, my being . . . When you begin to see the possibilities of music, you desire to do something really good for people, to help humanity free itself from its hangups . . . I want to speak to their souls.

JOHN COLTRANE

Experience is not what happens to you; it is what you do with what happens to you.

ALDOUS HUXLEY

*W*e begin (and will end) with the Master. Why? Because the Master is qualitatively different from the other Voices. This role encompasses the mindfulness and awareness that we aspire to bring to our professional lives; it stands behind, coordinates, and animates the other Voices we may choose to use as coaches.

Mastery blends skill and experience with attention in the moment. We have seen the concept of the master glorified in media representations of athletes and artists, pop stars and poets, but we can also find mastery all around us, in mechanics and midwives, cooks and carpenters—in ourselves as well as in others. Perhaps we notice the fluidity and efficiency with which we flip burgers on the grill. Perhaps

TEACHER: I think there are two things you're trying to act on at the same time, but they conflict. The first is that it's a good thing to be getting another perspective on your idea, bouncing it around and getting it in as good shape as possible. That would make you want to talk with Michael about it as soon as possible, because you respect his opinion.

CLIENT: Yes, that's right. I think he could help me work on it.

TEACHER: Yes, but the other thing appears to be winning out.

CLIENT: What's that?

TEACHER: The other thing is that it's important to you to appear competent, to have worked out all the kinks before you share something. Maybe that's what held you back when you met with Michael.

CLIENT: Hmm. [pauses] I see your point. Yeah, it's a tradeoff. I can't do both at the same time. But maybe by trying to make myself look good, I actually get in my own way.

TEACHER: Exactly. You made the defend-your-competence thing more important than the refine-your-thinking piece. It's not what you say you value most, but that's the way you acted.

CLIENT: Yeah, you're right! I do that a lot. I usually lay low until I'm very sure of myself. But maybe that holds me back sometimes. That's a big one. I'll have to think more about that.

Here the Teacher exposes the contradiction between Jessica's stated value of refining her idea and the way she acts in order to protect Michael's perception of her as competent. It's an "aha" moment for Jessica, as it often is when we first see the unconscious assumptions that we operate from. In this example, Jessica's overriding concern in the end is to appear competent. In her conversation with Michael, that "governing value" won out over her stated goal of refining her idea with the input of others. Seeing the powerful influence of that unconscious, conditioned

As coaches, we can also project on our clients. Sometimes we suggest a plan of action because we find it intriguing, or it's something we'd like to do. A test is, as with the other Voices, noticing if you experience extra energy or excitement as you move into this role.

It's easy for coaches to define their own success as getting the client to act, so we must beware of overdoing it. On the other hand, we may find ourselves at times reluctant to push and challenge. If that's the case we must ask ourselves if it's our own need to be comfortable and avoid the tension of challenging that holds us back. To hold back from pushing the client towards action can collude with the client's own desires to stay comfortable. We must balance the client's need for movement with his need to be grounded in that movement and in charge of the process. Always, the client's needs must provide the guidance for the pacing and direction of that movement.

Finally, we may seek to cover our lack of experience in a particular area by appearing more knowledgeable than we actually are. Speaking beyond our experience, or invoking a level of authority that we don't in fact possess is misleading to the client. It serves the client better to steer him towards knowledgeable resources than to pretend to have solutions that aren't, in fact, rooted in our experience.

It is the coach's role to challenge our clients and to encourage them to create movement in their lives. That is, generally, what they want and expect of us. Having clear outcomes and good agreements about how to work together creates the legitimacy for this challenging.

Use these guidelines to support your own mindfulness in the Guide role:

- Keep the client in charge. The Guide Voice slips quite easily into the coach's agenda. It can be difficult for both coach and client to know where the energy and direction are coming from, and who is responsible. Ask the client for an explicit commitment after making any recommendation. A simple lack of disagreement

Exercise 13.9: The Investigator Aspects

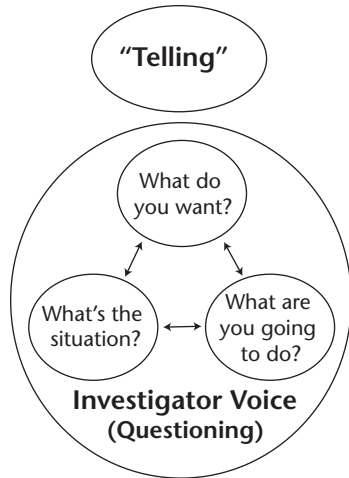
Instructions

Keep this template in front of you, or re-create it on a separate piece of paper. Consider the four areas shown: the three Investigator Aspects, as represented by the three questions, and the three undifferentiated sharpener Voices, collectively called Telling. With your observer mind, pay attention to where you're working in at each particular point in time. Use a quarter, or any small object, and move it as you coach, keeping it in the spot that *primarily* represents the mode you're in. Don't worry, for now, about distinctions between sharpener Voices.

After each session, take a couple of minutes and complete one line of the chart below.

After a week or two, answer these summary questions:

- What did you learn about the nature of observing yourself?
- What did you learn about when and why you switch from questioning to telling or vice versa?
- If you were going to continue but modify this exercise, what would be interesting to pay attention to in learning more about questioning and telling?



Sample Worksheet

Date/Client: Note the date and the client.

Investigator Aspects: Of the four roles, what did you notice yourself primarily doing during the session? What switches did you notice?

Observations: What did you notice about your use of these four ways of working? Which were you most comfortable? What else did you notice in observing yourself?

Date/Client	Investigator Aspects <i>(What did you primarily do? Switches?)</i>	Observations <i>(Use of four ways of working? Comfort? Other observations of self?)</i>

How can I serve? The commitment to mindful service keeps these questions at the forefront; seeking the answers is our curriculum.

Service becomes the mirror in which we see ourselves reflected. Our dedication puts our ego needs—our attachments, aversions, and conditioned habits—right there in our face to look at. Sometimes we like what we see and choose to keep it. Sometimes we don't, and we choose to change or try something new. Either way, the act of committing ourselves to truly serving another guarantees that we will see ourselves more clearly, which in turn creates unlimited opportunities to learn.

Dependency and Service

A good way to check in with yourself to see if you are truly serving your clients' needs is to ask about the ways in which you may be fostering their dependency on you. If we jump in to provide information and suggestions, perhaps that helps the client make an immediate decision, but perhaps doing so will make him less capable of finding the information on his own the next time he has a question, and more dependent on you for help. There's no clear answer on this one, and no guidance that will reliably lead you to the "correct" balance between empowering your clients and creating dependency. However, the search for that balance must be undertaken responsibly and explicitly by the coach if the coaching process is truly to support the long-term growth of every client.

In a coaching relationship, the client looks to the "expert" coach to provide information and knowledge. The ability to serve an apparent need is satisfying to the coach, and part of the work that pays the bills, no matter the specific profession in which the coach is engaged. Both may collude in this mutual dependency.

The bottom line here is that the client's long-term effectiveness and capacity for self-generation define the success of the coaching process. The more explicit the coach is about how she is coaching, the more

22. Julia Cameron's book *The Artist's Way* (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1992) provides a wonderful roadmap for anyone seeking to discover their creative side.
23. Based on an exercise described by Rick Ross, in Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994), pp. 108-112.
24. An assessment tool that allows clients to provide detailed feedback to their coach is available at <http://septetcoaching.com>.
25. The list included here is excerpted from the ICF's Code of Ethics. The ICF Code of Ethics, including the ICF Philosophy and Definition of Coaching, and Ethics Pledge, may be viewed in their entirety at http://www.coachfederation.org/ethics/code_ethics.asp. Guidelines are reprinted here by permission of ICF
26. Darya Funches, *Three Gifts of the Organization Development Practitioner* (Seattle, WA: The REAP Gallery Unlimited Corporation, 1989), p. 157.
27. Laura Whitworth, Henry Kimsey-House, Phil Sandahl, *Co-Active Coaching: New Skills for Coaching People Toward Success in Work and Life* (Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publishing, 1998), pp. 17-18.
28. Flaherty, *Coaching: Evoking Excellence in Others*, p. 53.
29. Whitworth et al., *Co-Active Coaching*, pp. 34-39.
30. Darya Funches, *Three Gifts of the Organization Development Practitioner*, p. 157.
31. Pema Chödrön, *When Things Fall Apart*, pp. 78-80.
32. Flaherty, *Coaching: Evoking Excellence in Others*, p. 51.
33. Merilee Goldberg, *The Art of the Question* (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), p. 3. This excellent book on the use of questions in therapy has lots of value for coaches as well. While the examples are clinical, the discussion of questions and language, and the uses of questions to shape learning, are powerful and applicable to the distinct process of coaching.
34. See Robert Fritz, *The Path of Least Resistance: Principles for Creating What You Want to Create* (Salem, MA: DMA, Inc., 1984); and Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of Learning Organization* (New York, NY: Doubleday Currency, 1990) for two good descriptions of creative tension.
35. Fritz, *The Path of Least Resistance*, p. 66.
36. Richard Wiseman, *The Luck Factor: Changing Your Luck, Changing Your Life: The Four Essential Principles* (New York, NY: Miramax, 2003).
37. See Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom, *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc, 2003), which provides a good overview of the field.
38. Sue Annis Hammond, *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry* (Plano, TX: CCS Publishing Company, 1996), pp. 7-8.
39. Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, p. 250.
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