

# Collaborative Role Coaching Releasing the New Leadership Energy Spontaneity and Creativity

by Andrea Barrett and David Matthew Prior



When leaders are truly spontaneous and creative, they flick a power switch that electrifies human energy potential to respond with competence and confidence to the demands of today's rapidly changing business environment. We assert that no other leader qualities could be more important in light of the global financial crisis and exponential change confronting today's business leaders.

## LEADERSHIP AFTER THE FACT

Leaders in any organization know what it is like to meet the morning with optimism and motivation and by nightfall to reflect bemusedly on the breadth of the day's challenges. Often within that reflection is a sense of wanting to have handled situations in a more efficient manner, to have foreseen its events, to have thought bigger-picture, and to have been more innovative and creative when it was needed. Somehow, those missed opportunities accumulate, resurfacing later as another challenge in a different guise.

## A LEADER WITH NO REGRETS

As we coach leaders to increase their leadership capacity, we often hear a specific need albeit it in a variety of contexts. Leaders want to be able to put leadership acumen into action by being more innovative and creative precisely when it is needed. There is a wealth of leadership wisdom to be absorbed and it is exhilarating to intellectually grasp a significant leadership framework, but where managers and leaders fumble is often when the unexpected occurs. At that point, leaders use their default leadership skills to negotiate the presenting challenge. Often the leader's reaction is the habitual one, and the mechanics go under the radar until later, when reflection takes place. Among the surfeit of published leadership wisdom, it is disconcerting to be unable to translate intellectual insight into action when a situation demands it.

## A NEW PARADIGM ~ THE LEADER'S ROLE RESPONSE-ABILITY

In coaching leaders we have discovered that by exploring their role response-ability, we can help them fine tune their role responses and learn to be more creative and spontaneous when they need it. Role response-ability can be explored through analyzing the roles a leader enacts in his response to a particular challenge.

In other words, role analysis sheds light on what ordinarily is outside of the leader's consciousness. This method of coaching, Collaborative Role Coaching, points leaders to the power switch of their spontaneity and creativity. When that switch is flicked, innovation is beamed in. Leaders describe this process of illumination as feeling spontaneous, emboldened, inspired, and at times, brilliant.

It is interesting that on a macro level, some organizations appear to be innovative and others not. Current theories indicate that organizational culture and its attendant attitudes and assumptions are integral to developing creativity and innovation. Our experience as coaches shows us that on a micro (individual) level, within the context of an innovative culture, that it is the

employee's role response-ability (ability to respond in the moment) that dictates whether innovation will be present or not.

**Role response-ability can be defined as the capacity to enact specific roles so that our response to a challenging situation is both spontaneous and creative.**

## ONE LEADER'S PARADIGM SHIFT

Mike is a CEO of a significant technology enterprise. His business, although successful, is not delivering the outcomes he expects. Previously, Mike had unquestionably adhered to his business model and did not entertain staff input. This resulted in a burned out

leader, a disenfranchised staff, and a business model that would never deliver what Mike hoped it would: wealth generation for himself as well as his clients. Once Mike identified the roles he was used to operating out of - "Pedantic Patriarch", "Constant Expert" and "Lone Leader" - he realized that he needed to develop other roles to steer his business in another, more successful way.

Through Collaborative Role Coaching, Mike identified new roles to be developed. He role shifted from "Pedantic Patriarch" to "Naïve Investigator"; from "Constant Expert" to "Objective Observer" and from "Lone Leader" to "Collaborative Leader". Mike created a new organizational model for ideas that had no traction previously. The results of his paradigm shift included a more motivated team who then developed a suite of innovative services with revenue projections far exceeding any previous expectations.

What actually happens when a leader is both spontaneous and creative is that he can move fluidly and successfully through many useful roles. Spontaneity and creativity are the energies that fuel rapid role changes. Innovation is the product.

## DEFINING ROLE THEORY

Roles are not a new concept. The notion of role is familiar in the world of dramatic arts. In business, we understand "role" as a generic term for the descriptor of a set of functions, e.g., the role of legal advisor. Role coaching is enhanced by our familiarity with these definitions; however, our approach is based on the seminal writings from the school of psychology, particularly those of role theorists Dr Jacob Levi Moreno (Who Shall Survive; 1953) and Dr. Max Clayton (Enhancing Life and Relationships; 1992).

Moreno viewed personality in terms of roles. He described the emergence of roles in terms of that being prior to the emergence of the self. Roles do not emerge from the self, but the self may emerge from roles.<sup>1</sup>

Clayton advanced Moreno's theory by providing a process through which we can analyze and develop our role repertoire. The purpose of the concept of role is to make meaning of our observation and experience of one another.... to make sense of the many different elements of human functioning as they occur in response to particular situations.<sup>2</sup>

It has been postulated that within each person exists a dynamic interplay that affects one's energy for change. Clayton describes these dynamics as the "motivating force" which propels one forward and the "restrictive fear" which holds one back. Roles can be categorized so that it is clear whether one is role responding from a motivating and "progressive" place; or, whether one is operating out of the "restrictive" force with a role which is "not useful".<sup>3</sup>

Roles are the manner in which one relates to the world – they are the embodiment of the leader and can change from moment to moment.

## FROM ROLE THEORY TO ROLE APPLICATION

### FREEZE FRAME: ON LOCATION INSIDE THE ORGANIZATION

Imagine the cameras rolling as a significant moment unfolds in an organization: the people involved, their responses, and body language are captured as a mini movie. Now imagine that this significant meeting in the breakthrough movie is slowed down so that we can watch and study each frame. Suddenly, the responses

are accentuated through the magnification of our attention. We can see individual responses of body posturing, words that are said and the manner in which they are delivered. That is what a role looks like, a specific response to a specific situation in a specific moment.

We have adapted Clayton's work<sup>3</sup> to describe roles in the world of business. Collaborative Role Coaching takes role theory and applies it to leadership action learning. Through a role coaching conversation, the coach assists the leader to identify his current challenge, problem or opportunity. The coach then expertly facilitates the naming and identification of the leader's current role responses, sparking new role development and powerful creativity.

**That roles can be analyzed in terms of their utility offers leaders a strategic framework for learning and practice of significant underutilized roles. This then impacts the leader's development precisely where it is needed.**

## ROLE CALL FOR TODAY'S EMERGENT LEADER

Collaborative Role Coaching offers leaders the opportunity to put their leadership behaviors under the microscope in a practical and efficient way. Leadership behavior can be drilled down into roles, knowing that every role is a unit of behavioral response to a specific situation. Each role can be categorized in terms of its utility to the leader. This means that a leader can analyze whether his roles (responses) are useful or not useful in a specific situation. Being able to analyze leadership behavior in context-specific terms offers a wealth of

information about how unconscious attitudes and emotions get triggered. Through role coaching, leaders can have real time, self-directed, self-paced leadership development by identifying and rehearsing new roles.

## ROLE AWARENESS + ROLE INTENTIONALITY = LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS

The increase in awareness of our roles leads to more useful roles being applied intentionally, thereby increasing our leadership effectiveness. The more useful roles we have at our disposal, the more spontaneous and creative we become. The combination of spontaneity and creativity in our choosing of roles leads to significant and appropriate responses to unexpected events. **This is the new leadership energy.**

**FROM DETAIL MANAGER TO INDUSTRY LEADER**

Cathy is Director of Operations in a service industry corporation. As the corporation has grown, Cathy has struggled to keep up with the demands on her department. An average day is 10 hours at her desk, 6 days a week. In a role coaching session, Cathy shares feedback received from her CEO indicating that she has lost her edge because she has been neglecting higher level strategic functions. Cathy was aware that long hours had taken their toll, but convinced herself that this way of managing was required in order to ensure that operations were well maintained.

Through a role coaching session, Cathy became aware that she had been micromanaging as a result of assuming that she was the "Detail Manager" in the company, being the only one who could do it properly. Cathy discovered that not only had she been over-using the role of "Detail Manager", but that she had also been over-using "Hands-on Supervisor" and "Lone Ranger" roles.

Role coaching helped Cathy to identify under-used roles of "Future Analyst" and "Empowering Leader" which her job actually

required. As Cathy reviewed her leadership behavior in terms of useful and un-useful roles, she claimed the more strategic roles of "Trend Analyst", "Industry Leader" and "Objective Observer". These newly claimed roles took on real significance in Cathy's future management of her department's resources.

**PROCESS OF ROLE COACHING:  
THE POWER BEHIND THE SWITCH**

The process of role coaching typically delivers to the coachee an understanding of their role repertoire, that is, which roles are useful, not useful and could be useful. The leader also gains insight into belief and emotional systems that have triggered particular responses, and of which he has not been conscious heretofore. The coach then facilitates the leader to name and claim new roles, ensuring that he is poised for spontaneous and creative leadership. The leader finishes a role coaching session with an action plan of how to develop significant new roles. Subsequent role coaching sessions provide a structure to review and monitor progress for the fine-tuning of role responses.

**COLLABORATIVE ROLE COACHING PROCESS**



Clarify Meeting Objective/Target



Identify Roles that are Currently Used

Categorize Roles as:

- Useful (for client objective)
- Not Useful (for client objective)
- Could be Useful (for client objective)



Coach Facilitates the Client to Claim a New Role

## SUMMARY

What would happen if a Tentative Manager, afraid to make decisions, transformed into a Tenacious Spartacus? How might this impact the team who hungered for a brave leader? Imagine the impact of a Tenacious Spartacus in an organization beset with complacency! Collaborative Role Coaching propels leaders to unleash their natural power and potential for spontaneity and creativity. This is the new leadership energy.

## BIOGRAPHIES

**Andrea Barrett** trained as Occupational Therapist, in Dublin. This qualification proved to be a foundation for a compelling interest in understanding the nature of human potential and behavioral change processes. Training in the Schools of Psychodrama and Sociocodrama (Australia) led to a successful career as an Organizational Development Consultant and Executive Coach to government and private industry there. Andrea currently directs an organizational development and executive coaching company in Texas that maximizes human potential through leadership coaching and training.

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## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Moreno, J.L., *Who Shall Survive?*, Beacon, NY, Beacon (1953)

<sup>2</sup> Clayton, G.M., *Living pictures of the Self*, (p 11), ICA Press, Australia (1993)

<sup>3</sup> Clayton, G.M., *Enhancing Life and Relationships*, (p59) ICA Press, Australia (1992)