

THE COACHING EFFECT

WHAT GREAT LEADERS DO TO
INCREASE SALES, ENHANCE
PERFORMANCE, AND SUSTAIN GROWTH

**BILL ECKSTROM &
SARAH WIRTH**



GREENLEAF
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Praise for *The Coaching Effect*

“Using evidence-based findings and vivid examples, Bill Eckstrom and Sarah Wirth reveal the ‘missing piece’ in leadership: the coaching factor. They show how, using growth rings and healthy tension, you can get the great people you hired to perform at peak capacity.”

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“Bill Eckstrom and Sarah Wirth are clearly the brightest minds in the field of sales coaching. The advice in this book is priceless. It should be mandatory reading for anyone who is in charge of a sales team, or any customer facing team. If you want to grow sales, this book will help you win.”

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—JOHN ROOD, Senior Vice President, Marketing,
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“Bill and Sarah are the real deal. Their guidance has added a new dimension to our sales leadership that is missing in most organizations!”

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Executive Vice President – Group Division

“Eckstrom and Wirth help you rethink coaching effectiveness and growth. Using research and data-driven methods, they honed their approach to coaching by considering the perspective of the coach, the coachee, and whether it delivered results. The outcome is insightful and proven-effective. Check out the discomfort factor (unexpected), the Growth Rings and how they fuel the Coaching Performance Equation, how to consider both the quantity and quality of coaching, and their simple but effective 4-step coaching process. If you want to improve coaching and organization performance, this is the right book for you.”

—MIKE KUNKLE, founder, Sales Transformation Architect,
Transforming Sales Results, LLC

“Bill and Sarah do an excellent job of applying systems thinking principles to their method of coaching for performance improvement. I teach these same scientific-based principles to my MBA class on Leading Change every semester. Bill’s 2017 TEDxUniversityofNevada talk provides valuable support material for the book. Highly recommend!”

—BRET L. SIMMONS, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Management,
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“The objective and data-driven focus on the value of effective coaching on sales growth makes this book an excellent read.”

—KEVIN SIEBERT, President, Tecumseh Poultry LLC

“*The Coaching Effect* makes a compelling and evidence-based case for ambitious future leaders learning how to coach and embrace discomfort.”

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“A leader’s ability to coach is no longer a nice-to-have and is now a must-have.”

—TOM OLSON, Chairman and CEO,
Points West Community Bank, Windsor, CO

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First Edition

DEDICATED TO THE
TEACHERS, COACHES, AND BOSSES IN OUR LIVES
WHO HELPED SHAPE THIS BOOK.

*The constant facade of order hides the wilderness that is
craving to seep out and teach us that life wasn't created to be
what we think it is. Beyond words, we must experience the
wilderness to be taught what cannot be otherwise known.*

—DR. SERENE JONES

Contents

| | |
|---|-------------|
| <i>Preface</i> | <i>xiii</i> |
| <i>Acknowledgments</i> | <i>xxi</i> |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| ONE: The Growth Rings | 15 |
| TWO: Coaching Redefined | 37 |
| THREE: Coaching Quantity and Coaching Quality | 57 |
| FOUR: One-to-One Meetings | 79 |
| FIVE: Team Meetings | 95 |
| SIX: Performance Feedback | 111 |
| SEVEN: Career Development | 129 |
| CONCLUSION: The Four-Step Coaching Process | 147 |
| <i>About the Authors</i> | <i>171</i> |

Preface

MITCH WAS OUR NATIONAL director of sales and my boss. I worked under him in my new role as sales manager of the western district for a medical equipment company. He was smart, tough, stubborn, impatient, and demanding. He also had other annoying qualities. He constantly pushed, prodded, and challenged most everything I did. Mitch did not create what I would call a comfortable work environment for me, nor would I consider him an easygoing manager.

He took a keen interest in my development from the get-go, and I remember wishing he hadn't been quite so invested in my performance as a first-time manager. I felt he expected more from me than from the other managers and was more critical of my work, which made me want to avoid him at times. While he never told me what to do, he constantly questioned my actions and decisions. He forced me to painstakingly analyze every option and consider every detail. There was always a lesson to be learned. He taught me to evaluate how my actions would affect our business, our employees, and our clients. I'd just come from a sales-producer role, so this was not how I was accustomed to thinking. Looking back, I see that nothing ever came easy while working for him.

Mitch made sure I took full responsibility for what happened in the region I managed, including what my salespeople did and did not do. And excuses were not acceptable. He gave me the proverbial kick in the rear when needed and complimented me when appropriate. There was an overriding code that was unspoken yet obvious to those who were part of his team: maximum effort and results were not optional. This high-performance environment created a feeling of what I now call *healthy discomfort*; the

discomfort wasn't fear-based, but an emotion more like what I felt before a big exam or athletic competition.

Speaking of exams, it was not uncommon for Mitch to give us a written pop quiz on the technicalities of a new product or single us out during a meeting with a challenging question. When in his presence during the workday, discussions about sales performance and new strategies were inevitable and would often turn heated. It used to frustrate me because I knew, whether he agreed with my thought or strategy or not, he would take the opposite position just to challenge my thinking.

What I adored about Mitch's management style was his belief that if a person never failed, they weren't trying hard enough. So I took great liberties in this area. Begging for forgiveness versus asking permission was my mantra, and Mitch let me know he tolerated my missteps because he saw an early version of himself in my behaviors. Working for him came with an odd mix of emotions: I was never fearful of losing my job, I was always provided continuing-education opportunities, vacation time was never tracked or discussed, and my expenses and travel were never challenged by him, but there was *always* tension in the air created by his demands for perpetual growth.

Mitch openly communicated that he saw great potential in me as a leader and would push me to achieve that potential. His actions and behaviors let me know I wasn't just some asset or tool that allowed him to hit the sales goal. He cared about me as a person. He often invited me to personal dinners at his house, and we would have poignant conversations about family and raising kids. He even made sure our wives spent time together.

Despite all this, Mitch has the distinction of being the most challenging and frustrating person to whom I've ever reported. But he has also been the greatest growth catalyst in my professional career. Only now can I look back with enough clarity to understand what Mitch was trying to do and his reasons for it. Simply stated, Mitch cared enough to make me uncomfortable. And although he never said it, he seemed to intuitively understand that being in a state of discomfort is the only way a person can grow.

Sadly, the “Mitches” of the world are the exception and not the rule in leadership and coaching roles. If you doubt me, take a moment and consider all the teachers, coaches, and bosses you’ve had in your life to date. Could you list fifty? One hundred? Perhaps two hundred? Now think about *only* those that had such a positive impact on your life that you might say, “I wouldn’t be where I am today without that person in my life.” Could you say that about two people? Three? Maybe five? I have done this exercise with thousands of leaders across the globe, and it is rare that anyone says they had more of these influencers than they can show on one hand. That is a sad reality check about a role that, at its core, is designed to elevate you to levels you could not otherwise achieve.

High-performing teams and their coaches have always been fascinating to me. In my early years, I was captivated by Vince Lombardi and the Green Bay Packers, John Wooden and UCLA, and Tom Osborne and Husker football. As I matured, this interest evolved to include people like Lee Iacocca with Chrysler and Lou Gerstner with IBM. Why do some teams always achieve while others wallow in mediocrity? Early on, I knew it had to be because they had strong leaders. *First, Break All the Rules*, a best-selling leadership book released in the late nineties, fueled my curiosity with its research and affirmed my beliefs. This book showed it was the manager that made all the difference.

I did not begin my career with the goal of getting into management. The first ten years were spent in commissioned sales, and while successful in that arena, I always found myself gravitating toward helping others sell. Though I couldn’t articulate why at the time, there was something more innately satisfying to me about motivating others to achieve. Since that first management job working under Mitch, I’ve worked only in leadership roles, tackling everything from regional sales management to an executive position with a publicly traded company. I’ve experienced a variety of bosses, some life changing in the way they coached and others who were just bad, but I’ve learned from them all. Personally, as a coach I’ve been far from perfect, but I would like to think I’ve touched lives and businesses in a way more positive than not.

When I was promoted to my first leadership role, I had eight salespeople reporting to me, but besides Mitch I found no resources and tools to help me learn what to do as a leader. There were thousands of books I could have given to my salespeople to help them improve their skills, but there was nothing that defined, taught, and quantified my role, which I viewed as identical to that of a coach. So I worked to hone my skills in a variety of ways, many of which took me outside of sales. I learned from and engaged with sports psychologists. I studied the latest leadership models. I got to know and quizzed PhDs in organization behavior. I conducted my own research, and had my own good old-fashioned experiences. Eventually, I reached a point in my career where I realized I should take what I had learned about being a successful leader and share it with others. I knew I could be that resource that the field of management was missing.

In 2008, I started EcSell Institute, a company whose vision is to *create a workplace where every employee knows what great coaching feels like*. My plan was and still is to accomplish this by working only with department leaders, with most of EcSell's work focusing on sales leadership. The other strategic caveats were that all EcSell programs would be created and supported with research, and success would only be measured by correlating coaching activities and behaviors to revenue and performance growth. The motivation for starting EcSell Institute came about for two reasons: (1) my passion for understanding the science behind a leader's impact on performance and growth and (2) my termination from my last executive role. I'd be lying if I said getting fired wasn't devastating at the time, but for reasons you will learn later, that humbling day had a profound impact on the trajectory of my life and the lives of those around me.

The early years at EcSell were more discomfiting and costlier than I ever imagined. Our small team worked hard to create and sell something nobody had ever sold—a measurable coaching methodology, the outcome of which quantifies effectiveness of those in leadership roles. On several occasions, I thought we would fold, but our committed team always made something happen when necessary to keep us alive.

At the risk of braggadocio, my greatest coaching strength is identifying and acquiring highly talented people. And these people, who now compose the EcSell team, continually amaze not just me and our clients but also one another. While I receive a great deal of the accolades (I have been featured on the cover of magazines and in newspaper articles; I did a TEDx Talk that went viral; and I have been asked to do countless podcasts, radio shows, workshops, and speeches across the globe), none of this would have happened without the talent, passion, and work of our team. It is easy to be humble when you realize your success is because of others.

Nothing elevates performance more than coaching has been our consistent why, and it guides our research, service, sales, and strategy. Technology and research have substantially changed what work we deliver and how we deliver it, but nothing has influenced our delivery model more than my brilliant colleague and coauthor, Sarah Wirth.

Many pages of this book are dedicated to explaining how discomfort and challenge are necessary to achieve growth of any kind—personal growth, professional growth, and revenue growth. Sarah certainly acts as a comfort disrupter for me and our business. I often describe her as the yin to my yang because, even though we are different in many ways, we complement each other with our abilities. I tend to lead with ideas, data, emotions, and passion. Sarah views everything with logic—how what we’re offering can be applied. I get excited about how we can affect people by helping them become better coaches; Sarah likes to analyze the impact of coaching on the bottom line. But we are aligned in our belief, based on both emotion and logic, that growth only occurs in a state of discomfort, and leaders at every level have the greatest impact on the discomfort levels of their teams.

Sarah has spent her career studying the impact of great leadership. She graduated from Michigan Law School but knew the legal profession wasn’t the right fit for her. So rather than taking a lucrative job offer at a national law firm, she decided to work for an employee selection and development company. She spent the next decade studying the talents of leaders at

world-renowned organizations like The Cheesecake Factory, the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, and the Estée Lauder Companies. Doing this work was where her love of analyzing the impact of effective coaching on a company's bottom line was born.

In the years since, Sarah has developed a knack for figuring out the right questions to ask to understand how leaders create growth. Turning research data into insights, her special talent is distilling complex ideas into simple concepts to share with others. Sarah was raised by two teachers, so her drive to learn, ask questions, and help others discover new ways of working comes naturally to her. She may be logical and love data, but you truly see her come alive when she's sharing what she's learned with others. When I recruited Sarah to join EcSell Institute seven years ago, I was looking for someone who could help take our company to the next level in client service. We were doing a good job of growing and acquiring new customers, but I knew we needed to be offering more if we were going to retain them. Sarah agreed to join our team and ultimately developed the client-service model that would deepen our research into the connection between coaching and measurable growth.

Since our company's inception, we have studied more than one hundred thousand coaching interactions to understand the behaviors and activities of what we now refer to as *high-growth coaches*. What we've learned is that coaches who drive significant growth operate differently than their peers. They are more consistent and accountable in their actions. They are better at developing trusting relationships with the people they lead. And most importantly, they do not worry about creating discomfort because they know they must challenge their team and make them uncomfortable in order to help them grow.

In this book, you will hear a combined voice—mine and Sarah's—so *we* will be primarily used as opposed to *I* in our writing. Also, the book includes real-life examples and stories of coaching successes that come from our experiences from within as well as outside the world of business.

The book is *written to* executive leaders within every company, because

ultimately you own the performance environment of the entire organization. Growth and resulting revenue are being unnecessarily left on the table by every business we have researched, and this should shake you to the core. But this book is *written for* frontline managers who must become the catalyst for their team's growth. And, despite my sales background, this applies to everyone who has a team reporting to them. A team of any kind reflects how it is coached, and growth will not be maximized unless the manager drives it.

Continue reading and you will learn about the tools, processes, behaviors, and best practices that high-growth coaches use to create high-performing teams. You will be introduced to a step-by-step coaching methodology that is proven to increase results. You will understand the importance of measuring the effectiveness of coaching as well as how to accurately assess coaching *quantity* and coaching *quality*, and how they affect revenue.

Finally, this book is based on research and best practices, *not opinion!* You will see how our research is used to draw conclusions as well as detailed case studies of how the proper amount of coaching activities and high-quality coaching creates growth and improved performance. When you finish this book, you will know exactly what managers need to do to become high-growth coaches. Most importantly, if we were to interview your team for a sequel to this book, we hope they would tell us how *you* evolved from being just a “comfortable manager” to the greatest growth catalyst for your team's professional career, just like Mitch was for me.

Introduction

IT IS 8:30 A.M. in southern Florida and the summer humidity is already oppressive, but the young athletes are moving with precision around the clay court as if programmed by the latest sports video game. They have been working since 7:00 a.m.; a few began at 6:30. Rene is barking encouragement and instruction, and though his Spanish accent makes it challenging for me to understand, it is infinitely clear that the students know what he wants.

There is little time for rest; the renowned coach's intensity does not allow for complacency. The kids move station to station, drill to drill, with brief breaks to mop off sweat, quickly change their shirts, and guzzle water. Working hard is not an option; the players self-select in or out of his culture. If the kids are not playing with heart and soul, they are asked to sit or go home, and "home" means for good. The unwritten rule regarding an injury is that if you are injured, you do not play. If you play, you are not injured. Most every aspect of their tennis game is worked on daily. There are approximately twenty players, and each is called by their given name.

Rene Gomez has coached the likes of Andre Agassi, Jim Courier, Anna Kournikova, and Monica Seles, so he knows what it takes to play tennis at the highest level. He doesn't talk to the kids about playing professionally; they only discuss disciplines and act in ways that take their game up one notch at a time, one day at a time. And when the next rung on the ladder is reached, the coach turns up the heat once again—more conditioning, more strokes, and more mental resolve. For many of the teenagers here, according to Rene, the only difference between them and Maria Sharapova is toughness, both mental and physical.

Beyond Rene, the most important pieces to the high-performance puzzle at Gomez Tennis Academy are his assistant coaches. Rene works with all his

students, but it is not physically possible for a single person to provide the needed attention, so it's up to his assistant coaches to grow and develop all the talent. The assistants are the ones pointing out specific tweaks a player can make to their swing. They're the ones offering words of praise and encouragement to someone who is working hard. They're the ones barking challenges to someone who needs to step up their game. They're the ones counseling a homesick teenager. Every day, all day, they're the ones on the front lines, demanding extreme effort from their players so that they can reach their full performance potential. While the culture begins at the top, without the other coaches supporting the vision and executing high-growth activities, the program would fail.

THIS STORY IS AN example of high-growth coaches working in a demanding, high-performance environment. The players are there to grow, to separate themselves from the pack, to see how far they can take their game, to test themselves every day. And because they are not there to be ordinary but rather exceptional, their coaches cannot be ordinary. Coaches must perpetuate, not cap growth; their actions and behaviors must drive performance improvement in a healthy way. Likewise, this book is not about being ordinary; it's about achieving excellence and helping others achieve results they would not attain without a high-growth coach in their life.

COACHES ARE THE KEY TO PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH

These high-performance environments allow you to measure inputs and outcomes at every level, from how well the players play to how well the coaches coach, and these measurements can then be used as a baseline for growth. In a high-performance environment, those team members not willing to continually improve or to push or be pushed will not find a home.

These types of organizations, whether a youth tennis academy or a Fortune 500 company, know how to identify and acquire high-performing talent, but just as importantly they know how to develop and retain talent. To a high-performing business, developing talent is the essential function of their managers, rather than just one of their priorities. Managers and their team members have used the term *healthy tension* to describe how high-performance environments feel. They push themselves and their teams to constantly improve, and being “too busy” is never an excuse for not getting done what is most important. The success of high-performance teams depends on their coaches.

EVERY GROWTH
CHALLENGE A
BUSINESS FACES IS A
MANAGEMENT ISSUE.

At EcSell, we learned long ago that every growth challenge a business faces is a management issue. How often have we seen the same team perform at an entirely different level depending on their leader? The examples in the sports world are endless, and you can probably point to an example or two in your own professional experience. Great coaches have such a positive effect on their team’s performance because they believe every aspect of growth is their responsibility, and they behave accordingly. Think about it: from hiring talent to player development, planning, strategy, accountability, and motivation, coaches affect everything.

DISCRETIONARY EFFORT: YOUR COACHING VALUE

To understand the value you bring to your team as their coach, ask yourself the following question: Will people on your team still do their job without you as their manager? For example, when a sales manager goes on vacation, will the salespeople who work under him or her still show up for work and continue to sell? Leaders of all levels in organizations—and we’ve asked

more than a thousand—answer that yes, of course their teams do work without them being physically present. So, if your people can still do their jobs without you, the value you bring to them and the organization is measured by how much better they will do their jobs with you as their manager. If you manage a sales team, your value equals how much more your team sells because of you.

The additional amount produced by a team, measured in dollars, productivity, wins, and so on, *because of a manager* is what we refer to as *discretionary effort*. It's how much more work gets done, how much a team's efficiency increases, how much a team's quality improves, or how much more is sold because of a manager. If a sales team would produce \$10 mil-

lion without a manager and they sell \$14 million with one, the \$4 million difference is the monetary value of the discretionary effort obtained by the manager. With the right tools and data, any organization can now measure the discretionary effort managers bring to their teams (more on this later).

Part of what we have found through our research and will show in this book is how managers create discretionary effort

over long periods of time. It is important to note that discretionary effort should not just be measured at a single point in time. For example, in business, a manager who uses fear as a motivator can get discretionary effort for short periods of time, but it is not likely to be sustainable. Though fear can create growth, it is not a healthy way to achieve it, and over time fear will likely lead to a low-growth, chaotic environment. That said, we did find in our research (which we will show later) that there is a correlation between

THERE IS A
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WHO CREATE HEALTHY
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high-performing teams and managers who create healthy discomfort for those on their team.

Some team members describe their managers as nice and feel their managers have created a comfortable team environment in which to work. Just to be clear, we're not saying there's anything wrong with managers being nice or creating some feeling of comfort. But nice managers don't obtain nearly as much discretionary effort as high-growth coaches who create discomfort. If a manager is simply nice, they're not creating the healthy tension, the discomfort, that leads to optimum performance. They're not pushing their team members outside their comfort zones to get them to grow. And they're certainly not creating a performance environment like the ones we see with a great sports team or a high-growth company. But how do we measure a manager's ability to create this type of environment?

MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS MUST BE MEASURED

Data that measures employee effectiveness is by no means new, especially in sales, where many companies track most every selling activity imaginable through tools such as customer relationship management (CRM) systems. However, consider the following exchange and think if it applies to your company.

A while back, we had a conversation with a VP of sales who had a litany of frontline sales managers reporting to him. Not everyone on his teams was achieving their sales goals, and he was searching for answers. When we asked what data they regularly reviewed, he shared all the metrics they track, showing virtually every minute of how a salesperson spent their day. They measured the number of sales calls made, where they traveled, customers or prospects called, ratio of deals closed, and so on. They had an endless stream of data on what their salespeople did. But when asked what his managers were doing to drive growth, he said, "Guys, I understand why you are asking and want you to know I've been working with most of my

managers for more than ten years, so I trust them all. They are not only work colleagues; they are good friends. But having said that, I have no idea where they were last week, let alone last month. Plus, I have no idea if they are doing the activities or behaving in a way that drives the most growth because I have no idea what those things are. I guess I've just always hoped my managers were doing the right things."

The attitude in this frustrating exchange is unfortunately commonplace in every work environment we've researched. For the heads of organizations to know nothing about the activities, behaviors, and overall effectiveness of the role that has the greatest impact on team performance, the manager, is ludicrous. Common sense dictates that nobody comes to work with a goal of failing, but the manager's role is arguably the most precarious regarding longevity. We see firsthand how companies are quick to release managers, and a revolving door is set in motion, especially in sales departments. A big reason for this chaotic turnover is that nobody helps them understand how to be effective, nor is anyone measuring their performance inputs or outcomes. Time and again, we speak with senior executives who have no idea how their managers are spending their days or even how they should be spending them. Even managers themselves question if they're focused on the activities that produce the best team results.

To sustain growth, maximize the performance of your business and teams, attract the best talent, and ensure that your organization remains relevant in today's and especially tomorrow's workplace, resources must be committed to the continual development and quantification of managerial effectiveness. The goal of this commitment, and hopefully an outcome of reading this book, is to get managers to behave and drive results in a way that resembles a *high-growth coach* as opposed to a performance-limiting manager.

You've probably noticed by now that we prefer the word *coach* to *manager*. That's for a very specific reason: the term *manager* is an archaic term describing a role that, by definition, limits growth and performance. A manager oversees managing tasks and managing people to accomplish those

tasks. They promote processes and order, but those are not the elements that lead to growth. On the other hand, a coach develops and inspires people to do their best work. Coaches obtain more discretionary effort than managers, which is why the best coaches elevate their team's performance.

For many people, the word *coach* triggers association with athletic teams, for which the job description is simple: to win. Indeed, the role of coaching in athletics encompasses the same key elements as effectively leading a business team. The coach must manage processes and outputs, develop relationships, lead and inspire, strategize, recruit, and certainly create discomfort for their team to achieve maximum performance. In addition to *coach* being more robust than previous descriptors of the manager, the title and role of a coach (which is detailed in chapter 2) more clearly defines what is required in business to consistently grow. Going forward, we will primarily use the word *coach* as opposed to *manager*.

Even if we know that the word *coach* and related coaching activities better describe what it takes to lead a high-growth team, there is still a significant lack of understanding of what a coach needs to do in a business environment to be successful. In our research with sales departments, we see that approximately 80 percent of existing coaches, even those who've had coaching training, are not executing the necessary coaching activities with the right frequency or quality that will lead a team to perform at the highest levels (we'll discuss why in future chapters). We also see that 30 percent of the coaches in a sales department are either providing no discretionary effort or unknowingly preventing salespeople from selling more. Said another way, sales departments are paying, on average, 30 percent of their coaches to inhibit sales.

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When we set out on our journey to understand and quantify how coaches influence growth and overall performance, our vision was to discern the activities, behaviors, and tools the best coaches use. We deliberately began our work in sales departments for several reasons, one being the background of those on the EcSell team. Another reason was that sales departments traditionally do a better job tracking performance data. Having such black-and-white numbers (every business tracks sales) made it easier for us to correlate coaching activities and behaviors to results.

The more we learned about how coaches affect sales results and as we shared these findings with CEOs, presidents, and other executives throughout the world, they would in turn share their belief that effective coaching in the sales world should apply to every department. While we always believed this as well, their response motivated us to expand our work to almost every type of leader and team in an organization. However, you will see that most of the examples in the following chapters use sales departments because we have so much rich data.

WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE COACH?

We had many discoveries along the way as we sought to understand what made certain coaches more effective than others. These discoveries are the foundation of the coaching methods and best practices that we share in the coming chapters, but here are a few of our most exciting insights:

- We discovered that high-growth coaches perform specific activities whose effectiveness and execution can be measured. This insight was

our most important initial discovery because it showed us that we could quantify what the best coaches did differently. And if we could identify and measure coaching activities, then we could also educate other coaches on what to do to increase their own effectiveness.

- We discovered that high-growth coaches not only have specific coaching activities they perform regularly but also exhibit unique behaviors when coaching. A huge part of our research has come through surveying employees about their coaches. As we saw how employees rated their coaches on dozens of different behaviors, it became obvious that high-growth coaches simply coach in a different way.
- We discovered that these successful coaching activities and behaviors could be quantified, taught, and implemented by those willing to change. As we measured coaches over time, many over the course of years, we often saw significant changes in their activities and behaviors. Coaches who focused on improving the quality and quantity of their coaching in turn had team members who gave them higher marks in their overall coaching acumen. And, not surprisingly, the coaches' measurable performance improved. For sales coaches, it meant their teams sold more.

In spite of our excitement at all of these discoveries, one discovery we made was more significant than all the others—the discomfort factor. Just like my manager Mitch or tennis coach Rene Gomez, high-growth coaches are not afraid to push, to demand, and to challenge to get their teams to perform. They don't shy away from making their team members uncomfortable. In fact, they relish it because they consciously or subconsciously know that growth can only occur in a state of discomfort. Their goal is to get the best possible performance out of the people they coach, and they must move beyond just being a nice manager to make it happen.

Perhaps the reason the discomfort factor was so significant is because it really surprised us. We had been measuring and quantifying coaching

behavior for a while, but there seemed to be a concept we were missing. And it wasn't until we worked with a brilliant university professor, Dr. Mary Uhl-Bien, that we discovered what it was: the best coaches embrace or create an environment of discomfort to get those on their team to grow.

Our journey of discovery will not end as long as there is more to learn about great coaching. While we have our own opinions and ideas about coaching, it is our goal to always let the data guide us. So, as you continue reading, know that everything we are sharing with you is based on our research, which includes the following:

- **Objectively measuring more than one hundred thousand coaching interactions in the workplace.** This was primarily executed through a coaching cloud software that we developed for the single purpose of quantifying and understanding coaching effectiveness within an organization. The software allows our clients to cut and slice coaching data in a variety of ways, examples of which will be shown throughout the following chapters.
- **Surveying more than seven thousand employees and managers in various roles and companies throughout the world.** Surveys were used to discover and dissect the relationship between employees and their coaches. We call this our *Through the Eyes of the Team* survey, and you will see many of our survey findings throughout the book. This data comes directly from the individuals who experience the interactions with their coach.
- **Working directly with our own clients.** We interact daily with executives and coaches throughout the world. We listen to their challenges, needs, and ideas about coaching, which keeps us attuned to what is happening at every leadership level in an organization.
- **Conducting focus groups of executives, managers, and employees.** We have met face-to-face and over the phone with groups throughout the world at all different levels, in all different markets, that encompass

everything from agriculture to high-tech to health care to learn their perceptions of great coaching. The ideas and concepts they share continue to shape and inform our formal research efforts.

As you read this book, know that coaching is hard and, candidly, most managers don't do what it takes to be categorized as *high-growth coaches*. When we refer to a high-growth coach, we are referring to coaches of teams that are producing in the top 20 percent of their coaching peers within the same company. For example, in a sales department that has a team of one hundred coaches, while we research them all, we separate the twenty highest-performing coaches measured by their team percent to goal. We then look for differences in coaching activity and behavior. The same goes for a company that has ten coaches; we study them all but look for what is different about the top two.

When the top 20 percent are analyzed, these facts emerge:

- They do 30 percent more coaching activities than the bottom 80 percent.
- They coach with 18 percent better quality than the bottom 80 percent.
- They coach teams that average 110 percent of goal, while the bottom 80 percent average 91 percent.
- They coach teams that produce an average of \$4.1 million more sales revenue than the bottom 80 percent.

Using our data, if a sales department has fifty frontline managers, they can safely assume that forty of them, due to poor coaching, are leaving a combined \$164 million in revenue on the table. Those figures should cause every leader to stop in their tracks and want to know more about what their coaches are doing and how well they are doing it.

We will analyze, in detail, the science of performance and growth and

how coaches perpetuate or limit the performance or growth of individuals and teams. We will share the specifics of who we research, how we research, and what benchmarks apply to everyone in a coaching role. There will then be a series of chapters that detail measurable and quantifiable coaching activities and behaviors that we have proven lead to improved performance and sustained team growth.

Most of the book justifiably focuses on what coaches can do to drive more performance from individuals and teams, but the concluding chapter details how an organization can adopt and implement coaching best practices. We will share a four-step coaching methodology that can be utilized by businesses of all sizes to create a team of high-growth coaches, the outcome of which measures and quantifies coaching activities, behaviors, and overall coaching effectiveness.

Throughout this book, we share business case studies that outline how differing companies transformed their management team. You will read how their committed journey to high-growth coaching affected sales results, but you will also be aware of the pain they incurred doing so. We will candidly share the realities that occur when behaviors are asked to change—managers who don't want their work (or lack thereof) exposed, managers who are comfortable with how they work and don't want to be accountable for a new way of coaching, managers who say they don't have time, and managers who don't want their work quantified. But you will also read about managers who do adapt and then adopt a high-growth coaching methodology and how their team outcomes look and feel different. You will hear from team members who have poor coaches and those who have high-growth coaches. And, because we always correlate coaching to performance and growth, you will see the good, bad, and ugly data of a variety of coaches who lead sales teams.

While the results that high-growth coaches achieve are likely to sound attractive to you, and they should, it is challenging to consistently execute what a high-growth coach does without a strong personal desire or organizational commitment to learn, grow, and change. Our research clearly

shows that what we are espousing is different than what most managers do today, which therefore creates discomfort and organizational disruption. However, because of our research, we have learned to embrace discomfort, and by the time you are finished with this book, we hope you will too. Because being in a state of discomfort is the only way to continually grow.

Finally, before we get started, I'd like to propose an important question.

WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE TO BE COACHED BY YOU?

This is a succinct, simple question that should evoke great thought. Whether you are a frontline manager or executive leader, I encourage you to challenge yourself by answering it. Before you read further, stop and write down the question and your answer. Do it now on the lines that follow.

In EcSell's coaching academies with leaders from across the world, we most often begin by asking this question. Although the responses obviously vary, what remains the same is that most of these leaders have never even considered this question, nor do they have an analytical understanding of how effective they are at improving individual and team performance.

Not knowing how your team feels about your coaching effectiveness is unacceptable. The managers and executive leaders within any organization are the obstacles, catalysts, decision makers, and solutions for growth. The challenge in having empirical data about your coaching effectiveness is that you are not only exposed but you are also holding a mirror up to yourself, which is hard for most everyone. It is tough to see a reality in which those

on your team may not believe you care about them beyond the workplace or in which you are not at your best when under pressure or in which you inhibit the growth of those on your team.

Discovering this may create discomfort, but it also creates an amazing growth opportunity. Naïveté is no longer an excuse for not having a data-driven understanding of what it feels like to be coached by you.

The Growth Rings

#WhatTeamMembersSay

Question: What does your manager do best as a sales coach?

Answer: I don't know. I've never been coached.

Through the Eyes of the Team survey respondent

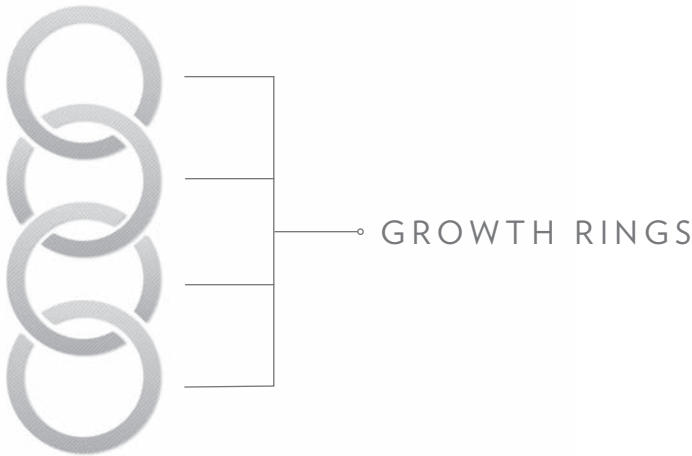
IN THE EARLY YEARS of our company, our small EcSell team spent countless hours in coffee shops, restaurants, our family room (before we could afford an office), or any place that would allow our patronage while we obsessively debated and analyzed how coaches contributed to high-performing teams. We knew that coaching had the most significant impact on performance. We knew there was something to high-growth coaching that classic leadership and management models were not explaining. But figuring out how to research and explain it had us stumped.

We assumed coaches understood that their primary role was to create growth above and beyond what their subordinates were willing to do on their own, but our work with clients proved we were wrong. So to help managers better comprehend what to do and how to do it well, we studied basic coaching activities and behaviors. However, the more we researched,

the more we learned that the best leaders were unique in their coaching, and we could see that—either intentionally or unintentionally—they created or embraced an environment of discomfort as a growth mechanism. But why did these behaviors have such powerful outcomes? What was it about discomfort that created so much growth?

Ironically, it all came together when we injected some discomfort into our own discussions by inviting leadership guru Mary Uhl-Bien, PhD, to work with us. Her research background, profound knowledge, and passion for the study of leadership helped us view growth through a different lens. She constantly challenged and expanded our myopic views on the role of a coach-leader versus a manager.

Dr. Mary was invaluable in assisting with a paramount discovery that was quite literally an epiphany, a “holy \$#it” moment that stopped us in our tracks. What began as a journey to understand how coaching affects the performance of individuals and teams had turned into a global model for explaining how growth is sustained and amplified by *all* living things. We discovered a model that showed *why* exponential and sustained growth only occur in a state of discomfort. We call this model the *Growth Rings*.

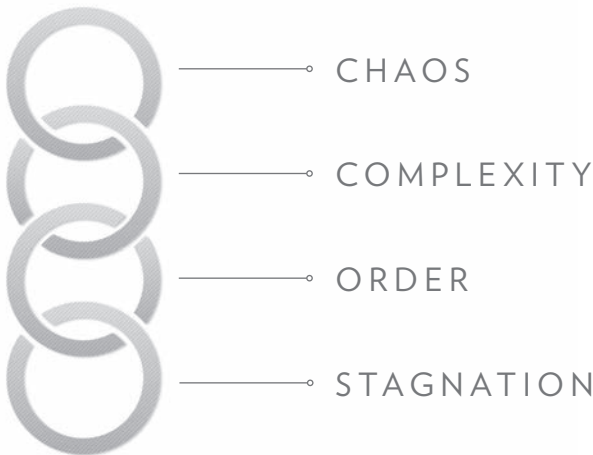


Since this discovery, we have spent years on additional research, challenging the concept, refining it, and finding understandable ways to explain

it. And after communicating the Growth Rings to more than a thousand presidents, CEOs, and various executives; another eighteen hundred people at the University of Nevada TEDx event; and an astonishing two million (and growing) who have since viewed the “Why Comfort Will Ruin Your Life”¹ TEDx Talk online, we know the Growth Rings are resonating with business leaders and have immense performance applications to all businesses throughout the world. Even more, since the TEDx Talk introduced the Growth Rings, our company has been inundated with emails, tweets, Facebook posts, phone calls, and LinkedIn messages from people around the world with professional and personal stories of how the Growth Rings have already affected them as well as those on their teams.

For us, understanding the Growth Rings has changed how we parent, coach, view adversity, and think about human behavior. The Growth Rings have altered how we view the world and thrive within differing environments (or opt out of them). The Growth Rings have played a powerful role in our personal peace and emotional development.

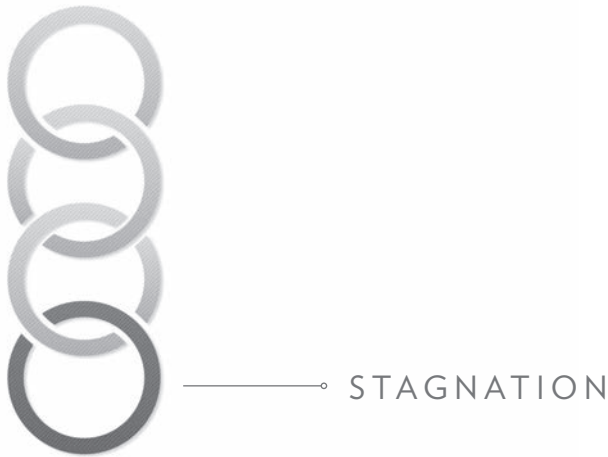
The Growth Rings illustrate differing environments that exist in our world and how they either promote or hinder growth. Each ring encompasses one of four primary environments: Stagnation, Order, Complexity, and Chaos.



1 Bill Eckstrom, “TEDx Talk: Why Comfort Will Ruin Your Life,” February 7, 2017, TEDxUniversityofNevada Talk, <https://www.ecsellinstitute.com/sales-coaching-blog/tedx-talk-why-comfort-will-ruin-your-life-transcript>.

These primary environments could represent one's dorm room, home, place of work, government, sports team, nature, and especially one's body and mind. The growth state of every living thing can be represented within a Growth Ring. And, while we'll explain all the environments that compose the Growth Rings in detail, we will take a more expansive look into Order and Complexity. Order and Complexity are the environments that are most represented in high-growth teams and therefore more applicable to coaching and growth.

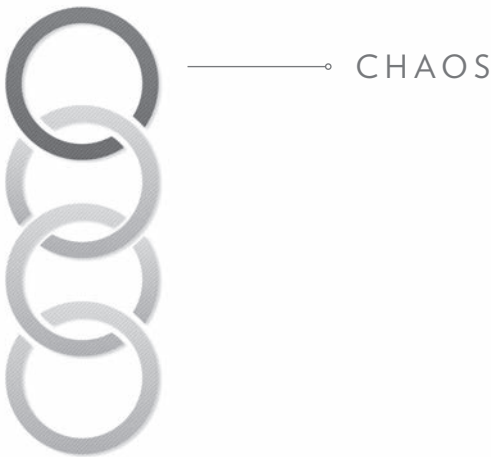
Stagnation



The first Growth Ring represents a low-performing, low, or negative growth environment called *Stagnation*. Stagnation is a situation in which people may need to follow too many steps, get someone else's permission, or deal with minutia that stifle creativity, independent thought, or action. Stagnation isn't a popular or common environment, but it exists in certain businesses, homes, and natural places. Stagnated environments don't just freeze growth; they regress it. Stagnation causes environments within nature to wither and die (think about old, rotting forests and stagnant water); it causes our bodies to lose muscle and our minds to lose imagination.

By the time a business reaches Stagnation, drastic measures need to be taken to reverse the decline. These may include, but are not limited to, changes in leadership personnel, rapid evolutions in products and services and how they are marketed, adjustments in markets, the hiring of outside consultants, and so on. Surprisingly, we have worked with very few businesses in this environmental ring, perhaps for the very same reasons they are in Stagnation—they are not willing to change. Although more examples abound, the most common example of a stagnated environment is a local or federal government bureaucracy. In these cultures, performance improvement, creativity, effective collaboration, and working out of the norm are not highly valued. They are all components of high-growth teams.

Chaos

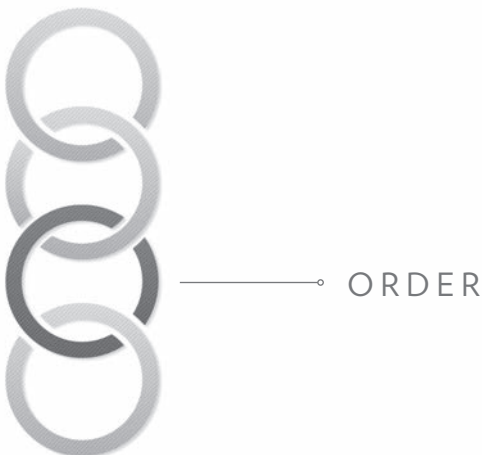


The antithesis of Stagnation is an environment called *Chaos*. Also low-growth and low-performance, Chaos can be caused by internal or external events or conditions. Chaos may be a temporary state that occurs (for example, in the early stages of a new business). We also see Chaos ensue as the result of natural disasters and horrific events like 9/11 and, though less tragic, business mergers and acquisitions.

We have often visited with leaders and employees from newly acquired companies that have no idea to whom they report, how their duties are affected, or if their employment will be retained. Behaviors exhibited in chaotic environments typify those when fear is present; fear tends to trigger in our brains one of the three *F*s: freeze, fight, or flight.

A graphic example occurred recently with an acquired company in the Midwest. We received several calls from longtime employees of the acquired company who were devastated over the outcome of the acquisition. They didn't believe that strategic direction commitments by the acquiring company were met; organizational structure deadlines were missed; and terminations, which are endemic to most acquisitions, were randomly occurring. When asked what it felt like to work there, an employee said, "We are numb, frozen, and afraid to do anything." Another employee shared how colleagues were receiving random phone calls informing them of their termination. He likened it to being a victim of a sniper attack: "We don't know when the shots are coming or who will be picked off next." It is easy to see how growth is limited in this type of environment. Chaos is having zero predictability or control over inputs and outcomes. And although more common than Stagnation, it is not an environment to desire, frequent, or reside in.

Order



Next to Stagnation is *Order*. Order is where people tend to want to exist because it is the most comfortable environment, but it is also the most dangerous. Order is achieved when the same repeated processes lead to a predictable result. However, predictability can lead to comfort and comfort is what can make Order catastrophic.

Doing the same thing with predictable outcomes is attractive in many settings. For example, the process followed by Southwest Airline pilots with an outcome of delivering us to our destination safely creates healthy Order. (However, if new, safer ways to fly a plane were discovered and not adopted, Southwest's Order could quickly turn into Stagnation.) As frequent business travelers, we have developed a detailed process that makes the ordered outcome of our 150-plus trips a year through airports very predictable and tolerable. For every trip, we keep our passport and wallet in the same briefcase sleeve; put our tablet and laptop in their own compartment; place our money clip, purse, glasses, and belt in the X-ray bin; and so on—everything is repeated in the same manner when we navigate airports and airplanes.

Why the repetition? In these examples, the same, consistent inputs lead to predictable, desirable, and repeatable outcomes—Order. Keep in mind the objectives of putting these specific processes in place have nothing to do with growth or advancement. For Southwest, the desired outcome is passenger safety, and that needs to be highly repeatable. So, if the passenger-safety goal is met, the same process is followed. For us, our disciplined travel process ensures that passport, phone, glasses, purse, tablet, and other critical items arrive at our destination with us—the desired outcome—as opposed to leaving them on airplanes or at security checkpoints.

Some years ago, my (Bill's) wife informed me of a new opportunity to make my trips through airport security more efficient. It was called TSA PreCheck. To obtain this qualification would require me to take a trip to the local TSA office (sixty miles away), fill out paperwork, go

continued

through an approval process, and pay a small fee. My response to her suggestion? No! I explained to her how my current process was effective, and I didn't see a need to change it. What I was saying without using the words was that I was entrenched in my Order and comfortable with the outcome.

Fast forward to a time shortly thereafter when I was late for a flight taking me to a meeting. The security line was long, which created immense stress for me. I wondered if I would miss my plane and the important meeting that awaited. While moving at the typical snail's pace, I watched a smaller line moving more quickly through security. I asked a TSA employee why the other line was so much shorter and moving more quickly, and she responded, "Oh, that line? That is for our TSA PreCheck passengers."

What *was* my best Order now proved to be an inefficient way to navigate airport security. The existing comfort that resulted from predictable outcomes shrouded my opportunity for an improved result. It took an emotional event (the fear of missing my meeting) to bring attention to my antiquated Order, which motivated me to jump through the TSA PreCheck approval hoops, which I did the following week.

Predictable, ordered environments are so desirable, they affect almost everyone's behaviors and daily business practices. Revenue predictability influences share price in publicly traded companies as well as goal setting and budgeting processes. To create more Order throughout our professional careers, we've been required to, and have required others to, create plans—sales plans, professional-development plans, territory plans, and operational plans. The publisher of this book required us to develop an outline, a plan for how the book would be laid out and written. And this is all done with the goal of having repeatable, desirable outcomes. And when predictability is achieved, comfort follows.

However, Order also presents its fair share of challenges. Order, by

nature, doesn't promote evolution, and for quite some time science has shown that absence of evolution leads to extinction. Examples of evolution and lack thereof are abundant in the history of our planet. Pesticides that are used to kill insects and plants have been found to be ineffective after several generations (which is a brief period in the insect and plant world). The insects and plants evolve and develop immunities to the poison so they can continue to exist and perpetuate. Another example is the peppered moth, which at one time had a light coloring, but darkened in response to pollution from the industrial revolution. This mutation came about because the light-colored moths were seen and eaten by birds more readily, so with natural selection the dark-colored moths survived to reproduce.

If conditions change faster than a species can evolve, then extinction is the likely result. This applies not only to biology but also to products, markets, skills, and businesses. In your businesses, technology has exacerbated the speed at which Order morphs to Stagnation, and we see nothing that indicates this will slow down. Order that does not evolve is a threat to everything: land and water, our bodies, our governments, and certainly the department or team that you coach. Take the story of Blockbuster Video, a popular and successful business in its time. It's a worldwide example of how sticking to the comfort of Order can ruin your business. Here is an overview of the timeline of events leading up to Blockbuster's demise:

1985: David Cook opens first Blockbuster in Dallas, Texas

1987: Blockbuster sold to investors for \$18.5 million

1992: 800 stores worldwide

1994: Viacom purchases Blockbuster for \$8.4 billion

1997: Reed Hastings is charged \$40 late fee for tardy return
of a movie, which motivates him to create Netflix

1999: Viacom takes Blockbuster public

- 2000: Blockbuster brings in almost \$800 million of revenue
... in late fees
- 2000: Blockbuster turns down offer to buy Netflix for \$50 million
- 2002: Netflix goes public
- 2004: Blockbuster has 9,094 locations, 84,300 employees,
and \$5.9 billion in revenue
- 2007: Blockbuster CEO steps down
- 2010: Blockbuster declares bankruptcy

For years, Blockbuster's processes provided them desired, ordered outcomes, but there were signs of technology shifts. Digital streaming, though relatively new in the early 2000s, seems like an obvious threat in hindsight. At a minimum, it should have been seen as a reason to shift the way Blockbuster distributed its movies. But Blockbuster did not do this. It stayed with a process model built on having physical outlets, charging late fees, and making people leave their homes to rent a movie. This indicates that the company made conscious decisions to stay the course, to accept their ordered environment. This does not mean, however, that Blockbuster didn't attempt other models and directions, but they were either executed poorly or did not have enough resources committed to make them successful. And while Blockbuster was floundering, Netflix, though founded twelve years after Blockbuster, was thriving. It is now an \$11 billion company. Blockbuster is one of many examples in a long line of businesses that were gobbled up by Order.

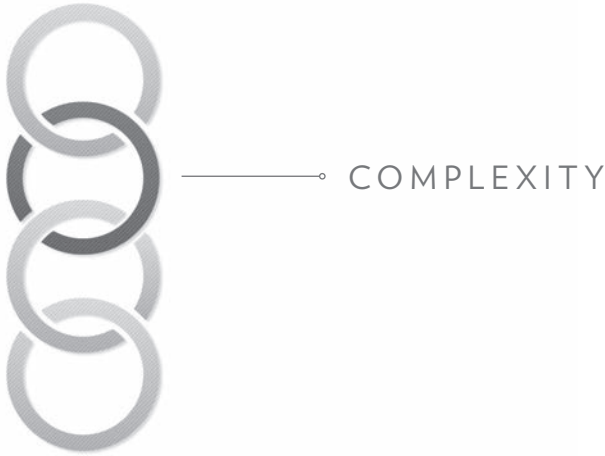
Every day, we visit with executive leaders who have no idea they are cemented in Order or that the key to breaking their minimal growth cycle and getting beyond their limiting Order lies in the activities and behaviors of their frontline managers, not their salespeople. Many of these leaders are from large Fortune 500 companies that are stuck in mid- to upper-single-digit sales growth, or they have no ability to grow organic revenue. They

sell, train to sell, roll out new products, manage pipelines, and track every activity a salesperson does or doesn't do (an executive leader told us they put GPSs in the cars of their salespeople, so they even know when they stop at a Starbucks) consistently, year after year. They have unknowingly created an ordered environment that develops and executes plans for single-digit growth and nothing more.

One of the most relatable and understandable examples of Order is physiological. Most everyone who exercises understands what the word *plateau* means, especially weight lifters and runners. A runner who measures progress by lowering their time in a 5K race can run the same course, the same days, over and over again, and improve their time. A weight lifter who measures progress by the maximum amount they can bench-press can bench-press four sets a day, three days a week, and improve their maximum lift. This proves that a person can do something repeatedly and realize gain, but only for a period of time. When working with executives in a workshop setting, I walk them through the exercise example and then ask, "If you never change your exercise process or input, what happens?" Their response is always the same: "You plateau." I then ask, "So, what do you need to do to avoid plateauing and always be growing?" The answer is always the same: "Change your routine!"

The negative consequences of Stagnation and Chaos are obvious, but Order, while needed and present in high-growth teams, can be a dangerous ally if not carefully monitored. Coaches need to pay close attention to their own and their team members' behaviors to make sure the outcomes of any ordered work are producing desired results, while simultaneously looking for new and better processes that lead to improved outcomes. Later in the book we will show how Order is effectively used by coaches to enhance or produce a high-growth team. And don't forget that it is the role of the coach to make sure their team doesn't miss the opportunity to sign up for TSA PreCheck.

Complexity



To break the Order, and hence the minimum growth cycle, you need to change what you input. When inputs are altered, you eliminate Order and enter the *Complexity* environment. Understanding this environment, its application, and how it is established or destroyed is critical because *Complexity is the only environment that creates exponential growth or consistently sustains growth*. Everyone, regardless of their life stage or place in their professional journey, needs to comprehend this concept and strive to attain this Growth Ring. And to attain Complexity, you must first understand that it is driven by changed inputs, unknown outcomes, and discomfort.

CHANGED INPUTS

You, your company, or other external factors can cause these changes. In nature, a forest fire would be categorized as a changed input. Physically, a new workout routine is a changed input. Examples in the business world

include development of a new product or marketing scheme, a new competitor showing up in your market, local or global economic shifts, application of a coaching methodology, or simply asking a person to do a new task. These are all changed inputs that will lead to altered outcomes.

When I (Bill) worked for Mitch in my first management role, our company had agreed to accept and distribute a new product we'll refer to as *Tech A*, which used a technology that had not been used in mass application. This is an example of a changed input in itself, but Mitch also wanted to change our new product rollout plan by requiring each salesperson to sell ten units of the new product to achieve a bonus. So not only did we have a new product to sell but the salesperson's compensation was also altered in a way that if this new product's minimum sales were not met, the salesperson's income could be drastically reduced. Anytime multiple inputs are changed, outcomes become even less predictable, which then ensures greater downstream disruption.

UNKNOWN OUTCOMES

The impact of entering a complex environment can be immediate, or it can trickle down into the future and create change in ways that are harder to predict. In EcSell's TEDx Talk, "Why Comfort Will Ruin Your Life," we used the story of Claudette Colvin and her unwillingness to give up her seat on a racially segregated bus as a way to illustrate unknown outcomes. She changed an input (not moving from her seat) and perhaps understood she could be in trouble in the short term, but she likely had not thought of the trickle-down effect of her actions—the unknown outcome. Not only did she set the stage for Rosa Parks to do the same, but she couldn't have predicted that she would end up testifying in the famous *Browder v. Gayle* lawsuit before the US Supreme Court. On December 17, 1956, they upheld the United States District Court ruling that the state and local laws requiring bus segregation in Alabama were unconstitutional.

It is important to note that not all Complexity creates desired

outcomes. In an article titled “Embracing Complexity” in the September 2011 edition of *Harvard Business Review*, author Tim Sullivan cites an example of park rangers in Yellowstone National Park who brought in the US Cavalry to hand-feed elk in the late 1800s to reduce elk die-off during winter months.² Elk were originally a plains animal, but due to westward expansion and modified land-use practices, they were forced into yearlong residence in the mountainous region. However, they had not adapted to the harsh mountain winters, and the population, having already been decimated from an estimated ten million to fifty thousand, was of huge concern. The changed input, hand feeding, was successful and the elk population swelled, but this desired outcome came with an unknown result. Years later the Complexity caused a trickle-down effect of fewer trout. Researchers discovered that elk would feed on aspen trees, which were also used by beavers to create dams. These beaver dams captured the spring runoff, which allowed trout to spawn. The more elk, the fewer aspen trees, the fewer beaver dams, and ultimately the fewer trout. Not a desired outcome, and if you are wondering where the *growth* is, it came in the knowledge scientists gained about the interconnectedness of the elk and their ecosystem.

When most people deliberately trigger Complexity by changing an input, they have a desired outcome in mind. For example, when a new product is introduced to a sales team (creating a changed input), it likely has been developed to meet a specific market need and increase revenue or profitability for a company (the desired outcome).

In our experience with Mitch, the new Tech A product, along with sales minimums and compensation changes, not only caused a great deal of consternation for the entire sales department but also had other, unknown outcomes. What Mitch didn’t plan on was how the technology in Tech A would be used in future products for not just our company but also for

² Tim Sullivan, “Embracing Complexity,” *Harvard Business Review*, September 2011, <https://hbr.org/2011/09/embracing-complexity>.

products distributed by our competitors. Fortunately, because of the challenges we had experienced with Tech A and the resulting intimate knowledge of the technology, our team was more equipped to sell, service, and help our clients maximize all the newest technologies. Thanks to Mitch's willingness to create and stick with the discomfort he caused, we became the dominant player in the distribution of all the new products.

DISCOMFORT

While not all Complexity creates discomfort, all discomfort is caused by Complexity. For example, entering a new market with an existing product may cause extreme discomfort for some salespeople who may immediately think, *Who are our new call points? What will the objections to our product be? Does this market have the same budgets? Do we prospect differently?* And yet other salespeople will respond with little to no discomfort despite not having answers to the same questions. But the same salespeople who are not bothered by the addition of a market may totally lose it if the product being sold is modified. Complexity and the discomfort it creates are unique to us all (which is why it is critical for high-growth coaches to know how Complexity affects everyone on their team).

From physical pain like the sort that comes from a knee replacement to the psychological pain of quitting a bad habit, discomfort is caused by either fear of the unknown or by doing something differently. And because these things create discomfort, they are usually avoided. To think of this in a coaching context, our research shows that 52 percent of managers refuse to accept the discomfort of Complexity (which would require them to coach differently), in spite of the profound evidence that doing so will lead to more sales. Change is hard.

Discomfort provides a wonderful opportunity because of your individual ability to recognize when you feel it. Acknowledging discomfort allows you to analyze its cause, leading you to make a conscious decision to either remain in discomfort, causing Complexity, or go back to Order.

Knowing that exponential and sustained growth only occurs when you are in Complexity forces you to decide to select growth or no growth.

These comfort-versus-discomfort decisions can be conscious or unconscious, and they are not uncommon. Consider your personal health and

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fitness. Everyone acknowledges that the way they eat and exercise has an effect on the quality and longevity of their lives. When we ask our audiences about lifestyle choices, nine out of ten people indicate they don't eat or exercise properly; probably very few will make the needed changes to live a longer and healthier life. Going to the gym can create psychological discomfort for many reasons: you may feel self-conscious about your body, you may be concerned about how others view your workout routine, or you may feel guilty about not being home with

your kids. It also creates physical discomfort when you lift weights or train aerobically—effective weight lifting means that muscle fibers are torn and then become stronger as they heal. Complexity, leading to growth, is at work in your body when you work out.

With Tech A, Mitch created discomfort right from the start. By changing the new product rollout plan along with salesperson compensation, he made us concerned about many things. We asked ourselves, *Will the new technology work as advertised? Will we have more returns? Will it shake our clients' trust in us? Will the salespeople make less money? Will anybody quit?*

It is safe to say that without the change in the compensation plan, fewer units of the new product would have been sold. What we don't know, however, is whether we would have sold as much of our other products

(the salespeople had a portfolio of about ten products to sell) without the addition of the new product. Although there is an obvious correlation, we believe the answer is no. Part of the mystique of Complexity is that there are related outcomes that are hard to track; though these changes happened some years ago, there are still positive and negative trickle-down effects occurring today—and these will continue for many years.

What was once complex can eventually become Order and could even evolve to Stagnation when growth ceases. For instance, our colleague described the first swimming lesson for his son, Alexander, in which the instructor dropped a weighted ring to the bottom of the pool and had the kids go underwater to retrieve the toy. She began by dropping it in very shallow water, then progressively got deeper with each retrieval. At one point she let the ring sink to a depth where Alexander felt uncomfortable, and he turned to her and said, “I can’t get that.” Alexander had hit the limit of his Complexity. Yet after a few more lessons, not only did he paddle to the bottom to grab the ring, but also, there was not a depth in the pool he was afraid to dive into. What was once complex had become Order, and new ways to challenge Alexander were needed for his growth as a swimmer to continue.

Bill’s Personal Growth: Discomfort and Discovery

My youngest daughter spent her senior year of high school at Gomez Tennis Academy, in Naples, Florida (we shared the story of Gomez in the preface). Leaving her home in Lincoln, Nebraska, moving to Naples, and living with a bunch of kids from around the world was a very uncomfortable decision for not just her but also my wife and me. *Our* Order had been for her to finish her schooling up the street where all our other kids graduated. We envisioned celebrating all the usual senior events with her—homecoming, prom, and academic banquets—and we wanted to watch her compete in her final year of high school

continued

tennis. We could have held her back and not let her move to Florida, but that would only have appeased our discomfort, not to mention that keeping her close also would have kept her in Order limiting her growth in a sport where she so badly wanted to achieve.

For my daughter, moving to Florida and playing tennis eight hours a day was a shock. There was discomfort in her body, but the pain and soreness eventually became Order and ceased. The coaches were very cognizant of pushing players to their limits (into Complexity) and then backing off, bringing Order to the Complexity for days and weeks. When a player began to plateau and their growth slowed, the training was amped up again, creating new discomfort in their bodies and minds. This was repeated at a different pace for each student, but discomfort was created on a regular basis. Complexity is the only way for an athlete to create and sustain growth.

My daughter is now a college junior and has not lived at home since her junior year in high school. Sadly, what was once Complex, having her gone, has become Order for her mom and me.

COACHES MUST EMBRACE AND FACILITATE COMPLEXITY

Complexity's impact, which is to say discomfort's impact, on the performance of individuals and teams is profound. The coach must control this high-growth environment, instigating and perpetuating it when appropriate. Coaches who know their job is to ultimately create and sustain growth will hopefully view discomfort as something to embrace and not avoid. The graph below illustrates how a coach who creates Complexity performs at higher levels. Specifically, in a sales department, coaches who create Complexity have teams that sell more.

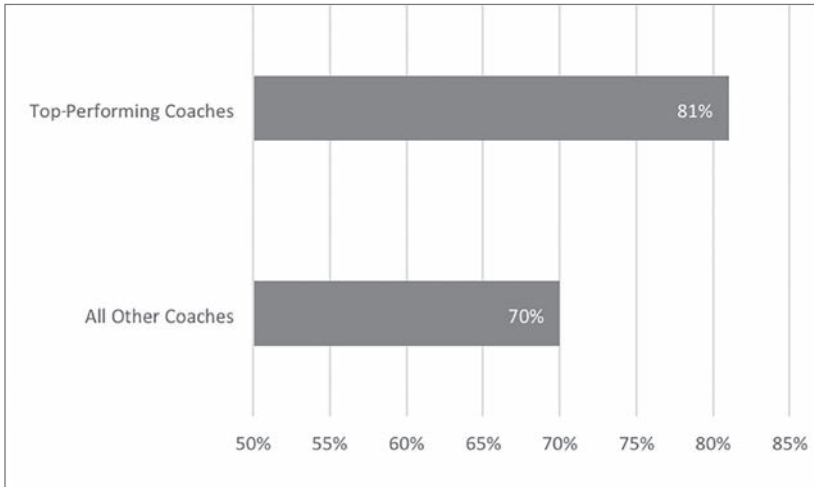


Figure 1. The Mean Complexity Theme score for top-performing coaches (top 20 percent) compared to their coaching peers.

Another common observation in our work is that because discomfort is most often the result of Complexity, very few people want to create or stick with a complex environment. Given what we now know, a great growth lesson has been comprehending the grit it took for Mitch to stick with his tough decisions. He was a master at creating new, challenging disciplines when growth slowed or ceased. There was always an influx of new products, technologies, sales goals, compensation programs, training, certifications, and so on. A person could argue that he caused too much Complexity, which would have been easy to say in the moment. Looking back now, it is clear that he created growth—uncomfortable growth.

It takes a talented frontline or executive leader to know when and how to personalize Complexity for an individual and decide when it is appropriate for a team. More than anything else, a coach must be very strong-willed to have the ability to persevere through discomfort and shoulder all the baggage that comes with the disruption Complexity causes. When those on your team are complaining and when upper management wants to know why there is consternation in your department, even when you question

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yourself, do you have the courage to keep going?

According to our research, most managers do not. They find excuses to look for another approach, to return to old ways, to make a popular decision as opposed to doing what is best for the team. For example, we see that coaches in sales who role-play challenging selling scenarios with their salespeople are effective in helping their team members grow. But after a while, many coaches discontinue this exercise, and when they are asked why, they

often respond, “My salespeople don’t like it.” Of course they don’t like it; it makes them uncomfortable!

In our work with organizations, we have seen that those that have executive leaders who are committed to evolution and who do not acquiesce in challenging periods caused by Complexity show more growth. We are not saying decisions should never be changed or reversed, especially as new information is uncovered (this is part of evolution as well), but discomfort can cause growth in different ways, many of which will be realized years later.

By now, you are likely wondering if there is a right time to trigger Complexity and how to do it in a healthy manner. Complexity created at the wrong time, the wrong way, and with the wrong people can have a negative impact on discretionary effort, demotivating people to perform. In the coming chapters, we will take a deep dive into a step-by-step coaching process, explore high-growth coaching behavioral themes, and learn how to apply them all in a way that will maximize the performance of your teams. Knowing and implementing this coaching process will provide you

the ability to move effectively through the Growth Rings, with an obvious focus on moving into the sweet spot—balancing Order and Complexity.

A final note on Complexity: a person cannot live their entire life in this environment. All of us need Order, and it is healthy to have a balance, with ongoing doses of Complexity and Order. We also wish we could offer a way to know when someone has reached their Complexity threshold or is ready to accept more of it, but for now we accept and are excited about the fact that our coaching discovery journey will likely never end. Although we can provide many fact-based approaches to help you become a great coach, we believe there is still some art to great coaching.

The best news for everyone reading this book is that our research shows that *any* coach who is willing to implement our methods to improve the quantity and quality of their coaching will have teams who grow and perform at higher levels.

#WhatTeamMembersSay

Question: What does your manager do best as a sales coach?

Answer: He truly cares about me as a person. What I have going on in my life and how that fits into work. He knows what I'm working toward in life and encourages me every step of the way.

Through the Eyes of the Team survey respondent