

Coaching as “Learning In Relationship”

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Coaching as "Learning in Relationship"

Purpose: demonstrate how the "learn in relationship" model and accompanying self-awareness competencies assist the "coach in training," providing an integrated approach regarding the coaching/learning relationship.

Objectives: Participants will...

- develop an initial understanding of the key components of the "learn in relationship" model;
- experience describing one's own story and inviting another person to describe their here-and-now "story";
- be able to pinpoint how the learn in relationship concepts "fit" into the coaching process; and
- engage in mutual inquiry, making direct applications to the coaching experience.

Paper Outline:

- I. The Critical Coaching Competencies Influencing Effective Relationships
- II. Self Awareness: Operating from the Inside-out
- III. Choosing to Learn: Self as Learner
- IV. The Inside-Out Dance for Learning in Relationship
- V Integrating the "Learning in Relationship" Model with Coaching Intentions

Appendix:

Questionnaire
Getting More Information
Bibliography

Preface

This paper attempts to integrate specific content that I have been working with from Learning In Action Technologies (LIAT) where I am presently a certified consultant. The content, I believe, is very helpful and supportive to the coaching agenda that we, as coaches in training, are embracing and practicing "real-time." The core technology from LIAT comes from work that Ron Short, founder, has been leading for over twenty years in his teaching and consulting practice with individuals, teams, and organizations. It is basically related to how we bring our real selves to be in relationship with others, whether that is one-on-one, in groups, or in total systems or organizations. It is profoundly simple and yet elegantly complex. It begins with a deep understanding of one's self and our choices in creating our own world and living in that world.

Its essence is about how to learn from others who have differing perspectives and be in a mutual inquiry to make genuine contributions to each other and the larger world.

Because I believe this work to be so completely relevant to the coaching experience and competencies, I have chosen to try to provide a glimpse into how "learning in relationship" builds a foundational platform for effectiveness in coaching. What you will read in this paper and experience in the presentation will give you a very brief glimpse of a two-day seminar offered by LIAT consultants, including myself. What is unique in this paper and presentation is its application to the "coach in training."

The presentation will focus on practicing skills for inside-out communications and applying the skill set to respond as a coach to a real-life situation.

The Critical Coachin⁹ Competencies Influencing Effective Relationships

Regardless of one's coaching specialization, whether one is coaching for being or coaching for performance, or whether one is coaching individuals or teams or organizations, certain core skills and competencies are foundational for ensuring the coaching relationship with client(s) result in effective outcomes. Probably the most fundamental of these competencies has to do with self-awareness, personal mastery, interpersonal relationships, emotional intelligence and communication skills.

Frederic Hudson, in *The Handbook of Coaching*, discusses how coaches need to model mastery, working "in small but deep ways to anchor people and human systems in a public philosophy of trust, vision, strategic thinking, conflict management and collaboration." They need to "inspire those they coach with a sense of self-reliance and deep-seated determination." He also says coaches must be "trusted by clients as highly competent and reliable learning resources." They must be "emotionally competent and able to... listen intently, express feelings naturally and appropriately, manage conflicts fairly and directly, provide accurate feedback, reflect on sense of self, observe and understand the conduct of self and others, know how to be in and sustain relationships, providing an environment of caring for the coaching work." These are just a few very potent examples of his broader set of competencies. Others in the coaching field have spoken about some of the same fundamentals.

Richard Egan speaks about practicing empathy, listening for key feelings and emotions, listening for the client's story and others within that story, using client-centered questions to best understand the client and how they operate. Robert Hargrove says "masterful coaches" have the "ability to inspire, demonstrate honesty and integrity and a passion to help others learn, grow and perform." To do this, a coach listens, probes for deeper meanings and provides meaningful feedback, engages with the client in learning new skills and discovering his/her capabilities. James Flaherty views the coaching relationship as a series of "conversations." "The goal of these conversations is to get the client into self-observation so s/he can view the situation from new perspectives and take responsibility for future action." Thomas Crane, in *The Heart of Coaching*, views transformational coaching as "relationship focused, requiring dialogue and heart," needing "humility" and balance between head and heart and fundamentally rests on the principle of self-responsibility.

All the experts in the coaching field discuss the importance of building the coach/client relationship, ensuring trust and confidence are key building blocks. Furthermore, they suggest that sharing stories serves as a foundation for learning and modeling self-awareness, choosing appropriate actions and being in mutual inquiry.

Becoming effective as a coach then, is highly dependent upon building one's self-awareness, observing one self in relationship and being highly aware of one's own personal assumptions, judgments and how those impact our personal choices and actions.

It seems absolutely critical then, for coaches in training, to receive intense training experience and practice in developing self-awareness, skill building for self-observation and know-how for positively influencing our relationships. The importance of our own mastery with congruence of feelings, thoughts and actions can significantly impact the success of the coaching outcomes.

In order to be in the "dance" of mutual inquiry with a client, it begins with knowing how to inquire about oneself. Effective communications are built on talking straight, building trust and taking risks. One cannot achieve an effective learning relationship without a clear understanding of personal impact and approach.

Self Awareness: Operating from the Inside-Out

A first and most important principle in self-awareness is to understand that "I create my own world through my own stories" of how life is for me and how I respond to others in various situations. Our own stories are real to us and they may be accurate; but then again, they may not be. Others' stories are real to them; likewise, they may be accurate and then again, they may not. Because we cannot know what's in another's head unless we are told, we are confronted with a dilemma that happens simply because we are human. *We do not know what we do not know--AND we do not know that we do not know.* The only way out of this is "to learn from each other in the moment." We must both describe our stories to each other and inquire about their accuracy. This means that learning happens when we compare our stories and then edit or rewrite them based upon whatever new information we glean.

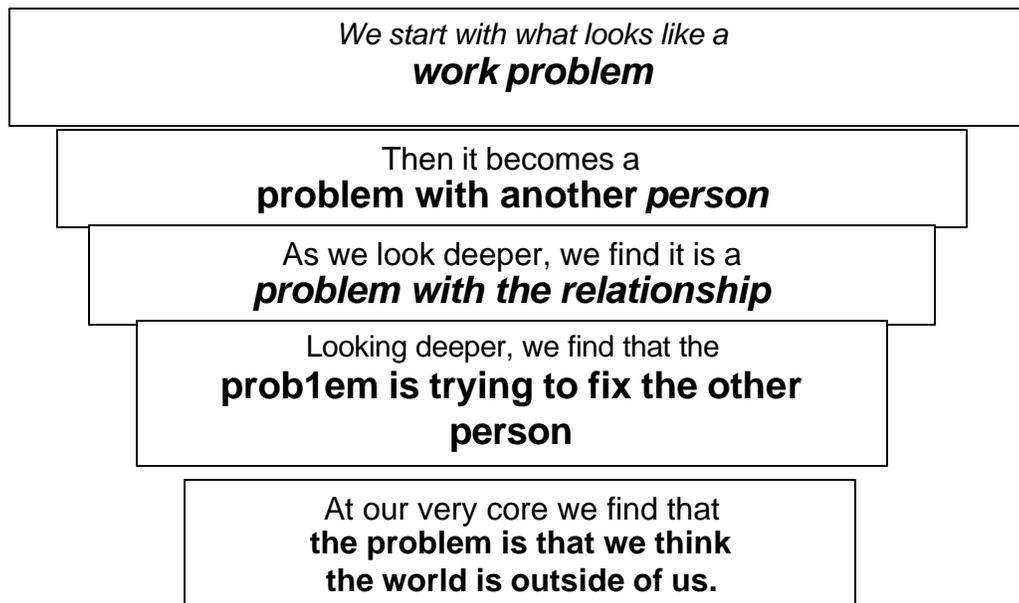
At the simplest level learning from others means that you do four things:

- 1. acknowledge that what is in your head is a story that you are makin up*
- 2. share it*
- 3. inquire about the other person's story and*
- 4. revise your story based upon new information*

This demands that we learn to be real, take risks to share and trust ourselves to be who we are. Normally, it feels safer to let others share their story first. However, if everyone waits for others, we all continue to develop our own stories about what is, never learning the real stories.

"We need to risk before we can trust--not the other way around. When we do not take risks and share our stories, we take a much greater risk--that fear and mistrust will rule." When we refuse to communicate directly or talk only with those who think like we do, we end up with distortions and half truths. As a result, we reinforce mistrust--all of our own making.

Ron Short, in describing the way out of our personal dilemmas, suggests that we begin with "thinking lessons." He suggests the critical path to learning relationships begins with being able to think differently. You might begin by thinking about one relationship that you have that you would like to improve or examine. Relationships are at the heart and soul of being able to get any results--be it an organization or a marriage or a coach/client arrangement. Any effort to change the outcomes for this relationship must begin with you and your specific interactions with this person. You are in the center of your relationships. However, we often operate with reflex action, assuming the world is outside, distinct and separate from us, when it's not. This is the natural human reflex.



In order to learn, we need a perspective that is just the opposite of the natural human reflex. Instead of focusing on what we think is "outside," we need to turn around and focus on what we feel, think and want--"from the inside." Here is an example of questioning from the inside rather than the outside:

OUTSIDE

INSIDE

What is he trying to do?

I'm wondering what is going to happen -- why am I so curious?

She is so bossy --pushing people around all the time.

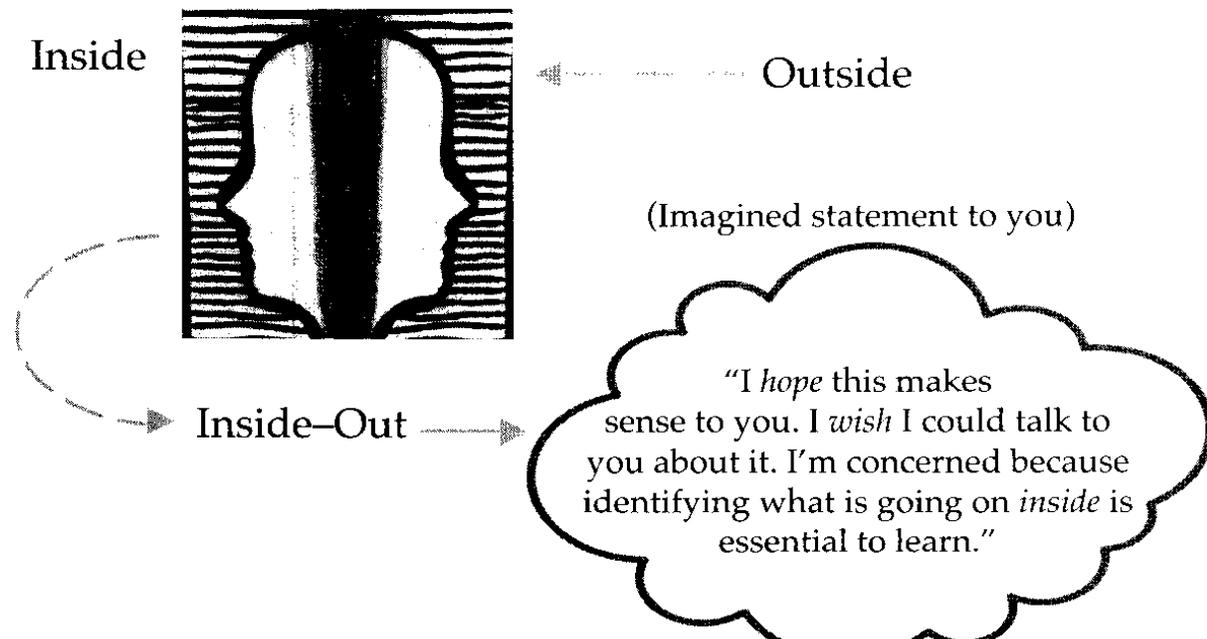
"I'm jealous. Do I want to run this place?"

He makes his life so difficult.

"I'm frustrated with him. Where does my judgment come from?"



When I face only outside, I mistakenly ignore what is "inside." I keep myself from being conscious of whatever is happening inside me. When I consciously face inside, with undefended honesty, I end up with a very different experience. In order to meet the world from the "inside-out" I need to consciously turn "inside," identifying what is there and making a choice of whether to bring it back "outside" to the other.



To operate from the "inside-out" means to observe and describe the motives, intentions, feelings, judgments and attributions that drive your responses to the other. To make this shift, it is difficult because our outside orientation is so strong--it can trick us over and over. We think we're being honest with ourselves and others, only to discover we are not.

Choosing to Learn: Self as Learner

"Learning from the inside-out places you on a path that will inevitably lead to an expanded reality." The more we practice this inside-out learning, the more we are transformed from spectator or victim into a new awareness of being creator and participant with. Respecting and claiming one's own perspective while simultaneously being open to others is the "key to learning." This takes courage to be yourself. In order to be open to influence from others' perspectives, we must risk the discovery that the only reality we have may be inaccurate.

Furthermore, the outside does not exist; everyone in our lives actually lives inside of us -- each fits into our own active stories that we have created about them, our relationship and myself. This critical awareness "that learning from others has little to do with them and a whole bunch to do with me" is critically important for my learning from others.

Think again about this person you are in relationship with; write down a judgment that you have about that person. Ask where that judgment comes from--you or the other? What do you believe that person's judgment is of you? Now, do you get that you are responsible for creating both those judgments? Isn't it interesting that we often react to what, in our own heads, we assume is going on in another person's head? We each end up living in the other's head instead of our own. So what is the solution? It begins when we separate the stories and own what is real to us by sharing from the inside-out. This means that we create interactions that become "differentiated." They are differentiated because we clearly separate our story from the other's.

Differentiated interactions make clear who is the author of what story. It means that I have the "ability to be an 'I' in the face of 'we' pressures (Friedman, 1985)." It requires:

- an awareness and ownership of our own internal state:
- a willingness to share our internal state with others as information (not as a statement about external reality but rather as a statement about our internal reality);
- the ability to say what's true for ourselves, in spite of the pressure to do otherwise;
- the ability to stay in contact and in relationship with others and to listen, understand and be open to influence from their positions; and
- the courage to be true to our own way of seeing things.

Furthermore, it means being secure enough in ourselves to stand our ground while being open to others, to the possibility of change and to the power of choice. By being able to be true to who we are in the moment, and hear the other's truth, we bring new clarity and new information and thereby, make learning possible.

Once we become practiced and more conscious, we are able to notice the patterns in which we participate. If we choose not to speak when we are upset, this is a pattern. If we participate regularly in gossip, this is a pattern. A key to learning from others is to see ourselves as participants in the creation and maintenance of patterns in our organizations, our families and other situations. Changing these patterns can be simple to understand, but very difficult to do.

Patterns serve purposes, sometimes consciously, but mostly unconsciously. Many patterns are dysfunctional as you can imagine. We all participate in the creation and sustaining them, unless we choose to consciously change our pattern. "Learning patterns" happen when:

- two people talk directly to each other about what is inside them NOW;
- both are descriptive of the here-and-now impact we have on the other;
- we inquire; we make individual choices based on shared information.

The goal is to learn, to increase our horizon of awareness and our range of informed choices. It is to expand and develop the capacity to activate our non-judgmental observer that simply notices what is true, not what should be true. The more we notice what is true about ourselves now, the more we notice ourselves in unique patterns and the more we learn about why, when and how we developed those patterns in the past. With this self-knowledge, we can make different choices, if we choose.

The underlying dynamic in this process of learning from the inside-out is not what happens to us, but what we do internally with what happens to us. We create our own experience. Our most empowering skill is the ability to look inside and gain awareness of the origins of our reactions. We do not have to understand when, how and why we react. We only need to be aware that our "here and now" reaction isn't all created outside of ourselves. If we can acknowledge that our reaction comes from within, not from what the other person is doing, then we can differentiate our interaction and separate the inside from the outside.

(Separate Inside from Outside)

Inside

I Feel

I think

I want



Outside

It

They

You

We

One

"To own that we create the impact that others have on us is, without a doubt, is the most difficult and most important lesson to learn." This does not mean that we won't react internally. However, whatever we choose to do in that moment or the next hour or the next day, is still clear. We have created the impact that outside situations, events and others have on us.

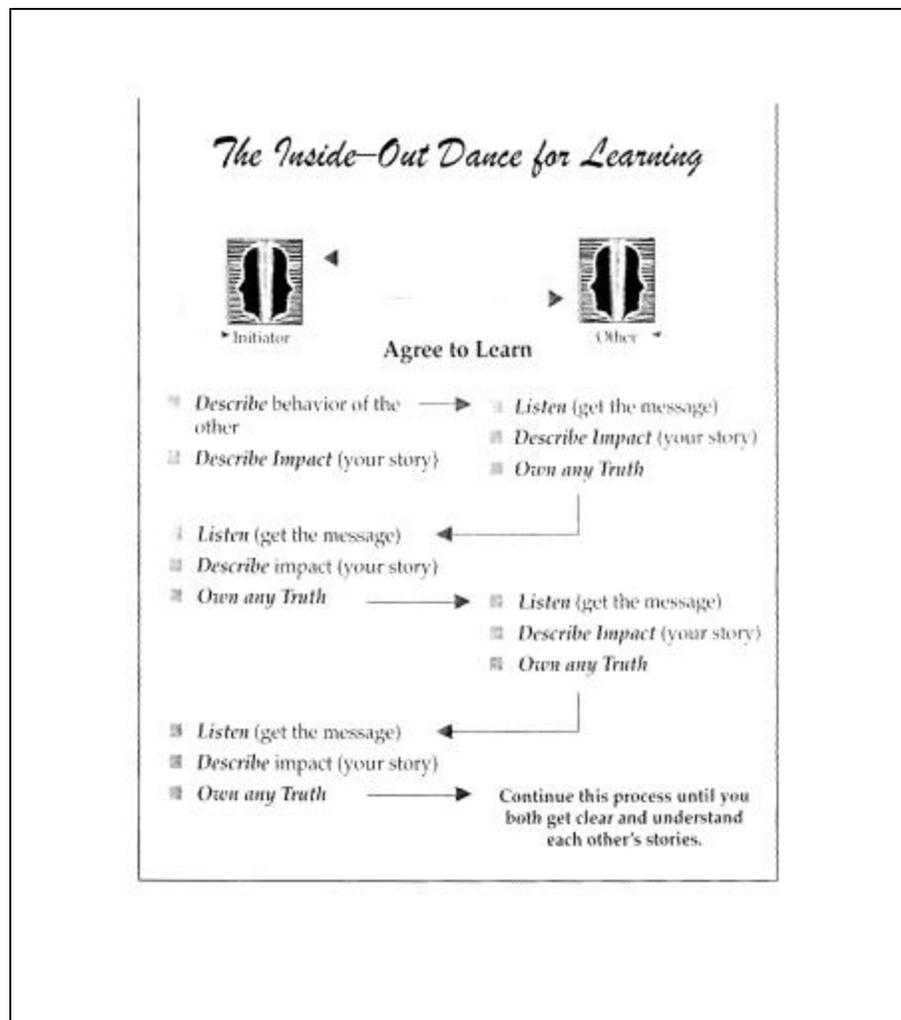
This doesn't mean we should let others off the hook for their behavior, or that others will walk all over us. It merely means that if someone does something to interrupt us or is disruptive, the interpretation and feelings are ours to own and deal with. The more we learn about ourselves, understand our own defenses and recognize how our past has influenced our present, the more we will be capable of learning from within. And the more we are capable of learning from within, the more we will learn from the real people who are in front of us now.

The Inside-Out Dance for Learning in Relationship

The inside-out dance for learning is to learn from and with the other. At the best of our ability, we will:

- share information and make individual choices rather than try to change the other person. Our goal is to change the relationship with information, not each other.
- Be prepared to learn about ourselves.
- Invite descriptive stories from each other.
- Accept each others' stories, not as THE truth, but our separate, individual truths.
- Be true to our individual stories and what is real to each of us, while being open to new information.
- When we feel defensive, we will report that we are.

The dance shown takes place when two people learn. It illustrates the essence of the dialogue that takes place when two parties learn about the other and about themselves. It is never this clean and clear, but rather can be messy and complex. However, when we are confused, we simplify and ask ourselves truthfully, "Am I being descriptive? Am I inviting the other to be descriptive?" See attached dialogue for an example of a dance conversation.)



The goal in the dance is clarity. The reality is "inside-out and "in the moment." The responsibility is shared. From the outside-in, we often listen for and hear what is in our head; what we expect and want to hear; what will support our judgments of the other or support our perspective. Instead, in the dance of learning we listen for what the other person feels, thinks and wants..

- here and now; with me, as I listen,
- toward and about me and the topic being discussed; and
- toward and about the other's self.

HIDE	REACT	"DESCRIBE" BUT HIDE	DESCRIBE
		Goals	
Protect	Change others	Change yourself, Change others	Clarity, learning; Change relationship
		What you do	
Hide, deny Placate Key into others	React, Defend	Appear open, But subtly defend	Describe clearly
		Pronouns you use	
It, one, they	You	You, I	I, you, we
		Where you place responsibility	
Outside on other(s)	All outside on other(s) or All on self	On other(s), Then self	On us, then on self, then other(s)
		How Others May Experience You	
"Nice, but who is this person?"	Defensive Reactive	At times clear, At times confused, At times reactive	Consistently Working Toward clarity

The dance is one of mutual inquiry. Some of the most critical "listen and inquire" skills are;

- paraphrasing
- checking perceptions
- being curious
- being empathic
- helping the speaker get specific and descriptive demonstrating respect
- being genuine, congruent and open
- using immediacy

Our responsibility is to describe and invite. It is all we can do. There are times when we and the other person simply cannot learn from each other. It is important then, to know when to give up, try again later or give up on the relationship.

Integrating the Learning in Relationship Model with Coaching Intentions

Assuming that we as coaches in whatever capacity want to create effective learning relationships with our client(s), there are many critical features of the "learning in relationship" model that can be directly applied in the coaching experience. First and foremost, if we can make the fundamental shift to operating from the inside-out, we can serve as models for the client(s) to influence their thinking and their frame of understanding their world as their creation. Once we or others make this shift, we/they cannot go back. The new self-orientation and thinking helps us to be more skillful and make smarter choices. Profound implications are associated with the ability to be able to turn inside. When we let this sink in, the learning potential goes deeper and deeper and the remaining steps flow more naturally and easily.

Secondly, the learning in relationship insists on building and using skills for describing, ensuring clarity of understanding in dialogue and taking personal ownership. These skills are critical in the coach/client relationship. When a person is able to describe his/her story (what they think, feel and want) and not feel bad for doing so, trust, communication and learning all increase. The key is to "invite" the here-and-now-story from the other, understand and accept it as truth. This is working with empathy.

The coach in mutual inquiry with a client, definitely wants to invite the client's story. The coach, of course, would encourage the client to describe what they feel, think and intend, inquiring with genuine curiosity, always keeping the goal of learning in mind.

The more both coaches and clients develop skills in using language to describe what is going on inside, the more choices they have and the "smarter" they become about their own situation. It is difficult to work with, or become more conscious of that which we cannot name. So therefore, if we cannot name and are not aware, we are then, not aware that we are not aware. This requires that both parties know how to be present, here and now with themselves.

Being able to be "in the moment" with a client and dance the learning dance in mutual inquiry affords the coach with more opportunity to build a trusting and

safe environment for the client to learn and test their own skills in the learning relationship. If I can, as a coach, be open be sharing my stories and inviting my clients "here and now" stories, the more progress we make in creating an appropriate path for the future and understanding the present situation and how it got created. However, as a coach I must be mindful of sharing my stories in a manner that serves the client's needs first.

The skill of being able to model differentiated interactions is also very important for a coach. Namely, this provides boundary awareness and helps provide a deeper relationship of respect and influence from one's own story/experience. This also helps the client to clarify their responsibility and make choices that are based on understanding of their internal reality. By being able to be true to who we are, it brings new clarity and speeds the actual learning process.

The learning in relationship model also demands that we think differently about our communications, about misunderstandings, about learning, failure and success. This type of thinking on the part of a coach brings new confidence and security to the relationship. Learning to accept ourselves and be fully present "in the moment" creates an environment for the client to be accepting of themselves and their situation, thereby moving more quickly to action.

Since a primary goal in the client/coach relationship is to help the client move to a vision orientation, it is important to discover early on the client's sense of purpose. Often times the client is stuck with something s/he sees as a problem and is blocked from seeing their sense of purpose. Therefore, helping a client think about and see the issues inherent in how they interpret the problem might actually facilitate the movement to a future orientation.

Obviously, becoming a master coach entails skill building and experience beyond what has been described in this paper. However, with the knowledge, skills and practice of being in a learning relationship, the coach would have a powerful platform of experience to step into creating a relationship that has significant assurance of effective outcomes, if the client desires to learn in the relationship. My experience tells me this set of skills provides the coach in training with the best toolkit available today.

My personal experience in using the methodology described includes working with individual clients, two clients in conflict, teams, and leadership groups. I have found that in each situation there tends to be a real epiphany in their thinking and practice. It has been my experience to allow for lots of practice

and messiness, never suggesting there is a clear, right way to begin to approach how we describe our stories, but rather the commitment to learn which means listening to the other and to oneself.

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Getting More Information

Books Available through LIAT:

Learning in Relationship, by Ron Short, PhD, 1998.

Discover Your Stories, by Ron Short, PhD, 2000.

Learning in Relationship - Self Awareness Reminder, Ron Short, PhD, 1998.

Seminars:

Learn In Relationship: In the Moment

Emotional Competency--A Lifetime Journey of Learning

Bring the Power of NOW into Your Relationships

Executive Coaching

Family Business Partnerships

Visit website: www.learninginaction.com for details on books, publications, upcoming seminars and workshops.

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SELF QUESTIONNAIRE

Rate yourself on each of the skills below using a rating from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). Have at least two colleagues rate you using the scale on the next page and then give you specific feedback on why they rate you as they do (what have you done, or typically do, that leads them to that rating).

1. ____ Others clearly know what you think, feel and want.
2. ____ Others know they can talk with you and leave feeling that you understood, even though you may not have agreed.
3. ____ Others know your position on things that matter to you. They know where you stand.
4. ____ You talk directly to individuals, not about individuals who are not present.
5. ____ Others believe they can influence you.
6. ____ Others can count on you for information or help when they need it.
7. ____ Others find it easy to give you positive feedback.
8. ____ Others find it easy to give you negative feedback.

Friend and/or Colleague Questionnaire

You are being asked to provide information to your colleague regarding his or her behavior related to "Learning in Relationship" Please be candid, honest and descriptive of what is real for you. Please rate using a 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) and give reasons for the ratings.

1. _____ You clearly know what he or she thinks, feels and wants when it is important to have that information.
2. _____ You can talk with him or her and leave feeling understood, even though not necessarily agreed with.
3. _____ You know where he or she stands on things that matter.
4. _____ He or she does not talk about others, but to others.
5. _____ You believe you can impact and influence him or her.
6. _____ You can count on getting information or help from him or her when you need it.
7. _____ You find it easy to give him or her positive feedback.
8. _____ He or she is receptive and open to understanding negative feedback.