Mike’s Musings
Closely Held Business and The Muse

Mike Jay

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Closely Held Business and The Muse

Over time, I’ve probably worked with more closely held businesses than not. From an agricultural background, to sports teams, to family businesses, professional partnerships, small and medium enterprise to large corporations that are often closely held, if not in legality, in terms of how they operate.

For all these entities, executive coaching needs to be nimble and experienced in my view. Not only in the operation of these business systems, but the way in which they implicitly function...most of the time, hierarchically, if not nobility; the rest of the time.

To cut to the chase, here’s something that I find is supportive of the coaching orientation when working with closely held enterprises. I call it my Leadership Cycle of Innovation for want of a better name:

You’ll notice that as complexity increases, the requirement for increasing leadership complexity, process complexity and in a lot of cases cognitive leadership complexity increases dramatically. This chart also gives you a quick checklist of what process complexity is required as you meet leaders at various positions in the cycle.

In the middle of the diagram, you’ll also notice what is called a B/I Leap. If you’ve never heard of the B/I leap, then maybe it’s time to help you understand how critical this is to implicit leadership style. Generally, closely held business reflects the style of their leaders. In a lot of cases, these leaders emerge and are not grown per se. Michael Gerber writes some compelling ideas into his E-Myth Revisited, which I recommend to coaches. The other book that I recommend is the Cash Flow Quadrant by Robert Kyosaki.

In the Cash Flow Quadrant, which looks like the graphic to the right, you’ll notice that there is a vertical line between the E/S and the B/I. The assumptions and beliefs that work on either side are often very different. Many closely held corporate leaders are still functioning on the E/S side of the equation, which stands for employee/self-employed versus the B/I side which stands for Business Owner/Investor. Kyosaki points out that often times, our viewpoints are skewed to these tendencies and the way we operate in reality often doesn’t match our intentions, or the reality itself. I find this with closely held leaders more often than I would like.

For those executive coaches working with larger organizations, I find the following paradigm helpful to create some ideas of how the world works at this more complex level, say beyond the B/I leap.

In the Dynamic Engagement Array which I write more extensively about at http://www.leadershipengagement.com we find a combinatorial approach that
when identified with the Taxonomy of Executive Coaching I wrote about early on in a musings column pictured at http://www.leadu.com/taxonomy, the coach has a pretty good platform for working from in terms of the process complexity that these people face.

In some ways, coming to grips with the nature of closely held leadership being in over their heads, is often a good place for a coach to start, especially when coaches can show them the path through what they already know to be true.

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