Commentary on Jack Wood Interview: Comments and Reactions
Russ Long

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The author offers his commentary on Jack Wood’s interview. The role of personal work, time for unconscious processes to unfold, and hope are important aspects for coaches to account for in their dialog with clients.

What does understanding the unconscious mean for you as a professional coach? What about your own unconscious, your client’s and/or the unconscious of key stakeholders? What is the unconscious anyway? Is the unconscious positive or negative, obstructive or life-giving?

This interview with Jack Wood crisscrosses the fields of psychotherapy, coaching, group and individual dynamics, and the roles of therapist, coach, teacher, consultant and more. It has an overriding focus in shedding light on the unconscious with its polarities of fear and hope. The fear aspect is tied to anxiety management, while hope is tied to the developmental process akin to the organic ripening of fruit in nature.

So, what is this unknown, murky idea of the unconscious? Jack references Freud’s concept of an underlying area of discontent, illogical wants and irrational drives, as well as the Jungian school seeing dreams, myths and archetypal material all existing in a situational hierarchy. Whatever is there, the unconscious process is speaking to conscious thoughts in a way that informs and influences individual and group realities and expressions. The influences may not be seen by the individual or group, hence the opportunity for an outside therapist or coach to facilitate awareness.

The interview clarifies that the unconscious feelings and misunderstandings swirling through the lives of our clients are integral to their decisions, preferences and thoughts; even our own. The work that we do on self-reflection and that we assist our clients to do is a fertile field for personal growth and development. The more that we and they can access things occurring in our hearts, minds and bodies, the more aware we become of ourselves and others.

Another key aspect of unconscious work involves incubation. A period of significant or intense learning in a workshop, for example, can be followed by the passage of several weeks of “soak time” before coming back together to provide significant growth. This allows for
unconscious processing, application experiments and reflection that utilize the natural strengths of the individual in meeting real world challenges. Individual coaching also provides options for this, with clients using their jobs and lives as learning laboratories for the adoption of new insights between coaching sessions.

I appreciated the emphasis that Bill and Jack placed on the dynamics of leadership and authority. Illuminating the significance of peer relationships akin to brother-sister relationships in families, the interview highlights the importance of the informal structure among in-place work groups such as executive committee members (not just the CEO’s role), reminding us of the complex nature of leadership work. Another area of significance to me is Jack’s concept of the “engineering” approach to executive coaching, wherein the focus becomes demonstrating “appropriate” behaviors for promotion rather than who the executive is as a person and what is the life they desire.

I leave this interview with an appreciation for the coaching profession’s opportunity to utilize the “hope” aspect of the unconscious. When we have the opportunity to assist our clients to engage in a developmental process, wherein they utilize their strengths to address their issues, we can call upon a natural capability to move forward in aligning their unconscious desire to succeed with their expressed goals. The exploration and discovery work of the coach can rest upon recognition that the unknown can be a true place of vitality for our clients.

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■ ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Russell Long, MCC, MBA, MHA

Phone: 843-278-1925
Email: rlong@changeinnovations.com

Russ Long is a certified executive coach and business consultant with executive, board and CEO experience. He is a graduate and faculty member of Corporate Coach U (CCU) and of Coaches Training Institute (CTI). He has executive experience in several business fields and coaches CEOs, executives, professionals, and entrepreneurs. His clients include IBM, Kaiser-Permanente, Abbott Labs, Comcast, and the FAA. He has been a selected speaker at several International Coaching Federation Conferences in Australia, Europe and US; has published articles in industry publications; has served in various ICF leadership roles; and is a certification assessor.
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