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## *Mike's Musings: Work to Play?*

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## Mike's Musings

### Work to Play?

Since there isn't a pre-programmed theme for this particular musing, I can run wild...a little anyway. However, I don't want to perturb the reading audience too much. First, let me thank those of you who send me notes about reading my musings. It is gratifying. It's good to know you're *sharpening the saw* as well, which to me is why I try to include ideas that stimulate your thinking and feeling. Before I muse, I wanted to say that we have tentative agreement to get some of my musings catalogued by year so that you can purchase back issues from *IJCO*. With this musing, we are completing our third year of musings. I want to say thanks to Bill Bergquist and John Lazar for putting up with me for the last three years. The *IJCO* journal, as well as several others, has come from "action-oriented people" attending the Executive Coach Summits over time. By the time you read this musing, another summit will be gathering and I encourage some of you out there to get involved with the Executive Coach Summit. If you do, I'll see you there. To get more information, visit [www.executivecoachingsummit.com](http://www.executivecoachingsummit.com).

### The Muse

Do many of you may find my little "wizard logo" attractive or not? I know people go both ways on it. Some people think it lacks a professional enough appearance, but I continue to battle for the wizard logo in my musing. What's key, and represented by the logo, is that executive coaching is part play and part wizardry. If you don't think so, I encourage you to read on.

The title of this musing, and hopefully what the wizard logo and I am going to model in this exposé is a paradigm shift as a transition from work to play. Over time, you've heard me mention Spiral Dynamics® and I've noticed lately there have been some coaching presentations at a variety of conferences on this paradigmatic work emanating from Dr. Clare W. Graves, an obscure researcher from Union College in New York. I'd like to take a lead from my friend Dr. Don Beck, a Graves protégé, whose work is located at

[www.spiraldynamicsgroup.net](http://www.spiraldynamicsgroup.net) and talk with you about something I see dawning on the horizon.

We joke around in the SDi (Spiral Dynamics Integral) community about the acronym SWIT, or Spiral Wizard In Training. Essentially, that's what my logo is to remind you of...that as an executive coach, you are really a SWIT. We all are, executive coaches or not! Along those lines, I want to provide evidence of a paradigmatic shift I perceive. It's fully in progress as I speak, but few realize it.

### Work to Play

The transition in paradigms from *work to play* has been underway for some time. Now, this may not seem like a fair topic for executive coaching, but trust me on this one. Core shifts are being made. Many people are labeling them in different ways and it's really confusing in general. We have the Xers, tweeners, the millenials and of course most of us are boomers. What can we make out of all of this?

Essentially I want to sensitize you to the underlying shift in our norms, value MEMEs, if you will, and the paradigm shift itself. Most of us in the spiral community and those who read Ken Wilber are familiar with the term 2<sup>nd</sup> Tier. This paradigm shift from work to play denotes an early marker of the transition out of 1<sup>st</sup> tier. I won't talk about that now. Perhaps if you write to me by email and encourage me, I'll save a musing for a discussion of what the movement among and between tiers means. The reason I brought it up was to denote the shift that will occur as a result of a movement from 1<sup>st</sup> tier values to 2<sup>nd</sup> tier values. Most people don't see this paradigm shift coming because of the myriad of labels that are promulgated. It is difficult to sort through them all, so I am making it easy.

The major shift in *our* lifetimes is *this* shift from *work ethic to play ethic* if you will.

I don't have much time in this musing to go into depth, but I wanted to spur you to think and feel how different ways of being, doing, having and becoming are going

to arise out of this major leap in consciousness, *although not everyone's consciousness will leap.*

Here are a few pointers:

1. Notice the shift a number of years ago to mainstream scenario planning coinciding with the advent of desktop computing, both occurring about the same time. Now, since the millennium we've moved on to simulation, yet isn't simulation actually playing games?
2. Identify the shifts in the types of games...? When I was a kid, I spent a ton of time in the bowling alley playing nickel pinball games. Ok, so I'm dating myself, but nonetheless, this early link to mechanical games is a key. Most of those games before the onset of pong and Pac-man, had to do with animation, yes? Now, look at the types of games kids are playing, they are living games, games about life, games that involve people, not balls and Pac people, but Sim-City and others.
3. Play is becoming institutionalized. This is a key for coaches of any kind. In my view, and I don't want to go off on a tangent here <grin>...if your coaching is more telling people what to do than play, you're not coaching. Here's where one part of the athletic paradigm is applicable to coaching executives. In athletics, when you weren't playing the game, what were you doing? Practicing. In my view, too much consulting is going on and being called coaching, instead of practicing before people encounter the playing field.
4. Play creates the ability to fail in a safe space. If you understand the auspices of learning and development, you'll realize that if executives learn and develop (which they will) by making executive decisions, it can be *very* expensive to the organization. Enter the coach. Getting executives to think and feel their way through important issues in my view is another key to their efficient and effective growth and development. We create *sustainability*, the other part of the executive coaching triad of success, through our ability to practice with increasing intensity in an ever-increasing space of ecology.

I've purposely left this a little vague. I went to watch the movie called *The Island* last night and I'm still suffering the effects. The reason is that in a lot of the movie, they purposely blurred the action, giving you bits and pieces with which to form meaning by filling in the blanks. I found this an incredible example of how play is forming in all disciplines. If they only give me bits and pieces...then who is making up the meaning? That's right, they have put me in control of a pseudo game — my own meaning making and imagination. For some,

this will seem laborious, but I suspect for many, it will get you to come back for more — energizing you in the process because it becomes about you, not them — a lesson for executive leadership in my opinion.

In this same vein, I believe that coaches, who are beginning to realize what is at stake with their clients, will begin to tell less and encourage our clients more through their actions to fill in the blanks — *to practice and to play*. This form of coaching play will become essential in activating greater areas of imagination in the synaptic environment of our clients, and just perhaps...a way to improve ego complexity. In doing so, we model play in practice. Perhaps, if we're lucky, some of our clients will "get" the idea that in order to develop others and create innovation, they can do the same...*play*.

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"To grow up to succeed and be happy is to develop the mind and character necessary to satisfy our needs, achieve our goals, and fulfill our dreams. But what needs and which goals and dreams? That is the first question we must answer. Only then can we seek to discover what kind of mind and character produce success and happiness. . . .

I have learned that we grow for many reasons, but if three of these are absent we begin to die psychologically. To grow, we must be in an *alive relationship* with others, whether as workers, partners, parents, or friends, even as communicants and believers in God. . . . [The] greatest growth occur[s] when a trusting and accepting relationship encourage[s] . . . vulnerability and openness to the influence of a respected person [we] love. . .

However, just being in an alive relationship is not enough; another impetus to grow must be present, a *basic drive*. . . to grow. Our drive to grow . . . goes hand in hand with the need for more alive relationships. Societal agents, such as families and schools, can subdue if not snuff our drive to grow.

A third necessary impetus to growth is to *have a vision* of what we want to become. A hopeful vision of the future inspires us to grow up."

-- Douglas Heath  
*Fulfilling Lives:  
Paths to Maturity and Success*

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