



The International Journal of  
Coaching in Organizations®

# IJCO

## *Visionary Social Context*

Christine McDougall

This article first appeared in the *IJCO International Journal of Coaching in Organizations*®, 2011 Issue 32, 8(4), 28-37. It can only be reprinted and distributed with prior written permission from Professional Coaching Publications, Inc.® (PCPI). Email John Lazar at [john@ijco.info](mailto:john@ijco.info) for such permission.

*Journal information:*

[www.ijco.info](http://www.ijco.info)

*Purchases:*

[www.pcpionline.com](http://www.pcpionline.com)

ISSUE 32,8(4)

ISSN 1553-3735

© Copyright 2011 PCPI.  
All rights reserved worldwide.



---

Professional Coaching Publications, Inc.®

# Visionary Social Context

Christine McDougall

*We are at a challenging point in the history of humanity's existence on Spaceship Earth. To survive we have hard choices to make that will require complex systemic change. The author has been a full-time coach practitioner for 14 years, and a student of global systems and the complex human dynamic. She sought who in the coaching world is doing work that lived up to Einstein's maxim that you cannot solve today's problems with the same level of thinking that created them (for example, creating a healthy future). The people interviewed demonstrate exciting models of thinking and being.*

## THE INTEGRAL, MULTI-PERSPECTIVE, EMERGENT APPROACH TO SYSTEMIC CHANGE

The corporate coaches and executives in organizations we interviewed are working at the cutting edge of deep, sustainable change, and all shared the following elements in their work. They place as their core values concepts such as love, wholeness, spirituality, working from abundance (versus scarcity), balancing yin and yang elements, the ability to simultaneously consider multiple world views, profound human connection, respect for all of life (including nature), and appreciation for the importance of deep immersion soul work. They also held as sacrosanct that they had to model, in all domains, what they were coaching and teaching. In other words, the interiors must match the exteriors. To do this requires a level of personal and collective rigor. All of the coaches and executives we interviewed have decades of experience in complex, multi-stakeholder change which has informed their approach.

### Spirituality and heart

In our interviews, several individuals and companies expressed their core values as love, wholeness, spirituality, bringing together both yin and yang elements and profound human connection. (Yin and Yang is the Eastern version of duality, such as male/female, black/white, or up/down, held in balance.)

DJ Mitsch, CEO of Pyramid Resource Group based in Cary, North Carolina, and a past President of the ICF, says that her company is currently using "traditional" language to enter into a conversation that has at its core, a more spiritual base. She describes spirituality as "the essence of the human spirit, corporeal, source outside 'self' that connects you to all living things - including the expanding universe and your part in it." Spirituality, distinct from religion, has no specific dogma or doctrine, and is based on an experience of a Universal intelligence.

Sally Breyley Parker, President of Currere, Inc, a coaching and consulting company based in Cleveland, Ohio, speaks of how

many colleagues are still trying to use the business case to sell the sustainability of the environment and all living systems. She says that while the business case is important, the *head* never sells anything. For her, there is an emerging recognition that the *heart* is the engine of change. “If you look at sustainability (which is a scale change), if the heart isn’t getting it, then it will not stick.” In her own journey, she was motivated by the feeling that her life was being lived in silos: a parent here, a business person here, these separate parts of her life did not allow wholeness. She wanted to create a company where she could show up as a whole human being—as a mum, a business owner, and a coach. Her vision is wholeness, and it comes from love. This is a very different operating model from the traditional business. The application of her work incorporates wholeness: the whole person, the whole community, the whole ecosystem.

*She says that while the business case is important, the head never sells anything. For her, there is an emerging recognition that the heart is the engine of change.*

Susan Taylor, Managing Partner at Generon International in Danvers, Massachusetts, says that love plus compassion is a defining force that underpins everything a person does. Generon also values *diversity*, not in the usual sense, but in the sense of valuing each individual regardless of their background. Taylor explains that

In some organizations people see others as a means to an end; we like to see human beings as a means unto themselves. We try to meet people where they are, which means they will meet the client and the organization where they are, and take them on a journey that invites love and compassion into the conversation. (S. Taylor, personal communication, August 3, 2010)

This was a constant theme in our interviews. The coaching conversation was shifting from a heavy performance base to one incorporating not only the whole person but their heart, mind, and spirit.

Dr. Leigh Gassner, a coach and partner in Reos Partners in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, was motivated by a profound love for his work in trying to find solutions to domestic violence and abuse. For seven years he trusted a deep impulse that allowed for solutions to emerge that were comparable to those of the coaches we interviewed who had many more years of training. His story parallels findings in science where discoveries happen simultaneously, in various parts of the world, without collaboration. Leigh, at the time, had no specific coach training, or any formal training working in complex issues. However, he had worked in complex social systems for most of his career in government. From experience he knew how they operated. Gassner had undergone formal training in coaching and multi-stakeholder issues only in the last two years. He allowed the core issue of domestic violence to inform the steps he took. He applied many similar themes

evidenced throughout this article: gathering the right people, creating learning environments, allowing emergence, holding deep trust and respect for the process, and encouraging wisdom to emerge from the collective synergies.

### **Interior to exterior**

The Constellation is a unique global community of eminent thought leaders, practitioners, and institutions committed to evolving the art, science, and craft of leadership. The Constellation came together at the end of 2010, born through a deep recognition that large scale, systemic change needed a coherent ethos, philosophy, and approach not currently available. The issue, team, project, or intervention is placed as the focal point of The Constellation's coaching, allowing it to inform emergent next steps. The group is a diverse gathering of masterful practitioners, mostly non-coaches. The work of The Constellation is complex, dealing with stakeholders from corporations, government, and civil society. The Constellation knows no "one" stakeholder has the answers to our most pressing problems. It works on the principle that if we gather the right people in the right environment, and curate deep experiences (in part using a coaching approach to transcend orthodoxies), new answers will emerge from the collective intelligence. The author advocates the need for collaboration and partnering with the client to move forward. We recognize that the level of thinking previously applied needs a higher and larger perspective to create a profound and enduring shift. The Constellation explores what is working – what currently exists in abundance – rather than scarcity and what is not working.

The Constellation recognizes that the current models of governance of business were initiated 410 years ago. Our limited liability corporate structure was created by Queen Elizabeth I to limit the liability of The British East India Company. Existing current corporate structures have the ability to avoid being held to account. The Constellation is exploring new ways of partnering with like-minded people to address some of the world's largest issues, using new enterprise models to conduct affairs, including complementary currencies, integral accounting, and new forms of value exchange. Rather than limit liability, The Constellation is interested in engaging accountability at the highest level, while being deeply conscious of the field effects of everything that is said and done. To do this requires a business model that doesn't currently exist.

The requisite component to achieve lasting transformational change is the level of development and thinking of the facilitators and coaches. They need to be able to work spontaneously in highly complex, chaotic, emergent situations, bringing together a high level systemic view and the ability to manage the details. They are aware that we have passed the stage of re-arranging the deck chairs. It is time to design a new ship. Their thinking, being, and doing need to express that as they guide the client on a journey

*...if we gather the right people in the right environment, and curate deep experiences (in part using a coaching approach to transcend orthodoxies), new answers will emerge from the collective intelligence.*

of discovery. All designs, activities, interventions, and enterprises must reflect an alignment of interiors with the very exteriors they are seeking to create. This goes beyond the individual “walking the talk.” We challenge entities to create aligned structures, cultures, values, actions, and beliefs.

For example, we can no longer look at accounting through the usual lens. We need to consider at least the following six domains:

1. Commodities (food, water, materials, etc.);
2. Commons (rites, taboos, honour, ecology, environment);
3. Knowledge (civil society, literacy, trade, marketing, stories, etc.);
4. Money (currency, trade credits, debt, equity, etc.);
5. Technology (appliances and tools, logistics, infrastructure, etc.); and
6. Well-being (health, sanctuary, inalienable rights, fellowship, etc.).

Not only does the facilitator/coach need to be sure this model is enacted in the exterior, he or she needs to be sure they are living this model both in their interiors and exteriors.

### **Balancing yin and yang energy**

There was a common theme amongst the interviewees that in the Western corporate model, the Yin energy (e.g., silence, intuition, receptivity, nature, nurture) is weak while the Yang energy (e.g., driving, doing, measuring, asserting) is strong. Leslie Williams, president of LeaderShift Consulting in Washington, D.C., and a faculty member of Integral Coaching Canada, has come to understand that at our core we are dealing with power, particularly the interplay of masculine and feminine characteristics in the exercise of power. (By *power* we mean both the traditional role of *power in work* as well as the *personal power* of how someone moves in his or her life.) Leslie worked with a client who was known to be a “hard driving, take no prisoners” type of woman leader. This client couldn’t keep staff, but did a great job for the company’s bottom line. She was never promoted to senior leadership because the senior leaders felt this about her: “Why would we invite someone like her into ‘the club’ when we know she thinks we are a bunch of idiots?” Williams explains that this client, who was in her late 40s, “came up the hard way” as one of the first women leaders in her company. She thought she could have it all “if you tucked your woman’s sensitivities away and you behaved like a man.” For many years, this formula worked for her, but after a while, things changed. She got feedback that the very strength that had made her so successful was now diminishing her effectiveness. This adaptation of an executive female into a predominantly male environment is well researched and understood. Too masculine and she gets criticized; too feminine and she gets ignored. What this client lacked was a healthy balance between the two energies.

*This adaptation of an executive female into a predominantly male environment is well researched and understood. Too masculine and she gets criticized; too feminine and she gets ignored.*

Leslie coached her client to work on her humility and compassion, integrating the necessary healthy aspects of the feminine yin energy. Her strengths once again became strengths rather than weaknesses, and she began to be seen as the tough but fair woman who loves to laugh and who will stand beside you. She was promoted into “the club” of the senior leadership ranks, and her daughter sent Leslie a letter of thanks for the change in her mother. This example is one of many, highlighting the very pressing belief amongst many of the interviewees that large scale systemic change will not be successful unless there is a more healthy balance of yin and yang.

Sally Breyley Parker, a coach with a background in Gestalt therapy, talked about the primary leverage point as “yin” (the feminine). In practice, this means putting attention on understanding, designing and supporting conditions that will encourage the emergence of wholeness, the feminine, the unmanifested, the invisible. Our propensity is to focus on “doing” rather than “being.” By shifting our focus to what will support us in being first, in a way that is whole, our doing will be different.

### **Creating the future with values beyond the profit motive**

There is a deep sense from these interviews and from many new publications and studies such as Daniel Pink’s *Drive – The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* that people in corporations are yearning for more recognition in their workplace of the values we explore in this article. There is a deep stress and fatigue associated with seeking to always focus on a profit model. However, given the current global situation, the fear of collapse, failure, and loss is great for many organizations. Those few evolutionary organizations, like L.W. Gore, who challenge many of our “business as usual” models, are pioneering the future. Since its early days as a company (founded in 1958), L.W. Gore insisted on putting their people first; creating a business structure that is atypical; and building a reputation for ethics, integrity, and taking a long term view when assessing business situations.

Sackeena Gordon Jones, Director of Global Learning and Development, SAS, spoke of her founder’s humility. He quotes the following as a core principle: *esse quam videri*, “to be rather than to be seen to be.” SAS invites their clients into their business, as partners.

SAS hosts events where our customers come together and learn and participate with each other, to learn about our culture. Every year we sponsor a user event where customers meet with their peers and share how they have used the products that SAS creates. The customer often creates extraordinary iterations and advances, and together they co-create the next generation solutions. (S.G. Jones, personal communication, July 31, 2010)

*There is a real sense we are entering such a new territory that we are simply making it up as we go. There is no existing model. Accessing senses such as intuition are critical.*

This example highlights another trend in large scale systemic change – an embedded collaborative approach. The emerging “crowd sourcing” models, aided by advances in technology, and open source technology platforms such as Linux, are other indicators of this trend. Integral Coaching Canada (ICC) has a strong sense that people are tired of talking about things. Joanne Hunt, co-founder of ICC, says, “They want change. They don’t just want the juicy insights. They want deep change in their own lives and the lives of others around them” (J. Hunt, personal communication, July 31, 2010). Mitsch, of Pyramid Resource Group, says that

There is a real sense we are entering such a new territory that we are simply making it up as we go. There is no existing model. Accessing senses such as intuition are critical. There is also a need for deep silence. It is the stuff that is happening in the spaces that we cannot articulate yet that will be the most meaningful. (DJ Mitsch, personal communication, July 30, 2010)

Joanne Hunt of ICC says that before there is any talk about change,

Too often we are in the never-ending game of development. At what point do we allow ourselves to pause, and be present to who we are, now, and all that is unique and good, about us. Many people have never really stood in their own existing goodness. (J. Hunt, personal communication, July 31, 2010)

DJ Mitsch spoke of this by talking about inviting silence into our lives. Generon uses nature, taking clients into nature for one to four days, stripped down to their most essential elements – no phones, not even a watch. The critical element is the need to allow a deep reconnection with nature, intuition, what is emerging, and silence. Again, this evokes the aspect of being, versus our addiction to doing. Our current model of Western society, which extends into our coaching, is heavily focused on doing. Do this, do that, stop doing this or that. There is little time for silence, for being with self, or being with another or nature. We are constantly moving, rushing, planning, and strategizing. When do we allow contemplation and reflection into our day as a practice?

Cathy Yuill, an ICC coach working in South Africa, is like an “eavesdropper coach” – listening for what is in the whole system, working different parts of the system to hear all perspectives. Yuill tries to build very high trust in the organization, while at the same time maintaining complete confidentiality with her clients. Her work with storytelling and narrative is almost a raw approach to systemic coaching. She works with multiple people and groups within the system, finding coaching moments around the water-cooler, for example, as well as structuring formal coaching

*Oftentimes in multi-stakeholder or trans-organizational public and private partnerships, all sectors come to the dialog or issue from their own perspective.*

conversations as needed. She is listening as a coach to the whole system, not just to one or two people within the system.

### **Working collectively where the energy is**

This means placing the client, project, or issue at the centre, working with emergence in the present to transform the current state entity to a more evolved one. Breyley Parker describes a situation four years ago, in the Cuyahoga River Valley, near Cleveland, Ohio. She was invited by the county managers to design a county-wide way of organizing that would ensure the regeneration of their river valley.

It was a very involved process, and they brought together a design collaborative that included all the representative sectors (stakeholders). They then expanded it to include a second county. From here developed stages of place-based transformation. Starting with the place, allow the place as a physical ecology, community of people and economy, to tell us who it was, informing from this what needed to happen next. (S.B. Parker, personal communication, July 31, 2010)

There is not a clearly outlined, linear, step-by-step process to this kind of change work. It requires letting go of all the traditional models and standing in the possible future, asking the future, “What needs to be invited into the present?” The coach does not have all the answers. The answers emerge from the space that is created and held by all the stakeholders, including, as Sally says, “the place that is wanting to be created.”

Oftentimes in multi-stakeholder or trans-organizational public and private partnerships, all sectors come to the dialog or issue from their own perspective. What rarely happens prior to this coming together is an initial conversation on co-creating who the multiple sectors are as a whole, when they are together, and for the purpose of this process. In other words, what is their overall intent? How is their dynamic as a new group of people bringing multiple points of view going to impact the outcome of the process? What is their social ecosystem?

Breyley Parker says, “My focus in this was in trans-organizational design, cross-sector work...fourth sector work<sup>1</sup>... the space of sustainability, where you have the coming together in an integrative way from all of these sectors” (S.B. Parker, personal communication, July 31, 2010). She believes that the idea of working with trans-organizational systems and trans-organizational development is the emerging trend for senior coaches. However, she has concern in the capacity of many coaches to be able to work within such complex and competing world views. This again highlights the critical need for coaches to invest in their own continuing development. This includes a multitude of options such as developing the ability

*By servant leadership  
we are referring to the  
leader who sees him/  
herself in the role as  
“servant to” in contrast  
to “gaining from” others  
for self-serving needs.*

to see the emergent whole, and not just the static parts; reading widely about the world, and experiencing this in some form, not just your local region; learning to see through the eyes of others; working on the shadow elements such as pride, entitlement, anger, envy, and laziness; and developing a mind, body, spirit practice.

### **Servant leadership**

By *servant leadership* we are referring to the leader who sees him/herself in the role as “servant to” in contrast to “gaining from” others for self-serving needs. The focus of the servant leader is on service to another, or a cause, or community. This term was made popular in the book with the same title written by Robert Greenleaf (2002).

A strong thread through many of the interviews was a very disciplined and rigorous personal daily practice by the coaches and the coaching organizations that are doing sustained and deep change work. For example, Generon has a process prior to deep dialogue with clients that will allow the coach to centre themselves and become an “open vessel.” This process, developed by Joseph Jaworski from Generon, involves at least an hour of deep centring, through meditative-type techniques, to get the coach 100% in present time, without any external or internal distractions. Integral Coaching Canada believes that how the coach shows up in deep transformational change work is one of the most critical elements. In addition, the daily practice of their coaches includes meditation, some form of bodywork that supports the individual coach’s developmental needs, and reflective writing. In addition, there must be a rigorous commitment to their own personal development, supported through coaches, mentors, and other professionals where required. “Coaches need to be able to cut through complexity. They need to be at a very high level of development themselves, with a rigorous daily practice that includes the mind, body, heart, and spirit,” say ICC’s Joanne Hunt and Laura Divine. Two of those interviewed quoted former CEO of Hanover Insurance, Bill O’Brien, who said that “The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener” (J. Hunt, personal communication, July 31, 2010).

Integral Coaching Canada (ICC) works on global, systemic change, one person at a time. We have highlighted their work in this article for two reasons. First, their coaching approach is the most comprehensively inclusive and considerate of more perspectives of both the coach and the client. Second, ICC created their model of coaching to support the development of embodied, sustainable change practiced by individuals or systems. In the past 12 years, their students are doing work around the world, using the ICC praxis, to affect incredible change. Leslie Williams, an Integral

*In the past 12 years, their students are doing work around the world, using the ICC praxis, to affect incredible change.*

---

<sup>1</sup>*Fourth sector work* is a term which originates from the work of social entrepreneurs and indicates that a fourth place/space is emerging that is not just corporate, government, or civil society, but a combination of them all.

Coaching Canada graduate based in Washington, DC, is the lead coach for community and social justice leaders in Louisiana. The program was developed in South Africa by James Joseph, former ambassador to South Africa under Nelson Mandela. The program, now running three years, is built around five core competencies<sup>2</sup> with the outcome being servant leadership. The coaches support the clients in integrating the competencies, such as personal renewal, into their work and life.

Cathy Yuill, an ICC graduate, is pioneering a method of whole systems change work; she moves seamlessly through the whole system-in-focus gathering information. She identifies current and new ways of being for this system, co-creating awareness and a series of new practices that will develop the muscles required for the topic. When coaching, she helps the client to make connections, follow story threads, challenge the system when appropriate, and collate the story, creating feedback loops which protect and honour confidentiality. Yuill follows the thread of the story, looking for meaning across the whole system, not just in isolated pockets. She says that

ICC provides our graduates with support in the work they are doing with systemic change, often by being on their advisory board, or simply by being available to support and discuss. Integral Coaching Canada coaches are taught to look at their own way of being as well as the way the client looks at the world. They describe this as “looking as the client” not just looking at the client. This is a very strong point of differentiation, and requires the coach to be highly developed in their own right, being acutely aware of how they see the world, and how their view affects the view of the client. (C. Yuill, personal communication, July 31, 2010)

ICC’s vision is that global, systemic change can be triggered by the “one-person-at-a-time” model. This creates narrower change but greater depth. The thinking is that when people make this kind of deep, sustained change, their path is to work in a much bigger space doing work of great service to the future of all of humanity. ICC feels that some current approaches to systems change are effective. However, their preference is to work with one human at a time, through depth rather than width. They have found this to be a very powerful approach to change.

## CONCLUSION

Few people doubt that we have extreme issues facing the survival and success of humanity in our current time. As coaches, we have the ability to support systemic change, and to bring the intrinsic

*...we must  
become masters of  
our own ability to  
take extremely complex,  
multi-perspective,  
highly evolved  
world views.*

---

<sup>2</sup> Based on the leadership of Nelson Mandela, these competencies include 1. Coming to terms with theories of leadership; 2. Ethics and accountability in public life; 3. Personal renewal; 4. Effective and ethical communications strategies; and 5. Supportive networks and coalitions.

DNA of coaching principles to the most complex issues. However, we must become masters of our own ability to take extremely complex, multi-perspective, highly evolved world views. We must be able to transcend the gravity of our own ego, and elevate our ability to operate with deep resonance and collaboration with others, motivated by love, care, service, and abundance. This article has presented a small window into the world of coaches and executives who are leading the way.

---

## REFERENCES

- Chapman, L. (2010). *Integrated experiential coaching: Becoming an executive coach*. London: Karnac.
- Global Convention on Coaching (GCC). (2008, August). *Dublin declaration on coaching including appendices*. Dublin, Ireland: Global Convention on Coaching. Retrieved from [www.coachingconvention.org](http://www.coachingconvention.org)
- Golan, Y. & Shani, E. (2007). *Points of you. The coaching game*. Retrieved from [www.points-of-you.us](http://www.points-of-you.us)
- Greenleaf, R.K., & Spears, L.C. (2002). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness* (25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition). Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Kauffman, C.M., Russell, S.G., & Bush, M.W. (Eds.) (2008). *100 coaching research proposal abstracts. International Coaching Research Forum*. Cambridge, MA: The Coaching and Positive Psychology Initiative, McLean Hospital, Harvard Medical School and The Foundation of Coaching. Retrieved from [www.instituteofcoaching.org](http://www.instituteofcoaching.org)
- Kline, N. (2005). *The thinking partnership programme: Consultant's guide*. Wallingford, CT: Time to Think.
- Pink, D.H. (2009). *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us*. New York: Penguin.

---

## ■ ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Christine McDougall

**Phone:** +61 414 384000

**Email:** [Christine@christinemcdougall.com](mailto:Christine@christinemcdougall.com)

**Website:** [www.christinemcdougall.com](http://www.christinemcdougall.com)

Dr. Christine McDougall partners with extraordinary people, globally designing and implementing world-changing artifacts to support the success of 100% of humanity, in the shortest possible time, and without ecological offense or the disadvantage of anyone. Christine is a founding partner of The Constellation, a global guild of eminent thought leaders, practitioners, and institutions. They partner with organisations and enterprises committed to systemic change in their unending quest to create better, more sustainable futures for all. Christine has spent the last 25 years working with the complex human dynamic of people and relationships. She is a skilled facilitator, coach, and speaker. She has worked with multinational corporations, senior executives, elite athletes, and social entrepreneurs from around the world.

---

## Resource Center for Professional Coaching in Organizations

*IJCO* The International Journal of Coaching in Organizations® is the signature publication of Professional Coaching Publications, Inc.® (PCPI). In addition to this internationally acclaimed journal, PCPI publishes books on topics of interest to those in the coaching community, whether practitioner, decision maker, or end user. You can count on PCPI, Inc. to provide content that pushes the envelope — bringing theory, research and application together in ways that inform, engage and provoke. Visit the PCPI website, [www.pcpionline.com](http://www.pcpionline.com), to view and purchase our growing line of products.

If you have administrative questions, please refer them to our *IJCO*® Office Manager, at [officemanager@ijco.info](mailto:officemanager@ijco.info). For advertising, marketing and operations inquiries, please refer them to John B. Lazar, *IJCO* Executive Editor, at [john@ijco.info](mailto:john@ijco.info). Please submit unsolicited manuscripts for peer review consideration to the *IJCO* office manager at [officemanager@ijco.info](mailto:officemanager@ijco.info).

---

Visit Both Our Sites at Your Convenience

---

*Journal information:*  
**[www.ijco.info](http://www.ijco.info)**

*Purchases:*  
**[www.pcpionline.com](http://www.pcpionline.com)**

