



GLOBAL COACHING FOR SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP

A 'neutral' stance on sustainability is amoral – leaders and coaches must take a stand, and urgently, argues [Philippe Rosinski](#). What is needed in place of contemporary leadership, is sustainable leadership.

In 2015, the 193 countries of the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their associated targets and indicators.¹ These probably constitute the best blueprint of what we collectively need to accomplish to address pressing planetary challenges and promote flourishing in place of catastrophes. For organisations, it is not only a matter of reducing their negative externalities: it is an opportunity to achieve business success while having a positive impact.

Unfortunately, we are not on track to achieve these SDGs; essentially due to a failure of contemporary leadership.² One of the characteristics of this leadership is its 'amorality', that is having no sense of right and wrong, and therefore not realizing that what they are doing may be wrong. Executives or coaches adopt an amoral stance when they insist on being neutral, on not taking a stand, arguing that their role is to achieve business goals regardless of their broader impact (or to help their coachees to do so).

We need instead to stimulate sustainable leadership, which is leadership in the service of human and non-human lives, committed to respect and restore natural ecosystems and a healthy planet. Such leaders strive to be ethical, aiming for the greatest good for the greatest number (utilitarianism), listening to their conscience to act morally (deontology) and seeking to become good people and to act as role models (virtue ethics).³

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External transformation of organisations toward true sustainability (net positive impact⁴) requires nothing short of the internal transformation of their leaders. Through a combination of caring benevolence and constructive challenge, in a protected space (non-judgemental and confidential), coaching provides the ideal context for a leader to engage in a deep personal reflection, to try out new behaviours and to devise concrete actions that will allow them to become the best version of themselves. The process takes place over time, giving the leader the chance to convert intentions into actions, to learn from successes and to address difficulties along the way. The transformation will benefit them as well as the world at large.

However, traditional coaching may be insufficient to address the complexity and magnitude of the challenges. By contrast, 'global coaching'⁵ allows raising awareness and defining success in a broad and sustainable fashion (the what question), while also providing diverse avenues to effectively enable this success (the how question). Global coaching is an integrated approach that calls upon multiple interconnected perspectives (physical, managerial, psychological, political, cultural, and spiritual) to facilitate the unleashing of our human multifaceted potential toward meaningful pursuits.

The 'Global Scorecard'⁶ invites articulation of specific coaching objectives along four dimensions: Self (taking great self-care – including internal measures such as feelings– and external measures such as health indicators like body-fat percentage), Family and Friends (sharing love and friendship), Organisation (adding value to the organisation's stakeholders), and Community and World (improving the world). It offers a critical difference to the established 'Balanced Scorecard'⁷ which only considers factors that contribute to business success. SDGs can clearly be linked to the Community and World category, and the corresponding indicators of success matter, whether or not they translate into business profit. The associated 'Global Coaching Process'⁸ therefore fully supports sustainable leadership.

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It is beyond the scope of this short article to explain in detail how global coaching can foster sustainable leadership but let me share a few examples to illustrate how this can work.

Coaching from a physical perspective encourages leaders to learn about nutrition, physical exercise and other activities that increase our health, fitness, and wellbeing, and to consider proactively the following questions: How can you increase your vitality and create the conditions for your optimal and sustainable performance? How can you promote wellness in your organisation? How can you increase your health and wellbeing while reducing your ecological footprint?

The physical perspective is directly related to SDG 3 ('Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages') and it is also linked to SDG 8 ('Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all'). Decent work involves indeed safety and harmony at work in place of excessive and damaging pressure.

Coaching from a psychological perspective notably allows us to uncover and not succumb to detrimental cognitive biases (e.g. 'availability heuristics'⁸) and group phenomena (e.g., 'tragedy of the commons'⁹, 'bystander effect'¹⁰) that favour our passivity, prompting us to take our cues from the nearby situation (e.g. seemingly harmless unusually warm weather) and people around us (who might not seem eager to intervene and take drastic measures). Here are some coaching questions: How can you make the most of various schools of psychology to improve your coaching/ leadership, and make it more sustainable? How can you recognise and overcome cognitive biases and resistances that get in the way of sustainability? How can you be aware of social dynamics that could lead to unsustainable behaviors, and not fall prey to these?

Coaching from a cultural perspective helps to broaden one's worldview and to become more creative. This supports the development of sustainability attributes, including 'creativity' (CISL¹¹ et IDG¹²), 'diverse stakeholder view' (CISL), and 'inclusive mindset' (IDG).

One challenge, captured by SDG 17, involves transformational partnerships. The greater the cultural differences between the partners, the greater the difficulty to turn these ventures into successes, but the greater also the opportunity to make a significant difference. Diversity¹³ is indeed a double-edged sword. 'Coaching across cultures'¹⁴ (i.e., the systematic weaving of interculturalism into coaching) is about deploying the richness that lies in cultural diversity. It supports transformational partnerships¹⁵ and, more generally, cooperation among diverse actors.

Here are some essential coaching questions: How can you make the most of cultural differences for fruitful collaboration among diverse actors? How can you leverage cultural diversity for increased inclusion, unity, creativity, and positive impact?

Coaching from a spiritual perspective is informed by secular philosophy, religious traditions, mythologies, and mysticism. It can start with asking simple yet crucial questions, while offering a safe environment enabling coaches to explore candidly these fundamental areas: What is your purpose? What is truly important

to you? What is the legacy you want to leave behind? It can involve artistic activities (collages, drawings, etc.) to help uncover that deeper purpose (letting our intuitive brain speak up).

In my experience, this domain is sometimes alluded to in coaching programs but without going as far as calling a spade a spade. The word 'spirituality' may indeed be perceived as inappropriate in a business context. However, I have found that explicitly including spirituality in coaching and leadership can be liberating, inviting people to consider purpose as a central theme rather than as a dispensable add-on. It's important to clarify though, that spirituality does not equate to religiosity.

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Global coaching is both exciting and demanding. It involves a life-long learning journey from diverse disciplines and the willingness to embody the human qualities we help others to develop. It is much-needed in today's world to promote sustainability and flourishing for all living species.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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