

WHEN THE WALLS COME TUMBLING DOWN

Breaking down barriers to communication

By Irene Anderson, CTACC



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features



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“There is a need and a level of accountability that people are seeking in order to be successful in all areas of their lives.”

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There are many examples from history of walls being built, such as The Berlin Wall, The Great Wall of China and Hadrian's Wall. Walls are generally built to keep something or someone in, or to keep something or someone out.

Walls are fear driven and are frequently built in the workplace by teams and by individuals in a team to protect the team 'norms.' Team norms are created by team members who accept a certain way of doing and being which is unique to the team. This translates into team culture.

It is common practice in North American culture to leave your home life at the door when you come to work and switch off whatever is affecting you in any other area of your life. How is this possible? People don't come in chunks; therefore, they build walls around themselves at work, at home or even in coaching in order to compartmentalize a whole life. People will do this to protect themselves from perhaps not fitting into the expected 'norm' in their current environment.

How does all this 'fitting in' impact on the whole person? How do you, as coach, break through to reach the whole client or employee? You have to find the hole in the wall!

COACHING IN A NON-COACHING ENVIRONMENT

In the corporate world there still exists an 'Us vs. Them' mentality. My experience as a 'coach' was challenging. I was a call center manager at the time, with 36 direct reports. Wow! The expectation was that I had to 'coach' each individual employee on their performance once per month. With only 21 working days a month, that was quite a challenge!

At that time there was a trend in the corporate world to change the role of a 'manager' of people to 'coach'. We were all given a

one-day course on how to coach. The definition of coaching used in the course was: "Coaching is a dialogue between two people with the goal of improving performance and productivity by way of positive influence." There is nothing wrong with the definition of this agenda, except that it is owned by the employer. What happens in a case where there is a clear corporate agenda and no agenda for the employee?

If a client is 'hiding their personality behind a wall,' it can be difficult to reach them at a deeper level.

UP GO THE BARRICADES!

Teams and individuals build team norms and culture and they are well protected on all perimeters. For example, let's look at team walls and individual walls:

Team Walls

When I joined this team in mid-career as an employee, there was the usual onboarding system where I learned the team values, mission and vision statements. Team members very quickly tried to indoctrinate me into the preferred and expected ways of being and doing to be accepted into the team. Once inside this new team, many tried to show me the 'real' way, or the underground behaviors that the team had chosen as their preferred way of delivering.

The 'boss' was outside the wall. I was told: "Never mind what management has told you. We do our own thing here." They were a high functioning team but extremely fearful and distrusting and their way was to view everything that management said or did as suspect. I decided early on that their way was not my way. This was probably one of the reasons why I was promoted to manager.

As a new manager, I had to find a solution that worked for both parties. It was soon after my promotion that I discovered Temperament Theory and how it could break down barriers to communication.

Individual Walls

People come into the world hard-wired with their personality composed of a bundle of values, strengths and deep psychological

needs. This deep psychological need or driving force is at the core of every individual. If the need is honored and met early in development, the individual will flourish. If the need is not honored, the individual may not flourish.

An individual may 'cover up' or build a wall around their preferred personality (their true self) if the context dictates; however, the essence of the individual will always be there, no matter how well covered up or hidden it may be.

This is only one tool in your coach tool box. It does not account for external influences that may have happened along the way. People are complicated. They do not come to work and check their whole self at the door.

BREAKING THE BARRIERS

Is there a common language you can share as a jumping-off point to get the coaching conversation started? Finding positive and effective ways to problem solve and move the person forward and allow them to own the agenda, especially in



a corporate environment, can be challenging.

That's where common tools like the MBTI™, Disc™ and Temperament (Personality Dimensions®) come in. They provide a common language by allowing the person to experience self-discovery in their own way – a non-threatening way in which to start a coaching conversation. Each coach has a favourite.

As a coach, I personally have found Personality Dimensions® to be one of the most effective ways to make the client comfortable in their own skin and feel that they can share their whole self with me.

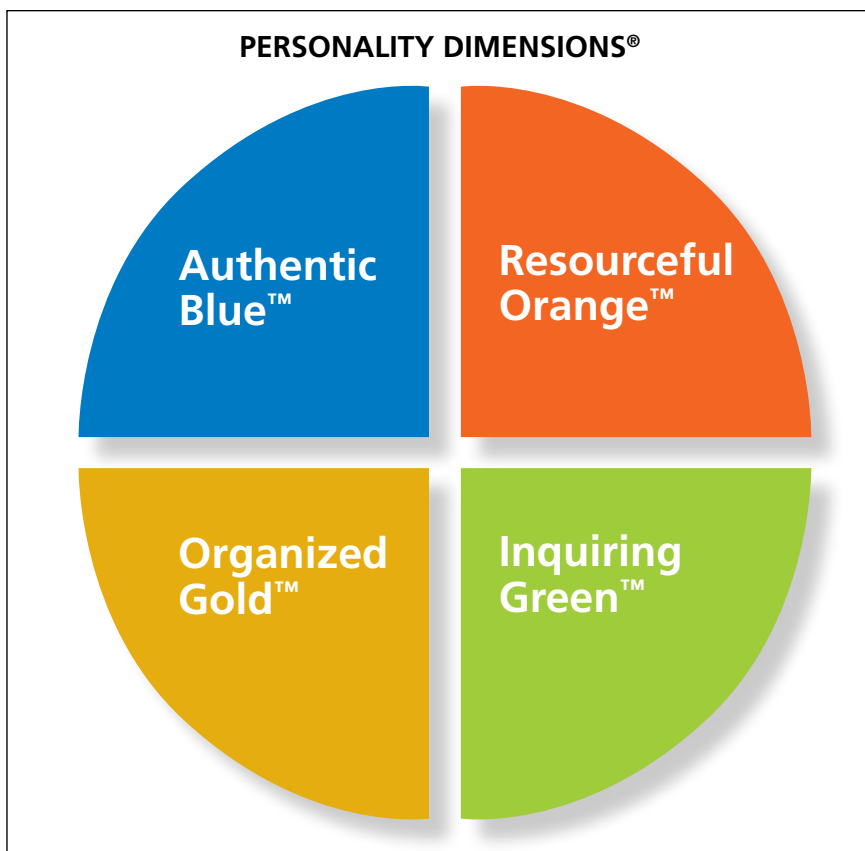
CRUMBLING THE WALLS

I discovered and have used the Personality Dimensions® Model for over 15 years. The 'Aha' moments I have witnessed are many. One example is that of a young woman who, after taking one of my workshops, realized that she was in the wrong job. She subsequently quit, went back to school and achieved fulfillment and success. I can recount moments for clients, some of them quite emotional, as they began to uncover and embrace their innate strengths. One of the common responses I hear is, "Hey, it's OK to be me!" I love to hear that! It means that the client is embracing their unique qualities.

My favorite story is of 'Mary,' one of my direct reports, who came into a performance review meeting saying, "You are going to make me cry. I hate these meetings" Ouch! 'Mary' did end up crying, but in a good way! I used the Temperament Model to allow her to discover her strengths and help understand why others misunderstood her.

Instead of walking away disgruntled, 'Mary' now had a solid plan for turning a bad situation around. 'Mary' turned out to be one of the most outstanding members of my team. Proud moment! Positive result!

Personality Dimensions® is based



on Temperament Theory, which can be traced back to Hippocrates, who identified that there were four ways in which people got sick. He named them as the 'Four Humors' (Phlegmatic... Melancholic... Sanguine... Choleric).

Personality Dimensions® translates this model into four colors (see graphic above):

➤ **Inquiring Green™**

Core psychological needs are Mastery and Self Control, Knowledge and Competence.

➤ **Organized Gold™**

Core psychological needs are Membership or Belonging, Responsibility and Duty.

➤ **Resourceful Orange™**

Core psychological needs are Freedom to Act Now and the Ability to Make an Impact.

➤ **Authentic Blue™**

Core psychological needs are

Meaning, Significance and Connecting.

The theory is that if these needs are not met or honored, the result is either short term or lifetime stress. Some people have hidden behind cultural barriers, familial barriers or team barriers for so long that they have forgotten who they are. Each personality style has deep psychological needs. Once understood and honoured, this allows the client to trust the process of coaching.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE PERSONALITY WALL?

If a client is 'hiding their personality behind a wall,' it can be difficult to reach them at a deeper level. They can throw up barriers to stop the coach/manager from understanding or working through real issues.

Personality Dimensions® can give you, the coach, a new lens with which to highlight the motivation behind certain behaviours in a safe and trusting way. Because

the tool can be used across all life experiences (work, home, relationships, volunteer situations, not for profits) it is a well-rounded way for client/employee to see how their behaviours influence all parts of their lives. It is a simple but powerful model that transcends all areas of life and can make a coach's job a breeze.

Personality Dimensions® uses a unique process of self-discovery. Either in teams or individually, the client is taken through a series of activities or coaching exercises where they identify their personality style. The client validates which elements describe their personality. They take ownership, seeing that there is no way to deny that the behaviors they are exhibiting correlate directly to the personality description.

The coach/manager can thus begin to work with the client/employee to identify which behaviours are working and which are not and explore ways that the client/employee can adapt behavior to enjoy more success.

This is how the client/employee takes charge of their agenda.

IN SUMMARY

The real magic of Personality Dimensions® and indeed of any temperament model is that people can discover and embrace who they really are, accept strengths and flaws and move beyond the 'box' of their color to be a more rounded individual. It gives both the coach and the client a jumping-off point to start the coaching conversation and begin to break down barriers.

Personality Dimensions® creates a common language that coach and client can agree upon. Taken beyond the introductory phase or assessment, Personality Dimensions® can be a solid foundation for coaching, leadership development, conflict resolution, sales and marketing and many other coaching applications. •




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