



## Creating Change Faster: Convergence and Transformation Acceleration

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Convergence brings a client's many experiences, skills, and characteristics together in the coaching relationship in a productive way that allows the coach to have insight into the whole client to accelerate change. Dramatic, lasting change that brings the client to her or his full potential – a state of transformation – can be achieved faster in a holistic convergence-centric coaching environment than in a more tightly-focused task or role-specific coaching conversation. This paper offers a preliminary model to allow the coach practitioner to discuss convergence sooner, explore the client's comfort and willingness to work in a convergence-centric environment, and to help the client understand the value of the concept through convergence-focused questions to be used in the coaching relationship.

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Coaching does not happen in a goal-only vacuum. Single goals, or a short list of them, do not define the client or the coach. Instead, clients bring their whole selves to the coaching experience. If the client acknowledges spiritual considerations and self-concept, this is as valid a part of the conversation as any other experience, secular value system, influence, or priority the client brings to the relationship.

Acknowledging God's call on a client's life, as well as the challenges the client faces trying to reconcile the holy and the secular, allows for a holistic approach that can be transformational. One could argue that acknowledging this is critical in coaching anyone who considers her or his faith in decision making and goal setting. Without including this element in the conversations, goal setting and planning, the coaching relationship can be less effective than it potentially could be, or potentially completely ineffective, if the goals established in coaching sessions are not congruent with the client's worldview. Dissonance leads to inaction.

When combined with an assessment tool to understand the client's underlying strengths, a clear picture of the client emerges, allowing the client and coach to work together effectively and more efficiently. This perspective into the client's whole person, and the drive toward values-informed goals (i.e., purpose fulfillment), are the components of the *Convergence and Transformation*

*Acceleration Model* (CTAM), which will be discussed in this paper. Visual representations of the model's key points are provided to facilitate the presentation.

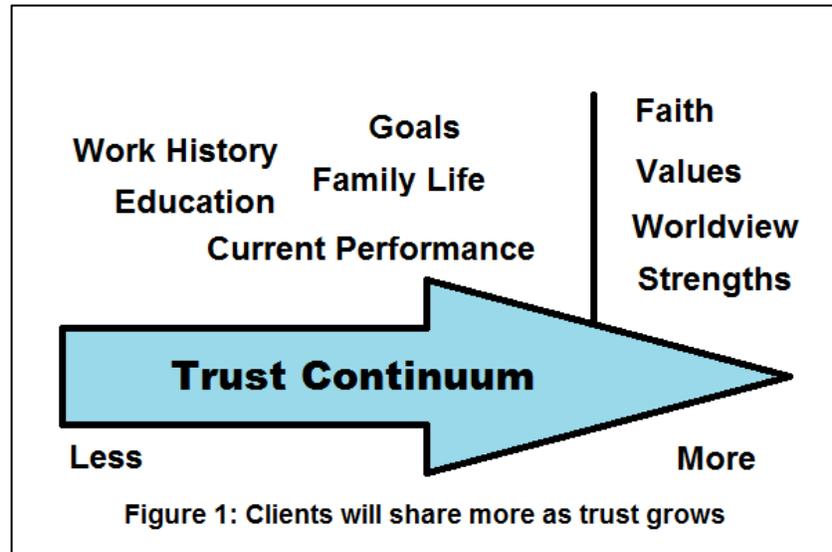
### **Coaches and Clients: Whole Selves**

Coaches and clients bring their whole selves to the coaching relationship; acknowledgement of relevant similarities and differences can strengthen the bond between the two. Stoltzfus (2005) recommends story sharing by the coach during the contracting phase to accelerate relationship building. A professional coach will be well-served to develop a standard and refined introduction that incorporates many of the things that the coach will want to learn about the client. This will include experience, education, values, ambitions and goals. Importantly, this approach displays sincerity, a quality of the coaching relationship cited as critical by Solomon and Flores (2001).

Earlier, more complete sharing by the client allows for faster growth and better performance. While some clients will follow the coach's lead, a more overt step to encourage sharing may be required, with an explanation of why it is important. Understanding can lead to more targeted conversations that will be more productive more quickly. There is still the possibility that information will be disclosed more slowly, though, with more personal information being withheld until a greater level of trust is achieved.

Compartmentalization and reservation, in which less personal information is revealed first, with more personal experiences and opinions being reserved, should be expected. As an example many people have experienced, consider corporate ice-breaker activities. Facilitators say something like this: *Tell us something about yourself that nobody else knows*. These types of activities have created an atmosphere of semi-truth. Maybe I will tell you about a vacation I took a long time ago or some other safe-to-share information, but I am certainly not going to reveal my most personal ambitions. Of course, this reserve is counterproductive in a coaching relationship.

Consider figure one, the "trust continuum." While it would be impossible to plot exactly how a client will respond to a coach and what he or she will share when, the general concept is worth considering. Each person compartmentalizes differently; some people are more or less open than others. The vertical line in the diagram represents that segmenting of information, the wall between things that are openly shared and discussed and those that will only be revealed in time and after trust is earned. In the case of strengths, they will only be shared after they are learned. In some cases, the client might not have a clearly articulated worldview or faith foundation. The point is this: for convergence to happen and for transformation to be accelerated, that wall must come down.



### **Convergence: A Teachable Concept**

While coaching is not about teaching or training, there is room for sharing tools that can improve the effectiveness and relevance of coaching. Convergence is one topic that can be discussed and taught to improve the productivity of the relationship. A coach can even use the images in this paper to explain the concept. The goal of raising the issue is to both make the client aware of the concept and to elicit responses that will open the door to additional conversations. Bringing the varied experiences and their effects on worldview into the discussion will allow for broader work concerning a client's values and purpose. Convergence conversations become the catalyst for transformation.

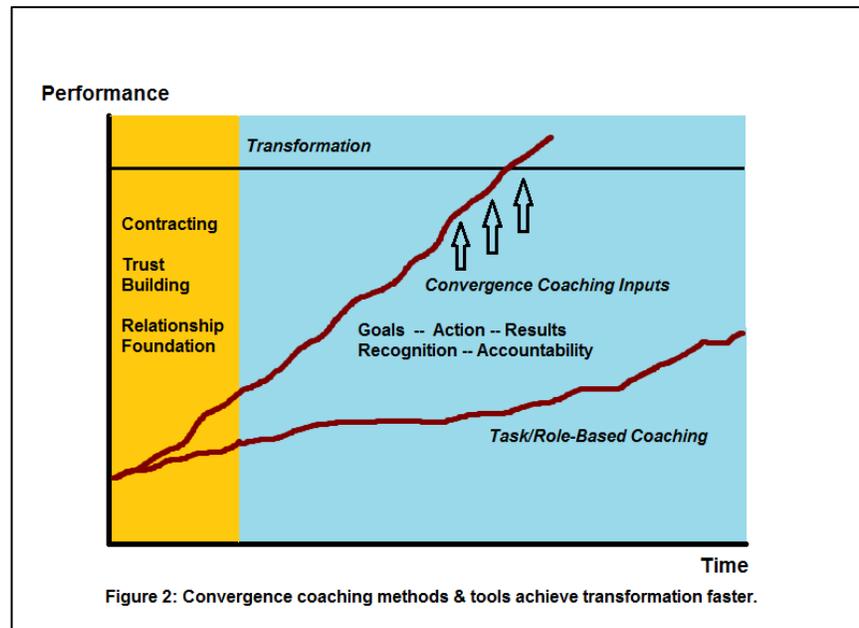
Fike, in Umidi's *Transformational Coaching*, describes the work as helping "the client weave previously scattered, random, or divergent threads into an integrated framework" (2005, p.147). A skilled coach can work with a client to identify, name and make sense of these threads. With an objective and trained perspective, the coach will see patterns the client might not; the Christian faith-journey and the client's activities in that life realm will become part of the tapestry.

Convergence-centric efforts expand the scope of the coaching relationship. This work takes what might have initially been a task or role-based coaching agreement and expands it to whole-life coaching. If there are relevant threads from a client's experiences that have been ignored in earlier work, those same threads can become part of the effort moving forward. Experiences that the client ignored or discounted can be re-explored by an objective coach and can be understood for their previously misunderstood or underappreciated role in what the client has achieved and to where she or he is going.

### **Convergence Coaching: A Longer Road?**

Convergence-centric coaching to accelerate transformation will likely expand the coaching relationship and its duration, and this consideration should be weighed against the coach's mandate, an essential issue in cases where a third-party is sponsoring the coaching. If an employer is financing the coaching work, convergence may not fall within that scope.

Additionally, the client may not be ready. Whether the coaching work is funded by an employer, the client directly, or even being done *pro bono*, there needs to be contracting, permission given before exploring some of the more sensitive and personal areas of a client's life. Figure two gives a graphical presentation of the concept. With more discussion of the many qualities, experiences and characteristics the client shares, the faster significant performance improvement and transformation can be achieved. Conversely, a task or role-based focus will likely produce less dramatic change.



Assuming that permission is given, the Christian coach should understand the responsibility s/he has to work with a convergence focus. The Christian faith is one that is forward looking, and one that ties the whole of God's creation into a purpose that is driving toward the certain outcome of some uncertain day: the coming of God's Kingdom. Everything in creation and all of our actions are pointing to this eschatological purpose; the Christian coach can be a Kingdom builder by accelerating transformation with purposeful convergence work.

A special and some say unique characteristic of Christianity is the transformative nature of the committed's faith journey. Whether we consider Jesus' explanation to Nicodemus that one must be "born again" (John 3:3), or Paul's exhortation to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2), the Christian walk is one defined by change for the better as Christians strive to be Christ-like and sanctified. Coaches can play a critical role in supporting and reinforcing this change, this transformational process. Just as a coach helps a client explore alternative approaches to problems and opportunities in so many life pursuits, this same skill and service can be appropriately applied to spiritual formation.

Ellen Charry offers a perspective from the theology literature about spiritual formation that informs the Christian coach. In her text, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*, she describes what she calls the "art of Christian excellence" and the concept of sapience, through which "engaged knowledge ...emotionally connects the knower to the known" (1997, p.4). When combined with the other two elements of Christian formation – awakening and catechesis – sapience, applying

wisdom and knowledge, becomes a powerful catalyst for transformation. Coaches can help clients in this regard by integrating questions about faith and worldview into the conversation, making spiritual considerations as relevant and present as others in the struggle to discern the way forward. Spiritual formation rises to the level of other development priorities for the coach and the client in an environment of convergence.

### **Convergence Coaching Needed More than Ever**

The need for convergence coaching is more urgent than ever. As many parts of the world, especially Europe and North America, drift perceptibly toward secularism and away from faith, the environment can leave the believer isolated and confused. How can I incorporate my faith, value system, and world view into my work? How can I understand my life and my work through the lens of my faith? How can I understand my purpose and the meaningfulness of my daily activities? There are many examples of professionals successfully integrating the two.

Seidman describes an awakening of her Jewish faith and her study of scripture and Jewish mysticism. As an organization development (OD) professional, she realized the overlap between spiritual development (SD) and OD studies and vocational activities. This led her to review the literature concerning spirituality at work, including United Methodist deacon Nancy Smith's study of workplace spirituality; a key concept is the integration of the secular and spiritual (2006, p.7). It is not going too far to say that a Christian on a life-long journey of spiritual formation and development will seek to square the elements of her life into a convergent, rational whole. The Christian coach can facilitate the conversation and fuel the transformation.

Weinberg and Locander (2013) examine workplace spiritual development in a one-on-one structure. They advance the notion that spiritual mentoring relationships can help people understand and appreciate their inner lives, the meaningfulness of their work, and context/connectedness. Questions and conversation between coach and coachee can easily examine these topics if the client wants to pursue the topic and if the coach is prepared to do so.

In a South African study, Wessels and Müller (2003), advance the convergence concept with documentation of in-depth discussions with co-researchers about spiritual formation and work meaningfulness. How do our vocational pursuits relate to and connect with our spiritual identities? This is an important consideration for Christians living and working in a secular world while also working on their God relationships. The authors quote Rolheiser's definition of spirituality as "being about what we do with the fire inside of us" (2003, p. 3); for Christians, it is about how we fulfill our desire to serve God and others while concurrently addressing our other priorities. How does a Christian find balance in the convergence of the spiritual and secular? How does alignment happen?

### **Convergence and Transformation Acceleration Model: The Details**

With the general concepts of convergence and coach reviewed, it is appropriate to now examine the details of the step-by-step process. First, coaches and clients come together into a relationship in which convergence is discussed early. This can be a topic of their very first conversation, setting the stage for productive work with a clear understanding of the work to be done from the start. In addition to standard details about the coaching relationship, the coach will explain that

the client's values, strengths, and entire universe of experiences and influences will be considered as they work together.

Stoltzfus recommends that coaches share experiences from their own lives to facilitate trust-building with the client. This "authenticity" validated and demonstrated with storytelling accelerates bond development between coach and client (2005, p. 88). The coach should be very mindful of the story that she or he shares, including details on values, faith and personal strengths to illustrate how convergence works and has played a crucial role in the coach's experience.

Next, the coach should explore and discuss the client's readiness to include faith in their discussions. The challenge is to find a way to discuss the subject in a respectful, non-threatening way, always being aware that clients may not want to open the door to that topic early in the relationship or ever. Here are some potential questions that can help the coach determine the appropriateness of the discussion and the client's readiness for it.

- *On a 1-to-10 scale, with 10 being most important and one not important at all, how important is faith or spirituality in your life at work and otherwise? Why did you give it that score?*
- *How important is your faith as part of your image of yourself and an expression of your values?*
- *How will your faith inform the options you consider and the choices you make as we work together and in areas where coaching is not involved?*

These open-ended questions give the coach the opportunity to understand the client's priorities and readiness to explore convergence more fully. Of course, coaches must be ready to hear answers ranging from "I have no use for religion and it has nothing to do with it" to "My faith and relationship with God are central to my life and all my decisions." Unless the client slams the door shut on faith, and has some interest in pursuing it, the natural next question is this: *Would you like to make spiritual development, God, and a Christian worldview central to our work together?*

Anyone calling him or herself a Christian coach must be prepared to respond to the calling to serve in this way if the client says yes. If they move the conversation in this direction, both must listen for what God is asking them to do: work toward a Christ-centered life in which faithfulness is central to all activities. The coach uses the relationship as an opportunity to help another believer along the life journey in an effort that will be fulfilling, rewarding and glorifying of God for and by both.

Once faith and its inclusion (or exclusion) in the coaching relationship has been discussed, the coach should summarize her understanding of what the client said to ensure clarity and agreement. This is a critical step as it will allow the coach to better prepare for future coaching conversations. This point will inform planning and potential direction for future conversations, goal setting, and follow up.

The final component in this model is the use of one of the many widely available assessment tools. Rath's StrengthsFinder 2.0 is inexpensive, accessible and relevant to many people, and should be strongly considered as a standard part of any coaching relationship. A skilled

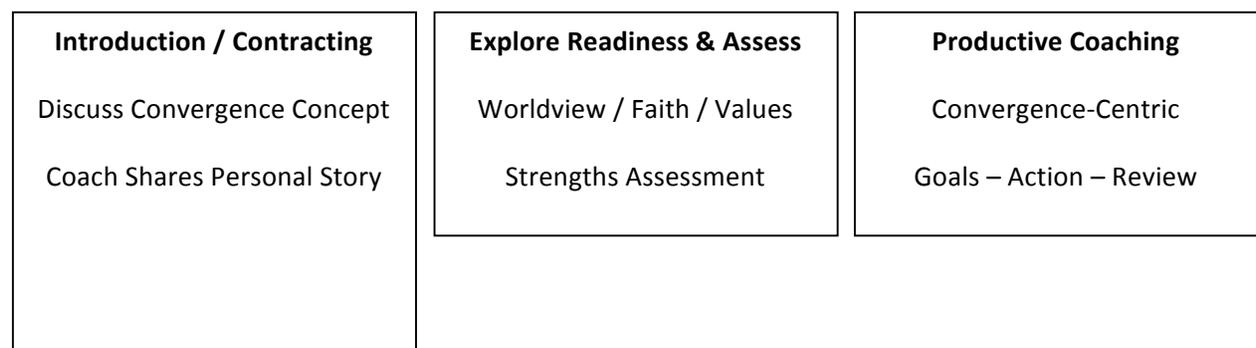
StrengthsFinder experienced coach, whether Gallup certified or not, can certainly find helpful insights into the client and ask better targeted questions with the enhanced understanding that comes from its use. This author has used the profile productively with coaches in both supervisor-employee and coach-client relationships.

With the stage set, the work of coaching begins and the rewards of the effort can be realized and appreciated. Clear, specific goal setting, followed by conversations with recognition for results and accountability for inaction, are the next logical steps. CTAM takes the follow-up stage in a purposeful direction in that it includes recognition and discussion of client strengths and reflection on action and outcomes in light of the client’s values and worldview informed by faith. Potential follow up questions can include the following:

- *How did your new-found recognition of your strengths affect your decision making and your work since we last met?*
- *How could you have been more effective in achieving your goals since we last met by being more purposeful in leveraging your strengths?*
- *Are there any strengths that we discussed that could have gotten in your way, understanding that over-reliance on strengths can sometimes be a stumbling block?*
- *Tell me how your faith informed your action planning and activities as you worked to achieve your goals?*
- *How has your work since we last met been in alignment with your faith and the call that God has had on your life?*
- *What challenges did you face, if any, with any disharmony between your values and your goals?*
- *What external pressures or challenges did you face from others as you worked to achieve your goals?*

The purpose of these questions is to encourage reflection and understanding of internal motivation of and environmental influences on the client. Honest answers to the questions above can help both the client and the coach identify patterns that influence results ranging from excellent to poor. This pattern detection, discussion, articulation and understanding can accelerate client transformation and bring the client to greater performance faster.

**Figure 3: Steps in the *Convergence and Transformation Acceleration Model***



### **Conclusion: Transformation Will Happen**

Creating awareness in the client is a coaching core competency (ICF, 2014). Building awareness of natural strengths is one critical area of discovery. For many people, faith is an integral part of their backgrounds, value systems and actions, even if they are not always aware of its influence. As coaches work to help clients understand themselves, their actions and reactions, and other beliefs and experiences that drive their choices actions, convergence of all of these threads into one meaningful whole will enrich the client's coaching outcomes.

If a client is willing and wanting to explore faith and its effect on her or himself, the coach will be serving God well if the coach accepts the challenge. As co-creators of a better future defined by personal excellence on all fronts, spiritual formation is worthy of the efforts of committed coach-client teams. The work will transform, illustrating Charry's contention that "those whose work is in tension with their Christian calling will have to seek redirection of their skills" (1997, p. 241). We are all changed by our walk.

In the end, is this not that what coaching is about? We help our clients identify the skills they have to solve problems, change direction, and achieve excellence. We help them become self-correcting and self-generating (Flaherty, 2010, p. 3). If effective Christian coaching helps clients align the actions with their most deeply-help Christo-centric beliefs, we can call that a job well done. The Christian coach will have fulfilled a much-needed role for the client and the Kingdom, and the client will be well-prepared to move forward to continue learning, growing, performing and serving.

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#### **About the Author**

Bill Florin is a master's degree candidate in the Organizational Leadership Program in the School of Business & Leadership. He anticipates graduating in May 2016. He graduated with honors with a Bachelor of Science in Business Management from the University of Phoenix. Bill owns his own company, Resu-mazing Services Company, and helps his clients with career development tools and coaching, with emphasis on résumés, cover letters, LinkedIn profiles, and interview preparation coaching. In his fifth year of business, he is expanding his range of services to include professional coaching as part of his work at Regent.

Bill also does volunteer work in career development, serving on the board of directors and as a volunteer trainer and coach with TBICO (T-B-EYE-CO), The Bridge to Independence and Career Opportunities, a non-profit organization in Danbury, Connecticut. He serves as the council chair in his church, leads a small study group and is the current club president of the Rotary Club of Monroe.

Bill is married to his wife Carin, who is a registered nurse at St. Vincent's Medical Center in Bridgeport, Connecticut. They have two children; Emily is 10 and Daniel is 8.

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