Executive coaching can focus on personal behavior change, enhancing leadership effectiveness, fostering stronger relationships, personal development, and/or work–family integration or specific performance issues on the job. K. M. Wasylyshyn (2003a) and H. Levinson (personal communication, 2003) suggested that executive coaching reaches for a deeper level of clinical and therapeutic intervention. The authors propose a health-enhancing, developmental model of coaching anchored in a process of deep interpersonal communication. This approach is neither a surface approach nor a therapeutic approach. It is an interpersonal approach focused on safe, secure communication in which difficult, complicated issues are addressed and where crucial conversations occur. In this process, the executive is approached as a person, one who stands behind the executive mask or facade.

Executives, especially chief executives, can be egocentric, action-oriented, competitive risk-takers with above-average anger and hostility (J. D. Quick, Cooper, Gavin, & Quick, 2002). Power is a prime motivator for executives, who are not typically introspective personalities (Nelson, 2003). Therefore, an executive’s role can become a mask that traps him or her into communication and behaviors that come from neither the heart nor the soul. Communication and behavior that fail to originate in the core of who we are and what we believe lack personal integrity and fail the test of authenticity. Luthans and Avolio (2003) traced the historical roots of authenticity to ancient Greek philosophy (“To thine own self be true”). For them, authentic leadership best represents a confluence of positive organizational behavior that emerges from positive psychology, transformational leadership, and ethical and moral perspective taking. 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ecutives and leaders who are authentic display good character, personal integrity, optimism, and a sense of direction.

To develop fully and grow healthy, to transcend simple physical and psychological health, we suggest that executives must work and live with character and a deep sense of personal integrity (Gavin, Quick, Cooper, & Quick, 2003; J. C. Quick, Gavin, Cooper, & Quick, 2004). So what we are suggesting is that to reach for that spirit of personal integrity requires executive coaching through deep interpersonal communication. We find that in deep interpersonal communication a dialogue occurs in which executives are able to enhance their health and further approach greater authenticity. Furthermore, deep interpersonal communication is the key to building healthy, supportive, positive relationships in the workplace and is essential to working together (Macik-Frey, Quick, & Quick, in press).

Wasylyshyn (2003b) showed us that executive coaching can focus on personal behavior change while enhancing leadership effectiveness and fostering stronger relationships, personal development, and/or work–family integration. As she well knows, some executive coaching reaches for a deeper level of clinical and therapeutic intervention. We are proposing a health-enhancing developmental model of coaching anchored in a process of deep interpersonal communication. This approach is neither a surface approach nor a therapeutic approach. It is an interpersonal approach focused on safe, secure communication in which difficult, complicated issues are addressed and crucial conversations occur (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2002). Through this process, the executive is approached as a person, one who stands behind the executive mask or facade.

**Executive Communication**

We propose a two-tiered model of executive communication. The outer tier is one in which the executive engages in functional, organizational communication through a wide variety of channels and mediums. The inner tier is one in which the executive engages in much more personal and intimate communication; this is where deep interpersonal communication occurs. At the organizational level, the executive is a communicator and source of information in a variety of roles, originally etched out by Mintzberg (1973) in his classic *The Nature of Managerial Work*. Communication in these various roles, such as the interpersonal role as leader or the informational role as spokesperson, is performance related and is separable from the executive’s need for a much deeper form of personal, intimate dialogue. Although executive coaching may be done at the performance level with a focus on the executive’s roles or mask, that category of executive coaching does not get at the deeper level of the executive as an authentic human being. Behind the mask is an authentic human being in the process of development (Fosdick, 1943; Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Few executives are very clear about this distinction between the roles they fulfill as executives and their performances related to these roles and who they are as persons apart from the role. This is due in part to their lack of introspection, yet self-awareness born of introspection is a key element of emotional competence (Nelson, 2003).

At a deep interpersonal level, the executive must deal with his or her more complex, emotional, and conflicted nature (Levinson, 1985). It is at this deeper emotional level that emotional toxins may accumulate within the executive ranks, having adverse health effects both on the individual executive and on the larger organizational system as emotional pain spreads (Frost, 2002). One important source of emotional pain is unresolved inner conflict and tension. Resolving inner conflict and tension through emotional expression has consistently been found to...
have health-enhancing value (Pennebaker, 1997). Furthermore, the processes of confession and expressive writing outlined by Pennebaker (1995, 1997) enable the person to develop a deeper understanding of his or her complex emotional life.

Our health-enhancing, developmental model of executive coaching through deep interpersonal communication may serve as a form of primary prevention within an organization (J. C. Quick, Quick, Nelson, & Hurrell, 1997), which compliments Schein’s notion of organizational therapy (J. C. Quick & Gavin, 2000). Primary prevention is aimed at addressing the source of the stress and pressure that create the risk for distress, strain, and dysfunction. Because executives are a central driving force for many employees within organizations, their actions or lack thereof may serve as positive or negative forces for employees. Thus, the influence of top leadership on the organization impacts the organization’s work climate and morale of employees as well as individual and organizational performance. When the health of one executive is enhanced, that can have positive, health-enhancing effects for tens and hundreds and possibly thousands of others within the organization who are in varying degrees influenced by that senior executive. Likewise, we suggest that when an executive does not effectively deal with emotional conflict and expression, but rather acts out anxieties, anger, and/or frustrations within the work environment, the resulting negative consequences affect not only the health of that executive, but also the health of the entire organization.

Business as Public Service

What is our common view of business, in contrast to our common view of the professions? One colloquial stereotype suggests that men and women go into business to make money, whereas individuals are “called” into the professions, such as the ministry to care for the distressed, psychology to strengthen the talented and help the traumatized, or medicine to heal the sick. We suggest that an executive may be called, too, and that, like Solomon (1999), business might better be thought of as public service that contributes to the common good when it is practiced in a positive, healthy manner. Focusing only on the short-term issue of making money can lead to behavior and performance that lacks personal integrity and is at variance with the common good. Some of the more recent negative examples in this regard come from Enron, HealthSouth, and MCI (formerly WorldCom) and strike at the heart of this issue. While Xerox paid a significant penalty of $10,000,000 during 2002 for accounting irregularities, MCI’s penalty from the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) was a quantum move above that, amounting to $500,000,000 for a misstatement of earnings in the amount of $11,000,000,000.

When health status is considered, there is a positive correlation between one’s socioeconomic status and health status, as indicated by morbidity and mortality (J. C. Quick, Gavin, Cooper, & Quick, 2000). We find this same positive relationship at the level of national economies. Specifically, those national economies with the highest economic (read business) markers, such as domestic product and economic activity, also are the ones with the highest health status markers, again considering morbidity and mortality. These data suggest to us that good business and economic activity is in the collective best interest of people. These data seem to us also to stand in contrast to the notion that people and profits are in conflict. Although we can accept that such a conflict may exist in the short term, we further believe that the rationale and logic for a conflict between people and profits breaks down in the long term.

While accepting the notion that business can be framed as a public service in the common good is not central to either our
model of deep interpersonal communication or to an understanding of executive health, we view the notion of business as public service as a useful contextual framework. This is because the process of working together connotes both a sense of personal integrity and integration as well as a cooperative and collaborative model of collective activity that stands in contrast to the strictly competitive, free enterprise economic model that emphasizes survival of the fittest (J. C. Quick et al., 2004).

The Mask(s): The Roles of the Executive

According to Boettinger (1975), management is an art form, essentially a science of the artificial (Simon, 1969/1996), which relies on three essential skills of the artistic process. These are craft, vision, and communication. For Boettinger, one of the responsibilities of senior executives is to teach, guide, and mentor. As an art, management relies on dynamic interaction and examination of the results of one’s actions; that is, one must learn from experience. These notions are consistent with Luthans and Avolio’s (2003) developmental ideas concerning authentic leadership, which requires both optimism and direction. The managerial skill of communication to which Boettinger refers is the same organizational communication to which we referred earlier. It has little to do with the personal and intimate and everything to do with the capacity of the executive to project positive power and influence through the organization he or she leads.

Mintzberg (1973) found that managers enact their positions through a set of 10 roles in which communication is integrally involved. These 10 roles are organized as follows.

- **Interpersonal roles**
  - Figurehead
  - Leader
  - Liaison

- **Informational roles**
  - Monitor
  - Disseminator
  - Spokesman

- **Decisional roles**
  - Entrepreneur
  - Disturbance handler
  - Resource allocator
  - Negotiator

While the increasing complexity of the 21st-century business environment resulting from the new era of globalization has dramatically changed much of the nature of managerial work, there is still merit in the core of Mintzberg’s conceptualization. The 10 roles he identified do rely heavily on organizational and formal communication. The forums, venues, and mediums through which managers communicate in these roles have been transformed by the revolutions of information technology and the information age.

These managerial roles, or masks to use our terminology, are part of a facade through which others view the manager. Levinson’s (1985) notions of an executive’s deeper complexity attributable to the conflicts of his or her emotional life are very much alive behind this facade. Although the facade may be functional, have utilitarian value, and not necessarily be directly in conflict with the executive’s deeper emotional life, the authentic person of the executive does require a deeper, more personal, and more intimate dialogue to be healthy. That dialogue must come through deep interpersonal communication. This can happen in a long-term relationship or a longer term coaching engagement in which there is a role shift from executive coach to trusted advisor (Wasylyshyn, in press).

Dialogue Through Deep Interpersonal Communication

In addition to the need to communicate through his or her various formal roles, the executive has a deeper interpersonal need...
for communication and relationship that is seated at the limbic or emotional level of the brain. This deep interpersonal communication is the target of our coaching model as it reaches beyond the superficial mask of control, drive, and competition and develops within the executive an awareness, understanding, and management of the emotions that are fundamental to his or her being. This level of communication functions at a deep level of trust and requires open, nonthreatening exchange. Operating in a relatively isolated realm, with limited opportunities to express this deep emotional communication need, leaves the executive vulnerable to suppressed emotional anxiety, conflict, and expression. Kets de Vries (1989) wrote eloquently about the problem of loneliness of command, and Lynch’s (2000) clinical evidence on the medical consequences of loneliness for executives and others is compelling. Hallowell (1999) suggested that the human moment at work is the antidote to this experience of human isolation and loneliness. To be healthy is to be connected. This is one of psychology’s gifts to the world.

What may be a more insidious, yet important, active problem is that of toxic emotions and emotional pain in the workplace (Frost, 2002). Executives are not typically well versed in the complexities and dynamics of emotions and emotional life. Yet the damage that toxic emotions and emotional pain can do to an organization’s bottom line is real and substantive. For executives interested in the health and vitality of their organizations, partly reflected in bottom-line results, there is an incentive to address these deeper issues, within themselves if not within others. Schein has talked about addressing toxic emotions at work through organizational therapy (J. C. Quick & Gavin, 2000). In this framework, executive leaders may serve as homeopathic agents within the organization to metabolize toxic emotions and serve as therapeutic agents. However, the process of metabolizing toxic emotions also places the executive who is acting in a healthy way at risk in terms of his or her own health. Thus, executives need coaches who help them metabolize, through a process of deep interpersonal communication, any toxic emotions they may have absorbed.

A complicating issue in the executive coach’s attempt to reconnect the executive to his emotional foundation is the executive’s poor introspection abilities, a trait correlated with the emotional competency dimension of self-awareness (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). Self-awareness has been consistently identified as crucial in identifying higher success in managers and leaders (Bar-On, 1997; Goleman, 1995, 1998), and it is felt to be the cornerstone of emotional intelligence (Boyatzis, Goleman, & Rhee, 2000). Sala (2001) found that higher level executives tend to overrate themselves by 15% on the self-awareness cluster compared with lower level executives. That is, they rated themselves 15% higher in this dimension than others in their work environment in a 360-degree assessment. He also found that there was a significant positive relationship between level of management and self-misperception of this ability (Sala, 2001, 2003). Perhaps as the executive rises in the ranks, the feedback from others is decreased sufficiently enough to impact the executive’s ability to accurately assess his or her emotional awareness. Regardless, the inability to appreciate their relative weakness in this area may contribute to a reluctance to remove the mask and engage in deep interpersonal communication.

Executive coaches can play a health-enhancing role with executives by establishing a dialogue that characterizes deep interpersonal communication. In dialogue we talk about the most important aspects of our lives and drop the mask(s) that the larger world often sees. The work of psychologist James Pennebaker (1995, 1997) showed us the health-enhancing value of
talking about the most troubling, painful, and important issues in open and expressive ways. Coaches can help executives do just that to resolve tension, conflict, and emotional pain. This is heartfelt communication, and it may even open a pathway between the executive head and heart (J. C. Quick, Gavin, Cooper, & Quick, 2004). Here, the coach is an immunizing agent, an antibody for the organization. In this regard, the coach needs a coach to keep himself or herself healthy and in balance, defended against any emotional toxins from the system.

To do this work, the executive coach needs a coach. We need our own coach to help us to metabolize the emotional toxins of upset, disturbance, and concern as we work through deeper emotional issues that are our own response to the emotional toxins and pain executives express to us. Harry Emerson Fosdick (1943), the minister of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in the early 1900s, learned this firsthand when he stepped out of the pulpit as a great preacher and into the pastoral counseling role. The first time he opened his pastoral office to his parishioners, he was overwhelmed with parishioners talking about suicide and other deeply disturbing issues in which he had no expertise. However, by reaching out to the psychological community in New York City, Fosdick learned to grow deeper in his life as a pastor and counselor and coach.

In our professional work with executives, general military officers, and university presidents, we may be characterized as psychiatrists, consultants, “the stress doctors,” and ministers in addition to psychologists. What has struck us as important is the need great men and women have for a deeper personal connection in which they can feel safe and secure to express and metabolize their deeper emotions and pains. While there is clearly catharsis in the moment, this is not a quick fix approach to executive coaching. Pennebaker (1997) found that revisiting emotional traumas is an on-going process of a lifetime. To coach through deep interpersonal communication is not necessarily to intervene therapeutically or psychoanalytically. We are not talking about psychopathology or mental illness. We are suggesting that these normal, healthy human processes of communication and relationship are essential to the health and well-being of executives, whose psychological health has benefits for all those with whom they work in organizations.

**Concluding Thoughts About Healthy Executives**

We have discussed executive coaching through deep interpersonal communication as a vehicle for executive development and for enhancing the organization’s health. This model aims to compliment existing models of executive coaching evaluated by Wasylyshyn (2003b). While much of executive coaching has been viewed as remedial in nature, Wasylyshyn (2003a) showed us that coaching the superkeepers is aimed at the top high-potential executives for the purpose of long-term development and contribution. This moves us away from the therapeutic and remedial intervention toward developmental and preventive work. To the extent we make this move, we are in sync with the zeitgeist in positive psychology whose emphasis is building on individual strengths and abilities, rather than correcting shortcomings and limitations.

Although coaching through deep interpersonal communication may have therapeutic value to the extent it drains toxic emotions from the executive ranks, its aim is to build relationship and enhance personal integrity. Our observation has been that healthy executives do build relationships, with coaches and experts as well as with employees throughout their organizations. Such was the case for Joseph M. Grant during the great Texas banking crash of the mid-1980s, the most difficult and trying period in his life (Grant, 1996). As
chairman and chief executive of Texas American Bankshares, he reached out to coaching resources, he built a management team to take the bank through the closure process, and he closed the bank and turned over its charter to the U.S. government with dignity and integrity. He exhibited an excellent example of authentic leadership (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Today, Grant is chairman and chief executive of Texas Capital Bancshares in Dallas, a bank that has just completed a highly successful initial public offering (IPO).

Coaching through deep interpersonal communication is an enabling process through which executives may better connect their heads with their hearts. What is behind the mask? Behind the mask of every executive is an authentic person who has deep feelings, emotions, values, beliefs, and character. We are suggesting that the role of the executive coach in our model is to enable that authentic person to become an authentic leader who exhibits personal integrity and great character for his or her own well-being, for the health of those around him or her, and for the health of the organization.

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