

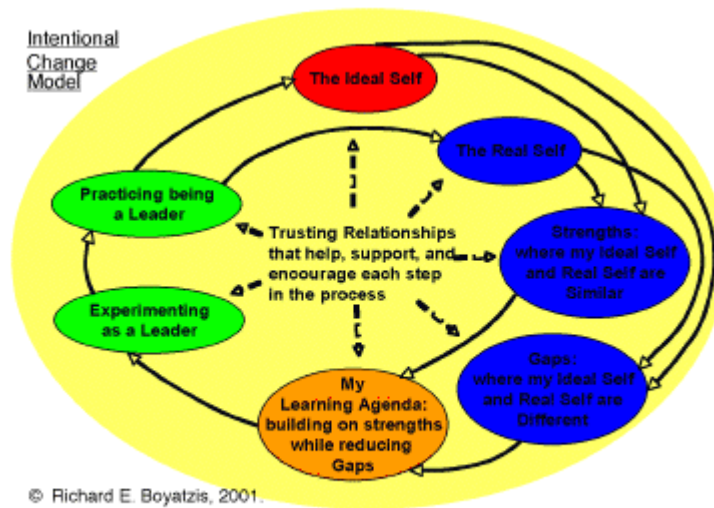
Creating Sustained Change - the Ideal Self

Over the years I have worked as a Coach, I have increasingly realised just how difficult it is to help people create sustained changes in their behaviours, attitudes and self-image. At the same time, I have also been amazed by the extent to which people do, on occasions; make sustained change in just such areas.

For example, for the past six years I have, most weeks, gone to a yoga class. Nothing unusual in that - except I don't actually enjoy yoga! I believe it's good for me - but then there are many things that I believe would be good for me that I don't do. Knowing that something is good for me isn't enough in itself to cause me to do it.

So why do I do yoga? It is for a simple and powerful reason. I have made doing yoga a part of my identity. I like to think of myself as someone who does yoga. When, a year or so back, I thought about packing the yoga in, I noticed that just that thought created a real sense of loss, of something missing in my life.

So what I have learnt is that, if I am to successfully change my behaviours, I need to make them part of the Self I aspire to being.



I was interested to discover that this is a topic which Richard Boyatzis has given considerable thought to in developing his theory of Intentional Change, the core driver of which is what he refers to as the Ideal Self.



He suggests that the creating sustained change at the individual level involves:

1. identifying my Ideal Self - who do I want to be?
2. identifying my Real Self - who am I?
3. developing a Learning Agenda - to build on my strengths and work on my weaknesses
4. experimenting and practicing the new behaviours, thoughts, feelings or perceptions
5. having trusting relationships that enable me to experience and process each discovery in the process.

The powerhouse in this process is the Ideal Self. It is made up of three major components:

1. a compelling image of a desired future articulating one's dreams, aspirations and fantasies;
2. hope caused by one's optimism and belief in one's general competence;
3. and a comprehensive sense of and acceptance of one's core identity (past strengths, traits and other enduring dispositions).

More in "Resonant Leadership" by Boyatzis & McKee, Harvard Business School Press, 2005.

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