

choice

the magazine of professional coaching

Aha Moments &
Breakthroughs

Brief Brain-based
Coaching

Systemic
Constellations

Creativity
in Coaching
Tools, tips
& techniques

Reproduced with the permission of choice Magazine, www.choice-online.com

Reproduced with the permission of choice Magazine, www.choice-online.com

Core Needs

The fuel in your tank and the answer to “what’s next?”

By Jonathan ‘Jeb’ Bates, PCC, MSOD

Sandra came to coaching at age 40 seeking what to do next in her career. After 10 years with her current company and two years into her current role as a marketing director in a large manufacturing firm she was beginning to think about where her career journey would lead her next. While it had been easy to plan the path of her past promotions, she was now at a crossroads.

Sandra didn’t really want her boss’s job (and he wasn’t going anywhere any time soon), nor did she like any of the other options she saw in the division. Even though she liked her company, she began to think she might need to look outside. Deliberate and strategic, she wondered if she could find an organization she liked as much as her current employer and whether she would be happy in a higher level marketing role. With a young family, balance was already a challenge. Greater responsibility, while an exciting challenge, also added stress.

We focused our coaching first on identifying her Core Needs. Core Needs are not about salary, benefits or working conditions.* Core Needs are those aspects of the client’s identity and values fulfilled by those activities and situations that provide positive energy for the client. For some, achievement and accomplishment are important Core Needs. For others, connection, collaboration and fairness are essential.

Our Core Needs are like “fuel tanks.” When our Core Needs are being fulfilled we feel engaged, productive and satisfied. If one or more of the tanks are empty, we will feel it regardless of whether some other tanks are filled to the top. While it seems rare for someone to have all the tanks filled to the brim at all times, having a least some fuel in each of the tanks is needed to function day-to-day without disengagement, dissatisfaction and ultimately, burnout.

By understanding their Core Needs, the client can assess, investigate and make personal and professional choices that will work for them. A workplace, role and manager that can



put fuel in some or all of the tanks leads to a happy, productive and engaged individual.

Core Needs really must be met on all three levels: place, role and manager. Working in a fantastic job with a great organization but with a terrible boss won’t work. An excellent manager and an awesome job will not work for long if the company’s environment is counter to your Core Needs. And of course, no company or manager can help you make it work if your job just isn’t right.

Sandra’s Core Needs list consisted of: achievement, accomplishment, meaningful relationships, trust, challenge, independence, teamwork, peace, time alone for reflection nurturing, learning and growing, helping and caring for others, and making a contribution in the world. As we discussed this list, she realized that her favorite jobs had provided her with nearly all

of her Core Needs in one way or another.

She also saw that her two least favorite roles had been missing key items. In one, she had little opportunity to learn and grow; she could have done the job “in her sleep,” and there was no sense of making a contribution in the world. In the other, she worked primarily alone without being part of a team, and due to the long term nature of the project, there was little sense of accomplishment.

Armed with this information, we first looked at the roles available to her in her current organization. She realized the company environment met her Core Needs more closely than she had thought. She decided that she preferred to stay there if she could make it work. We then identified how each of the potential internal roles would match her Core Needs list and where they would not. We brainstormed ideas of how the roles might be creatively “tweaked” to better meet some of her needs. One role in particular seemed promising if the group leader was willing to give her some leeway to build connections across divisions to foster collaboration and teamwork and accomplish something greater.

We then created a list of interview questions she could ask when interviewing outside the company to ascertain how well her Core Needs would be met on all three levels: place, role and manager. Since Sandra had an interview with a potential employer already lined up through a recruiter, she decided to test out her new interview questions. What she found surprised her. She realized that even asking the questions seemed to rattle the hiring manager. As she probed, she came to realize that the independence she sought and embodied would not be welcomed and appreciated in the

A Brief List of Core Needs

While there are many more possibilities, here is a sample list of typical Core Needs. As always, the client’s own words for describing their Core Needs are most important.

Acceptance	Connection	Learning and Growth
Accomplishment	Contribution	Making a Difference
Acknowledgement	Creativity	New Experiences
Adventure	Down Time	Part of Something Bigger
Balance	Efficiency	Physical Challenge
Being in Nature	Excitement	Recognition
Celebration	Fairness	Spiritual Connection
Challenge	Freedom	Teamwork
Collaboration	Fun	Variety/Change
Community	Helping Others	
Competition	Independence	
Completion	Leading	

Identifying Core Needs

You can identify your client’s core needs by asking them some simple appreciative questions:

- Think about a great work experience you have had either at your present organization or with a past employer. What was important to you about your work in that situation?
- When you look back on a day (or week), what are things you consider positive or exciting?
- What aspects of your work give you the most satisfaction?
- What is important to you about how you and your manager or colleagues work together?
- If there were one thing you would change for the better about your job, what would it be? Why?

team and company culture.

Following her interview experience, she set up a meeting with the leader who was the business owner of the potential internal opportunity she felt might be a possibility. She employed some of her interview questions in that meeting and probed the leader’s willingness to be creative with the role. She found the leader to be interested, engaged and open to possibilities. In the meeting, both became excited about the impact that could be created. Sandra also gained a new impression of her potential manager that she really liked.

With the likelihood that the position would become open in six months due to a planned retirement, the timing was perfect. Sandra accepted the position. Based on her understanding of the interplay of her Core Needs, we worked to create a strategy to make it work for her. She found ways to overcome her former concerns about balance, responsibility and stress. She realized that her fear about maintaining work/life balance for her family was mostly related to her need to nurture and care for others while also creating achievement. By shifting her focus a bit, she found a way to make the two work together better than before. She also came to understand that she could handle the added responsibility and stress by incorporating time for peace, time alone and reflection. Despite her greater responsibility, she experienced greater calmness and resourcefulness.

For Sandra, understanding and using her Core Needs gave her the answer to “What’s Next?” and the path to get there. As a coach, supporting your client in identifying and pursuing their Core Needs makes all the difference. ●

* “One More Time, How Do You Motivate Employees?” by Frederick Herzberg, *Harvard Business Review*, 1968. <https://hbr.org/2003/01/one-more-time-how-do-you-motivate-employees>

Reproduced with the permission of choice Magazine, www.choice-online.com

Reproduced with the permission of choice Magazine, www.choice-online.com