



## It's You

■ JOHN SHUFELDT, MD, JD, MBA, FACEP

Maybe you read my columns in the two previous issues of *JUCM* and had a brief moment of self-awareness. Maybe one of your co-workers put them in your mailbox. Did you actually ask your co-workers and subordinates if you were the “cancer” I was talking about? They are not going to be honest. They care little about you and fear for their jobs, and so, are hardly going to be candid. You may have even told your significant other, but she already knows the real you and has come to the same conclusion. Maybe you even took a shot at the messenger, but no matter what, there’s no hiding from the facts. Unlike Arnold, “It’s not a tumor” Schwarzenegger, it is a tumor and it’s you.

What do you do? You could continue to blame others for your lot in life, but where will that take you? By the way, your employer has not told you yet, but you are on the way out, so you better get your act together fast because another job change at your age does not look good on the old resume and you have abused too many vendors and past employees to find meaningful work, even in a city as big as yours. So now what?

### The How and Why of Coaching

Personal development involves a sometimes painful examination of your opportunities for improvement. The process entails 360-degree feedback from all the people you interact with, both inside and outside of the organization. The feedback should be direct, honest and unbiased. This sort of assessment is best performed by a professional coach. Typically, such coaches are psychologists, organizational behavior experts, successful retired executives, or educators. Historically, coaching was reserved for the underperformers. Today, however, leaders in all fields are using professional coaches to ensure that they reach their full potential.

The concept of coaching goes back to the Yale v. Harvard Football days of the late 1800s, when Yale hired the great Walter Camp and beat Harvard 26 out of 30 times in American-rules

football. Since then, coaching has become an integral component of athletics. Professional athletes, singers, and performers employ coaches for the entire duration of their careers. Coaching has also proved useful in the classroom. The students of teachers who are coached have better classroom test scores than their counterparts. The typical pedagogy of collegiate coaching, wherein at some point, the student no longer needs a coach, does not necessarily apply, however, in the professional world.

In some careers, people simply peak early. For example, my pop music career was over well before my 30s. People in other careers, such as mathematics, baseball, and pole dancing, also peak before age 30. Compare these jobs to ones that require complex interpersonal skills or an understanding of science or nature. The average age of a Fortune 500 CEO is 52. One study found the maximal productivity for a geologist occurs in the mid-50s.

### Benefits of Coaching

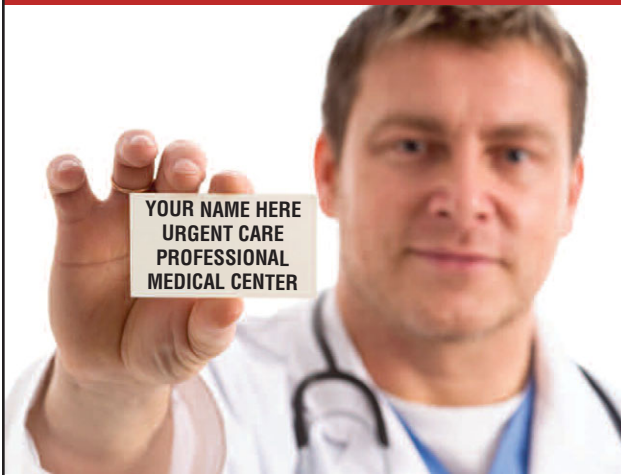
Who can benefit from a coach? We all can! Studies reveal, however, that very few of us will actively seek out professional assistance to help us stretch. Some of us hate the idea of being observed, others fear that having a coach means you are not competent or are convinced that the coach was hired to report back to his or her superiors. Remember, everyone can benefit from being coached. Sometimes, it may be the most seemingly trivial thing in the world, but the trickle-down effect from this inconsequential behavior can be a game changer.

Take famed UCLA basketball coach John Wooden. At the start of every season, he had the entire team sit down while he taught them to put on their sweat socks. Back in the Wooden era, UCLA was a powerhouse. Many on the team went on to careers in the NBA. Imagine their chagrin when they were being taught how to put on socks. Wooden was teaching two points: Putting on socks correctly prevents blisters. He taught them how to roll the socks up their feet and ankles and then smooth out the creases. Preventing blisters helps athletes stay in the game and may be the difference between a win and a loss. He was also demonstrating that seemingly small details separate winners from losers. “Details create success” was the credo of the UCLA men’s basketball program.



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## HEALTH LAW

*If your ego can accept the fact that you may not be perfect, then enlist the help of a coach.*

Good coaches drill into the details, reviewing the nuances of whatever role they are evaluating. What was your body language during that discussion? How did you open the meeting? Did you communicate the message so that everyone was clear on your intent? Were the results effectively communicated? How did you coach that employee? Did you communicate in a way that the employees understood the message? Was your communication style belittling?

Highly successful individuals are intentional. They engage in very deliberate practice to develop the full range of behaviors and traits required for sustained performance at an elite level. First, they identify areas of deficiencies. This is a tough, ego-bruising exercise. A good coach can gently help you through the exercise of self-reflection. Expertise requires transitioning from unconscious incompetence (I am incompetent and unaware), to conscious incompetence (I know my weaknesses), to conscious competence (I have to consciously work at it), to unconscious competence (It has become an ingrained habit). This evolution can only begin with the transition from incompetence to consciousness and that can only happen with either introspection or coaching.

With only a diploma in hand, few of us can muster the level of introspection necessary for sustained, elite performance. However, with a good coach, many of us could. During budgetary crises, coaching, mentoring, and training are the first things to get cut. However, doing so is akin to cutting marketing dollars when more patients are needed to improve the top line.

### Training and the 'Tumor'

As providers and operators, we always want the best, newest equipment and supplies, no matter the cost. We quote statistics about patient safety and reduced complication rates. We argue about search engine optimization, a larger media buy, bigger signage—the list goes on and on. Yet, are we willing to turn the lens toward ourselves? Are there techniques and strategies you could employ to produce amazing results? Are there things you can do to motivate your employees that would enable them to carry your business further?

If your ego can accept the fact that you may not be perfect, then enlist the help of a coach and move from unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence and watch your career and business flourish. As for my friend, "The Tumor," one way or another, I suspect the outcome is predestined. ■