Cognitive-developmental approach to coaching: an interview with Robert Kegan

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Dear Bob,

Your work on the evolution of consciousness and its implications for supporting adult learning and professional development is very important for coaching. I believe that most coaches hold dear to their heart the idea of the possibility and necessity of ongoing psychological transformation in adulthood and the need for a better fit between adult capacities and the hidden demands of modern life. It is not surprising then that your approach to understanding adult development, well known as a meaningful and coherent theory, now is in the process of creating its own niche in coaching practice. I would like this process to be the focus of our interview.

Keywords: transformation; developmental process; meaning making system; immunity to change; subject-object interview

Q: You have worked in several professional fields that have close relationships with coaching. It appears now that what you do is becoming even closer to it: working with leaders, presenting for and training coaches. What makes you go in this direction? I assume that it is happening willingly.

Yes, no one has handcuffed me and dragged me this way... [laughter]. I suppose the truth is that I am less attached to the identity of ‘therapist’ or ‘counsellor’ or ‘coach’ or ‘consultant,’ or even ‘teacher’ (though I’ve valued all these roles, and regard them all as different). About 40 years ago I fell in love with a single phenomenon – the way we make meaning; how we defend, and ultimately transform, our meaning-making systems – and the practice side of my work has been an ongoing exploration of
different ways to honor and support this activity. I have always felt that transformational learning is an exciting focus for practice, but also a bit vague as a subject of study, because ten different people can have ten different ideas about what it is that is actually transforming.

**Q: What is a transformation for you?**

The fast answer would be to say ‘transformations in the way we make meaning; changes in our natural epistemologies; changes in what we are “subject to”, and what we can take as “object”’. That probably sounds pretty dry and abstract, but it’s actually not at all. It has to do with what people can see and what they can’t yet see; the thoughts and feelings we have and the thoughts and feelings that ‘have us’; what agenda we are driving and what agenda is driving us. ‘Epistemology’ is about the distinction between what is available for you to work on (‘object’) and what you are so close to that you cannot see it, so it is working on you (‘subject’).

**Q: And you began attending to this kind of transformation as a psychotherapist?**

It was apparent early on that these kinds of developmental ideas had value to the enterprise of clinical psychology, psychotherapy and counselling, and I spent a good part of my life training therapists to use these kinds of ideas in their work. I continue to be a licensed clinical psychologist and continue to see a very small number of clients in therapy. I take a lot of satisfaction in seeing the ways these ideas have found their way into people’s clinical practices. But as an optimal venue for my greatest interest – supporting the transformation of mindsets and meaning-making – I wasn’t sure I had found it in therapy.

**Q: How so?**

To start with, it is the decontextualized nature of the work. I felt like my clients and I were at a disadvantage for not somehow co-occupying the living spaces we were talking about. Everything was ‘out there’, and we seemed to be residing in some private sanctuary ‘in here’. There are benefits to a sanctuary, to be sure, but I became curious about the benefits of ‘bringing therapy into people’s lives’ rather than their ‘bringing their life into therapy’. A related frustration is that there were obviously many people who could benefit from the kinds of support I knew how to provide, but who would never go for therapy. These might be people who did not experience themselves as depressed, for example, but who felt challenged by some limitation in the way they were carrying on. Or they might be people for whom the trappings, meanings, or processes of therapy just don’t fit their self-concept or mode of ‘problem-solving’. ‘How do we get men to go to therapy?’ is a question the profession has asked forever. Like nearly everything else I’m getting credit for these days, I never set out to work on this problem, or had any idea of anything to contribute to it. It just happened. One day I looked up and saw that under the guise of a ‘coach’ my colleagues and I were creating developmentally transformative contexts for just the sort of person everyone wanted to know how to ‘get into therapy’.
Q: I am very glad that this has happened. Bob, now I would like to ask about your first book. You developed a theory of orders of consciousness that is becoming more and more influential amongst coaches. At the same time this theory was first published in 1982 and naturally was conceived even earlier, perhaps nearly 30 years ago. What is your relationship with this theory now? Do you stand by it?

Not only ‘by it’, but ‘in it’, in the sense that it remains the foundation from which I practice, as a teacher, therapist, or coach. But of course it has grown and developed as we hope a person will. Like a person, a theory too will have its blind spots, which it needs to overcome if it is going to develop, and not simply end in its first incarnation. In *The Evolving Self* I published the results of about six or seven years of work looking at the landscape of internal psychological development across the lifespan. I did a piece of original research but mainly I was doing a synthetic kind of work, a meta-analysis of the work of Piaget, Kohlberg, and others in this tradition. I intuited

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order of mind</th>
<th>Name of the order</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Object</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Impulsive</td>
<td>Impulse, perception</td>
<td>Reflexes, sensing, moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Imperial</td>
<td>Needs, interests, wishes</td>
<td>Impulse, perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interpersonal <em>(socialized mind)</em></td>
<td>Interpersonal relationship, mutuality</td>
<td>Needs, interests, wishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Institutional <em>(self-authorizing mind)</em></td>
<td>Authorship, identity, psychic administration, ideology</td>
<td>Interpersonal relationship, mutuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Inter-individual</td>
<td>Intersubjectivity of self system</td>
<td>Authorship, identity, psychic administration, ideology</td>
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Further reading:


Figure 1. Cognitive-developmental stages and subject-object balancing in Kegan’s theory (adapted from *The Evolving Self*, 1982).
an underlying driver for the different aspects of self-development they were so elegantly researching. And I wanted to marry this rigorous but dry cognitive psychology to an exploration of the internal experience of developing. I was creating a kind of ‘existential cognitive-developmental psychology’ that has remained the foundation of my work.

Q: Could you describe what has happened since that first book?

After *The Evolving Self* I worked for a good 12 years testing and refining that theory. The results of that were published in the book *In Over Our Heads*. It represented a refinement of the original theory. It is like looking at an adolescent and an adult – you can see the same person, you can see that the face is the same, but you can also see the way in which it has aged and hopefully developed. So the 1994 book, for example, is better in separating out meaning-making ‘structure’ from ‘style’, which was probably the biggest limitation of the earliest version of the theory. The revised theory recognized that people may exercise a ‘connected’ or ‘individuated’ style *throughout* their development, e.g. that one might be ‘self-authoring’ in either style (see Figure 1). Of course, its main contribution was an application of the theory to the hidden curriculum of adult life: What is really demanded of us and of our minds in order to succeed in our many adult roles as parents or partners and as workers or citizens? The book showed that we all spend some portion of our adult lives ‘in over our heads,’ i.e., trying to tackle a hidden curriculum that is more complex than we are; and that the majority of us do not construct the world in the self-authoring way that is required to thrive in a modern world.

Q: It is also a research-based book as far as I know?

Yes. In the years between the two books, we developed, tested, and published a research instrument, the Subject-Object Interview (SOI) (see Figure 2). It allowed us to assess, with a high degree of granularity and inter-rater reliability, where someone was in the evolution of their mindsets. Once we had our own distinct measure, that led to all kinds of research all around the world, and that research both validated the central premises of the theory and helped us to refine it. *In Over Our Heads* was possible because of lots of research studies done by many, many people other than myself.

By then I felt confident that we had a pretty good picture of the landscape of increasingly complex plateaus that people can climb to and reach in their meaning-making. It was clear what those plateaus looked like; it was clear that people spend longer and longer time on a plateau before moving to the next one. This of course makes sense because the overhaul of the system is a more and more complex venture. As more and more research was done we began to have a picture of the distribution of mental complexity. It became clear that there are fewer and fewer people at the higher reaches of mental complexity. All of this was like studying the whole process from the outside as a researcher looking at it and trying to better understand it.
How did it happen that your focus has changed from research to practice?

In the 90s we began turning more to what you might call an educator’s question rather than the researcher’s question: can you do anything to help people make these shifts, and to support the processes of development? My long-time colleague Lisa Lahey was the driving force behind this turn. We very gradually began developing what eventually became the ‘immunity to change’ approach, which is built on the same fundamental ideas as the theory itself – the development of the ability to take perspective on something which you were formally fused with, to make the invisible visible.

As we got deeper into this we realised that we were beginning to engage the whole phenomenon of development from the inside out, rather than just from the outside looking onto it. We were finding ways to actually join people in their subject/object balances and to begin giving them some initial experiences of what it was like to move something from subject to object. That led to the book *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work*. That book, which was published in about 2001, led to a whole new phase of work that was oriented to a form of application, a developmental practice in a personal learning context, which is completely compatible with the idea of coaching or counselling in the workplace.
Q: What did you learn through this process ‘from inside out’ as you said?
We found rather immediately that people tended to have a very powerful experience in a very short period of time, in a few hours, and they would frequently say things like ‘wow, I didn’t see that coming’. There is a big ‘aha’ to that process and it is very gratifying to lead people through it. At the same time, what people were really marvelling at was the power of an insight and the speed with which they could get to it. But we also saw that there is a big difference between insight and actually being able to change behaviour as result of it. Yes, we could help people see the way in which they were actually motivated to act in ways precisely suited to undermine their genuine aspirations (to be a better listener, or handle conflict better, or to exercise more). They were shown the ways in which living alongside those genuine aspirations there were hidden commitments, for example to maintain control, or to never have anyone be upset with them, which created the immunity to change. So the insight is great, but what can we do to help them overturn it?

Q: Is the answer to this question going to be in the new book?
Yes. And it is not just our answer. It is the answer we learned from working with people in every sector, across nearly every continent, over the last eight to ten years since we wrote How the Way We Talk. We suspected that the answer to How do I overturn my immunity to change? was also going to be the answer to How can we support development?, because it was likely the goals they were trying to accomplish were what Ronald Heifetz would call ‘adaptive challenges’: something that would require a person to ‘get bigger’ in order to accomplish.

This launched us on another whole phase of work in which we have been refining not just the theory of adult development, not just a practical approach by which people can see their ‘immunities to change’, but a deliberate learning process: a coaching arc that people can engage over four to six months, in which they actually put the insight to work to overturn their immunity.

In many cases the accomplishment of some very focused goal, for example to be less controlling or more collaborative, or a better listener, or to let yourself be closer to people, etc., might end up being a bit of a carrot or a Trojan horse. The pursuit of it may lead the person not just to develop some highly focused skill that allows them to meet that aspiration, but ends up helping them actually to transform their overall meaning-making system. As a result they don’t just learn to be more collaborative – they learn that in being more collaborative they need to actually grow beyond, let’s say, the self-authoring mind that has a fixed relationship to its own way of doing things. Therefore, the coaching process may have a double value – it not only helps people to accomplish a very specific, focused goal but it also leads to personal development that enables people to function more effectively in a very wide range of arenas.
Q: And I believe that all of this is in your new book, The Immunity to Change? This sounds very exciting and I can imagine that some people who are already fascinated by your theory will be very eager to use this approach in their practice. At the same time this is a territory in which the intention to influence the developmental process is very important. I remember your words from The Evolving Self that ‘amongst the many things a practitioner’s clients need protection from is the practitioner’s hopes for the client’s future, however benign and sympathetic these hopes may be’. But what I hear now is the explicit focus on developing people. What can you say about this discrepancy if there is one for you?

When I wrote The Evolving Self, I was obviously interested in people being better able to support others, first by their ability to be more accurately empathic – not just to have big hearts, but to really understand who was on the receiving end of their empathy. How can we be more empathic for the person who is actually there in front of us and not some person of our own invention? That is certainly one of the biggest values I think of constructive-developmental theory – it helps you to project less and to perhaps more accurately dwell within the world of your client. Once one is there and dwelling, then there are certain things that one can do that can be more or less supportive to their ongoing development, if that is a step or a journey that they are ready to continue.

I’m fine with the fact that most people we enter into coaching relationships with have very little interest in projects such as the development of their meaning-making systems. That would seem to most to be a pretty vague and a grandiose ambition. They are just somebody who has had consistent feedback, for example, from evaluation processes that they need, let’s say, to open up more with their work colleagues, and they realise that is very hard for them to do. The problem then is generalized or summarised into something like ‘communication difficulties’. It is not like the person is coming and saying: ‘I want to have a qualitative development in my epistemological capacity’. They don’t think that way. What they are looking for is how you can help them with their communication.

Q: But you see a link to something else?

I am joining them around the issue, but I am making it clear to them. ‘You are not going to get any quick fix from me – no magic-bullet skill. There are people who can do that for you. If your challenge or aspiration is a technical one like that, you would be well served to work with someone else, because it would be much faster and much less real work for you. On the other hand, my suspicion is that you would not be sitting across from me if you hadn’t already tried things like this and found that they were not very successful. In this case I warn you that I am a developmental psychologist and my notion is that to really accomplish this you are going to grow and there will be growing pains.’ They say, ‘but at the end of the day am I going to become a better communicator?’ and I say, ‘yes, if we’re successful together, in the process you will become one’.
Q: So the specific need for coaching drives developmental work, but only if the client explicitly chose it?
Of course. I am not pushing anybody to develop. But what happens is you come to be surprised that your communication difficulties, to stay with that example, are actually related to something that you had no idea about. For example, you come to learn that it is really related to your desire to be right and have things done according to your design and to maintain control of situations. Because of those commitments you don't listen very effectively to people and tend to cut them off rather quickly if they're moving off of what you think. In this case the whole communication difficulties are really more a function of these hidden commitments. That can be very eye-opening for you and that is the kind of learning that we are going to be entering into.

Q: What is noticeable in your books is a most accepting attitude towards people of all stages even when their ‘immunity to change’ is strong or if they are ‘in over their heads’. But you seem to have much stronger view in relation to leaders. You said, ‘in a complex world, a complex mind in the leader is no luxury’. Could you say how important this is for you?
Oh, you have been reading my forays into public opinion and the popular press! It’s true I wrote an op. ed. in USA Today at the start of the US presidential primaries, suggesting, in so many words, that we needed a leader, from whichever party, who is not ‘in over his (or her) head.’ So you are suggesting perhaps there are limits to my compassion, and taking people wherever they may be? I’ll have to think about this.

When I finished *In Over Our Heads* I concluded that a great deal of individual and collective suffering arises from the mismatch between the complexity of the world’s demands and the complexity of our mindsets. There are only two solutions to this: either the world has to become less complex, or people have to become more so. The first isn’t going to happen, and for a long time most people (including the brain scientists) believed the second was not possible. Now even the brain scientists recognize the possibility of adult development and I admit I am interested in reducing human suffering.

But you are right that the only way to support development is to begin by fully accepting and acknowledging the way the other person is making meaning *right now*; by recognizing what is at stake in changing how he makes meaning right now; by understanding that the way he is making meaning right now is the way he is saving his life. That is exactly what the ‘immunity to change’ phenomenon is all about.

However, I believe that the role of the coach and the role of the voter are not the same, I guess. I entitle myself to expect certain ‘pre-requisite thresholds’ as a voter. As the candidates told us, when we are voting we are hiring a job applicant. My stance as a hirer is different from my stance as a coach.
Q: Bob, coaches would also like to know your view on the importance of actually measuring the developmental stage of the coaching client? The SOI is, unfortunately, very labour intensive for coaching purposes?

Interesting topic. I think that would depend on what the coach is trying to do and what is the nature of the contract with the client. The subject-object interview was not created to be a tool in support of a developmental process. It was intended to be a research instrument for studying a persons’ developmental location. It is used in before-and-after designs to ask: does developmental position change as the result of an intervention? It is used in correlative designs to ask: what are the ways that people in different developmental positions make sense of the same phenomenon, such as parental discipline or global warming? The subject-object interview was originally designed to be a research instrument.

Q: Did you notice any special effect of this instrument when it was used for research purposes?

For the majority of the life of that instrument, which has been around now for 20 years, the people who agreed to partake in the interview never knew the results. They just generously volunteered to be part of a research study, and I don’t think they minded this, because – to answer your question – it turns out that to be interviewed this way is intrinsically rewarding. Subject-object interviewers are normally very good listeners and provide for people a naturally therapeutic experience of feeling like they are being understood.

One of the things we didn’t expect but noticed was that in the original longitudinal sample on which the instrument was first tested, the attrition rate was very, very low. Usually when you try to do a longitudinal study over ten or twelve years, you lose a large percentage of your subjects. We, however, lost very few subjects, because they actually looked forward to it and valued it as an intrinsically meaningful experience. It helped them get clear about their own ideas. We didn’t debrief people or send them notice of the sort, ‘here is the array of developmental stages in the study and here is where you fell’. We never did that. We felt it was a sensitive sort of thing and that the process of debriefing people on that measure was something that required a whole different set of skills than either conducting an interview or analysing a transcribed interview. Some who tried that had disastrous experiences – people wept and said: ‘Are you saying that I am somehow underdeveloped?’ This is because developmental theory is normative; it’s not like a Myers Briggs instrument that says ‘you’re an INTJ and your boss is an INTF. Different strokes for different folks.’ People don’t cry – it is not like you have seemed to render any verdict on their state of evolution. You’re not saying: ‘one day, if you are lucky, you might grow into the more encompassing profile of your boss’. But if you tell somebody that they have a socialized mind instead of self-authorizing mind that can be a blow to your esteem.

Q: Understandably. So all that sounds like a case for not using the SOI in coaching?

It’s a case for not doing so without some careful preparation. As a matter of fact Lisa and I have used the SOI in coaching and we have trained others to do so, and, not only is there no crying, it is often the highest rated element of a multi-part learning program. But we use it only in those engagements where people from the very
beginning have an actual interest in the bigger subject of adult development and invite me or my colleagues in, because they know that we are not just coaches – we are theorists and researchers about adult development. Maybe they have read one of the books about it and they are interested in the general theory as well as making progress on a particular goal. When people come for coaching because they have a burning and urgent desire to get better around a specific goal, they would usually have less patience for this kind of thing. However, I have worked in many cases with people who had an interest in ideas of development. And these are not just human-service clients; often they are business people but psychologically-minded business people.

Q: Could you say more about how you worked with them?

We sometimes start with the SOI because it frames an expansive and novel dialogue. It allows people to talk about a host of things but at the same time has a little bit of structure built into it. Because we are asking for specific recent experiences when they felt angry or conflicted or moved by something, people find that interesting. Often they are surprised and intrigued by the unexpected patterns they themselves begin to see, and connections between apparently unrelated experiences. The usual format has been to just do that interview and to say: ‘It is a way for me to begin to understand you a little better in a very broad sense.’ People end up bringing in themes about their family life and their work life, talking about how they have changed and all of these themes that the subject-object interview asks for. Then I tell them that I’m going to study the interview, probably transcribe it and in our next meeting give them some impressions from it.

I do study it and get a sense of where they are and think about what are all the strengths of their current developmental position, what does it enable them to do. I think about how it represents advances over presumably earlier and less complex developmental positions. I also think about what it is that is difficult for them to do now given their current developmental position and try to draw a few examples from the interview that demonstrate that.

Then what we tend to do is begin to give them a little five-minute presentation, usually with some pictures and graphics, to show them these different developmental positions and then we might ask them if it is making any sense to them, or reminding them of anything. Often people will say yes, they will point and say ‘I’m right there, between 3 and 4’, they can see it themselves. We would talk with them first about the strengths we see in their current developmental position. Then we say: ‘if you are interested we can talk with you about what the theory would suggest are possible developments for you.’ They almost always want to hear that, which leads into a conversation about some limits and constraints of the ways in which they are making sense, and a picture of what they would be able to do were they to move to the next position. We often ask them if this looks like something they would find desirable. Very rarely people are not so sure. On the whole this works best with people who don’t have a burning focus like: ‘I want to figure out how to handle conflict better’. What they really want is to enter a journey of personal learning and personal discovery.

Q: So it is a developmental coaching?

Yes, developmental coaching often without a very specific goal at the outset. They usually recognise: ‘I can’t do that’. For example: ‘I do not have currently an ability to
let go of my own theory about how things should be and it does make it hard for me

to stay in the moment with people’. They say: ‘I can see how that affects my ability to

be closer to people, at home and at work, and I would like to change’. So they begin
to develop an aspiration and to say: ‘ok, how might I be helped to do that?’ Then

that leads naturally into preparing for what we call the four column exercise (see
Figure 3). We ask them to generate some specific goals, real ones, where they actually
go around and ask their wife and their boss and the person who reports to them:
‘what do you think is the thing that I most need to get better at?’ Through the four
column exercise we are deliberately positioning the immunity-to-change work as a
vehicle not only to accomplish a specific improvement goal that will go in their first
column but to actually support this bigger project of their personal development.
This is often a very powerful way to start, if a person himself or herself has an
appetite for this deliberately developmental kind of project.

Q: What about the type of people who are not explicitly interested in this theory?

With most of the people that I coach I do not do that. I have the theory in the back
of my mind and very often use the four column exercise by itself, especially the things
that emerge in their third and fourth columns, to orient myself to where they might
be developmentally. You can often begin to form some hypotheses from the four
column exercise itself. For example, if they discover a third-column commitment to
no-one ever being upset with them, then you start to see that the socialized mind is
probably still quite ascendant. The process of the four column exercise is allowing
them to look at a very fundamental premise that in order for them to feel whole and
in good order they must always be aligned with the valuable people in their lives. This
is the basic tenet of the socialized mind and if you have an ear and an eye toward it

This exercise is designed to diagnose ‘immunity to change’ of the individual. It is
based around a series of the following questions used to explore competing
commitments:

Step 1
Identify a commitment: I am committed to the value or the importance of…

Step 2
What are you doing or not doing to prevent your commitment from being fully
realised?

Step 3
Uncovering competing commitment: I may also be committed to…

Step 4
Examining a Big Assumption: I assume that if….

Further reading:

Kegan, R., & Lahey, L. (2001). How the way we talk can change the way we work:


Figure 3. ‘Four column exercise’ (Kegan, R. and Lahey, L., 2001).
you can often begin to get a glimpse of these things from the four column exercise itself around particular improvement goals that they have identified. The subject-object interview therefore can be very useful in coaching to help you to get a bigger picture of who your client is. However, whether you would actually do it would depend on the patience and interests of your client.

Q: Quite a few people who are trained to use SOI, including myself, would say that it is a fascinating instrument, but not easy to learn?

The whole developmental theory on which it is built is admittedly not easy. We have doctoral students who are doing research every year and we tell them that it is going to take them about a year to really develop the facility to work with this interview which they will need in order to do good research. Some people say that they don’t want to learn it and end up using Loevinger’s sentence completion test. A person can finish that in 30 minutes; they can send it off to somebody who scores it; and they get a crude developmental assessment or at least a number that can serve their research purposes. This can be sufficient for what they are trying to do. But if you are interested in coaching someone you really want more than the number; you want to know how that number ‘lives’ in its unique particularity for that person. Once you do develop the skills to actually listen from a subject-object point of view, however, whether you actually conduct SOIs or not, I think it is a very, very useful ability. You begin to see and hear things with much fuller dimension. (Though one student told me it ruined movies for her, because she could see the cause of all the conflicts, and what was going to happen before it came on the screen).

When Lisa Lahey and I started teaching our immunity-to-change coach development program, we initially thought we don’t need to teach all these people developmental theory. It is hard enough just to learn how to do a good four column diagnostic and then how to coach from it. But as always happens when you are teaching you learn more about what you believe and know, and what you actually do without realizing it. We saw that we had the developmental theory in the back of our heads and we used it a lot without even realising it. So we decided in a very light way to start teaching the people in our training program the developmental theory. And they found it very useful, very helpful even in terms of thinking about what is reasonable to hope for or think of as the next step in the development of their client so that they don’t set the bar too high or too low, so that they recognise where the person is. We did not teach them how to be subject-object interviewers; we didn’t teach them how to do that measure, but we did find that it was very useful for them to understand developmental theory in the process of doing the immunity work.

Q: Thank you, Bob, for a very informative interview. What would you like to say in the conclusion to the international coaching community that will be reading and contributing to this journal?

As Lisa and I have taken this work deeper and deeper we have been struck by a big contradiction: organizations throughout the world collectively spend billions of dollars trying to improve the capabilities of their people. The many year-end evaluations, 360-degree reviews, leadership development programs, exec ed seminars and the like, all suggest a public optimism about the possibility of real change and
improvement. But when we win the confidence of leaders across all sectors, what
many of them tell us is a version of, ‘people can't really change much. Al will always
be Al. The best we can do is leverage his strengths and hire around his weaknesses.’
This is interesting! Alongside the apparent, public optimism of huge investments in
improvement there is a deep-seated pessimism as to whether people really can change.
At the same time, there is no better match of interests than an organization’s real
need to keep developing its people and an individual’s real need to keep experiencing
their own personal increase. Within the contradiction and the match, there is fertile
ground for a genuinely developmental approach to coaching. I am thrilled at the
prospect of new people, new ideas, and new practices entering that space.

Notes on contributors
Robert Kegan is the Meehan Professor of Adult Learning and Professional
Development at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. The
recipient of numerous honorary degrees and awards, his thirty years of research
and writing on adult development have contributed to the recognition that ongoing
psychological development after adolescence is at once possible and necessary to
meet the demands of modern life. His seminal books, The Evolving Self and In Over
Our Heads, have been published in several languages throughout the world.
With long-time colleague, Lisa Lahey, he is also the author of How the Way We Talk
Can Change the Way We Work, and the widely distributed Harvard Business Review
article, ‘The Real Reason People Don’t Change’, Kegan and Lahey are credited with
a breakthrough discovery of a hidden dynamic which impedes personal and
organizational transformation. This work (on what they call ‘the immunity to
change’) has now found its way into the practice of leaders and senior teams in
business, governmental, and educational organizations in the United States, Europe,
and Asia. This fall they received from Boston University the Gislason Award for
exceptional contributions to organizational leadership, joining past recipients
Warren Bennis, Peter Senge, and Edgar Schein. This winter they were invited
faculty at the annual Davos Conference.

One of twenty, among Harvard’s 2300 faculty, honored by the president of the
university for his outstanding teaching, Kegan also serves as the co-director of
Harvard’s Change Leadership Group, a Gates Foundation-funded program to
enhance leadership capacities for district-wide improvement in America’s public
schools. He is the educational chair of Harvard’s Institute for Management and
Leadership in Education, and co-director of a joint program undertaken by Harvard
Medical School and the Harvard Graduate School of Education to bring principles
of adult learning to the reform of medical education.

Bob took his A.B., summa cum laude, from Dartmouth College, and Ph.D. from
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