

Interview with Phil Allison

(Music Introduction)

You know, my view is quite clear on this, in fact, that it's not our job to tell people what to do; it's our job to question people in what they're doing. And the change in the response you get is remarkable in that you actually have people that have to start to think.

Welcome to another Salestutor.com.au podcast, which supports business owners and sales leaders with ideas and tactical insights to accelerate their sales revenue.

Hi. I'm Ian Segail, author of *Bulletproof Your Sales Team*. I'm really thrilled today to bring you an interview with the gentleman who is one of Australia's premier executive coaches, Mr. Phil Allison. Phil is the managing director and the founder of a company called Corporate Edge, which is a corporate coaching company. Originally Phil started the organization back in '99 and it started as a consulting company. However, that quickly transformed into a corporate coaching company dedicated to assisting both individuals as well as companies to achieve their potential. Corporate Edge actually operates in Australia and New Zealand, as well as Southeast Asia.

Phil himself, coaches clients at the very senior levels of organizations with a distinct focus on managing directors, CEOs, general managers, national managers. Phil also runs a successful suite of coaching and leadership development workshops both for senior management as well as middle management. He also facilitates a strategic planning program, which helps organizations establish their direction, the objectives, vision, values, as well as cultural alignment. And I'm so privileged to have invested the time with Phil today and have him share with us from both his wisdom and absolute huge breadth of knowledge and experience when it comes to coaching people for performance.

So without any more fanfare, let's get straight into it.

IAN SEGAIL: Welcome Phil.

PHIL ALLISON: Thanks Ian. It's great to be here.

IAN SEGAIL: It's wonderful. Beautiful offices, lovely overlooking the water. Hopefully we can get some work done this afternoon.

PHIL ALLISON: It is very nice here, I've got to admit.

IAN SEGAIL: I suppose just for the benefit of those listening, maybe you can give us a brief overview of what qualified you to be at this table today.

PHIL ALLISON: Okay. I think it's something that actually started some 14 years ago when I was working in Singapore as the operations director of Cold Storage there. I was in the middle of my time in supermarkets, nearing the end, and I started to realize there was something else I needed to do with my life. Basically it's the Stephen Covey quote of where you're climbing the ladder of success only to find later on that the ladder was on the wrong wall.

IAN SEGAIL: It's interesting. So often I talk to people, in fact, I've done a podcast a few months ago and the gentleman I was interviewing said the exact, same thing.

PHIL ALLISON: Yup.

IAN SEGAIL: Even quoting...

PHIL ALLISON: The exact same quote.

IAN SEGAIL: Exact same quote.

PHIL ALLISON: I think it's perfect. That's a great quote and it just makes it easier. And when you actually talk to people about that, it's amazing how many people you can see start to reflect on their own lives and thinking about, "You know what? There's a part of my life where I just don't feel like I'm actually achieving what I should be achieving." And that was what was happening to me. At that point, I made a decision – I went into a lot of self reflection about what it is I felt I wanted to do with my life. And that was also the point where I created a life purpose and that life purpose was to achieve my potential in life through helping others to achieve theirs.

So it was one of those things where I didn't want to have regrets. I didn't want to get to the end of it and look back and think....

IAN SEGAIL: I would have or I could have or I should have, yeah.

PHIL ALLISON: Correct. But then the other side of it was what was I going to do? How was I going to prevent that from happening? And what I realized what I was really good at, what I love to do, what I was passionate about was working with other people either individually or in groups to get them to be the best they can be. And that was where, you know, basically I got to where I am today.

IAN SEGAIL: Right. And so tell us more about the work that you do today.

PHIL ALLISON: I started off with Corporate – this is our tenth year now. And originally started off doing consulting. I actually didn't know exactly what it is that I wanted to do or what I was going to do.

IAN SEGAIL: It takes a while to kind of figure out what the right thing is.

PHIL ALLISON: Correct. And it was right at the beginning – I want to say the beginning, obviously coaching I'd been going overseas for a while and then a bit of coaching happening in Australia, but it wasn't mainstream and it wasn't known. And I had actually not heard of coaching at that point. I knew that I wanted to run workshops and I'd been writing a few and you know, studying to get the criteria and the material to write a few.

IAN SEGAIL: What were you studying?

PHIL ALLISON: Well, just I want to say studying – did a number of courses, uh, and read many many books.

IAN SEGAIL: On coaching specifically?

PHIL ALLISON: Well, I didn't know coaching existed. Now I actually uh, a guy by the name of Ian Segail gave me my first coaching book. You probably won't remember that. A book from John Whitmore.

IAN SEGAIL: Way back then.

PHIL ALLISON: Way back then.

IAN SEGAIL: (laughing)

PHIL ALLISON: So...it and he's probably forgotten that. So that was my first coaching book. That's when I actually understood that coaching sort of really existed. That was back in our rebel days when we first met.

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: And really it was then that I knew what I was going to do. Up until then I knew it was going to be developing people. I knew it was going to be possibly training people and challenging people. I just didn't know it was called coaching.

IAN SEGAIL: So this was the tool or vehicle that you chose to...

PHIL ALLISON: Correct. So I went out and did some coaching training, uh, some basic coaching training which gave me structure, how to hold a coaching meeting and

gave me some valuable tools on how a coach should operate. It gave me the criteria I suppose and probably the ethical side of it as well.

And uh, basically got out there and coached.

IAN SEGAIL: So and you've been doing that now for ten years?

PHIL ALLISON: Ten years, yeah.

IAN SEGAIL: So, you would have made some interesting distinctions along the way as to what works and what doesn't.

PHIL ALLISON: Absolutely.

IAN SEGAIL: So maybe you can share some insight. What are you doing differently now than what you were doing when you first started?

PHIL ALLISON: If I was going to compare the early days, the early days I was probably the typical coach that goes out and gets trained even today I would imagine. A person who uses a structure. It's all about the questions and it's all about trying to really just end up with an action plan of what the person's going to do.

Coaching to me is about creating awareness and responsibility and that was one of the things that I learned in the coaching course. And I still agree with that today. You know, how do you make a person aware? And how do you make them responsible for the actions that they need to take to accept that responsibility? There's so much more to it now and I've learned that. And although I probably started quite early understanding that there was a distinction between coaching and mentoring, and a distinction between coaching and managing and a distinction between coaching and leadership – and later on, a distinction between coaching and being an entrepreneur.

And when I made those distinctions, when I understood what those five roles actually were, it allowed me to broaden the way I coach to actually take in all five roles.

IAN SEGAIL: Are you saying to tailor your coaching to suit the entrepreneur, the manager, the Is that what you're saying?

PHIL ALLISON: No. I'm actually saying I think a coach, the good coaches these days are all five of those things. So the distinction, just to clarify it so you know what the distinction is – a manager to me is a person who understands process, structure, you know, if we get into the real sense of it, does planning, gets compliance, all those sorts of things, the typical management things. That's what a manager does.

A leader is a person who inspires, a person who has a vision, who sets the direction, makes tough decisions.

A coach is a person who trains and develops people, but the main part of the development is through challenging. They're the person who gets people out of their comfort zones, really sparks them to do something they normally wouldn't do.

The mentor is a person who gives advice when asked on areas of expertise that they have.

And the entrepreneur is a person who grows a business. And having all five caps as I call them, that's a model I created about 7 or 8 years ago, having all five caps in your armory and understanding the distinction between the five, is critical in a coaching exercise. Because I'm starting with a person who is struggling to achieve something within their business, the first thing I'll look at is their structure. So I've really got my management hat on and not my coaching hat.

IAN SEGAIL: And the reason you look at structure is because...

PHIL ALLISON: It's the foundation for everything in a business.

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: It is amazing how um, I have worked with people for only one or two meetings because we dealt with structure on the very first meeting, and that fixed all the issues that the person had. So the second meeting was just really a wrap up of why this has all worked.

IAN SEGAIL: So that's interesting, because companies get set up and they've been operating for years and even different divisions have been operating for years and their structure is dysfunctional. So can you maybe share how do you find that out? If you find it out, what do you do about it?

PHIL ALLISON: I find it really simple. The easiest way I find to just sort of get a person to draw their structure...

IAN SEGAIL: The org structure.

PHIL ALLISON: Right, the org structure – it's a simple org structure. And then question it. You challenge it. And once you've got the structure out, you become the coach again and challenge, "Okay, what does this person do and why do they report to you? What does this person do and why do they report to you?" And then when you go down another line, so you start to see whether the structure is functional or dysfunctional.

One of the common mistakes is that people still believe and in the 21st century, you can have 12 or 13 direct reports. There are companies out there where managing directors will have 20 people on their senior team.

IAN SEGAIL: It's unbelievable, yeah.

PHIL ALLISON: And because there's so many people involved, it all becomes dysfunctional. And when you look at why there are so many people reporting to them directly, it stems to another issue, which is their need to control all parts of the business. So if I have a person reporting directly to me, I can then control that person, therefore that department. So instead of maybe having IT report to finance, I'll have IT report to me.

IAN SEGAIL: Right, so that's not in the structure, it's more control.

PHIL ALLISON: But it comes out in the structure, it comes out in the structure.

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: So when you start to question the structure, when you start to review the structure, when you start to question why that person reports to you, what you discover are control issues.

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: So then you start to challenge the control issues, challenge the person's time, how much time they spend with those people, how much they're actually able to influence all of the decisions being made in that area. You start to create the awareness around that, then you get them to accept responsibility of the fact that you know, if I believe the person, the CFO is capable, then they should be able to run that department, for example, like IT.

IAN SEGAIL: Right. So when you talk about challenging and creating awareness, what – how do you challenge that and how do you create awareness in somebody?

PHIL ALLISON: So if we look at coaching, there are three critical things you need to be able to do to be a coach. Absolutely critical – you can't do these three, it's actually I'll go back as four things. The single most important thing for a coach to be successful is a coach has to genuinely care about the growth and the development and the success of the person they're coaching.

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: If there's any other motive for you being there, you will not be successful in my book.

IAN SEGAIL: Okay, so let me ask you – so if I'm a manager, I've got an agenda, so how do I become a manager/coach? Because I've got an agenda.

PHIL ALLISON: No, you can have an agenda. Everyone's got an agenda. What I'm saying is if you want to be successful as a coach, you want your managers to be successful as a coach and this is an issue that happens in businesses all the time. They go out and train their team on how to coach and one or two people go out and successfully do it, and the other eight or nine or ten don't. Why? Because one or two people genuinely care about the growth and development of the team, the other eight or nine simply don't.

IAN SEGAIL: Okay, so separating the agenda from the caring. Gotcha.

PHIL ALLISON: Correct. So just going out and training your team how to coach, won't create a coaching culture.

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: You want a coaching culture, you actually have to surround yourself with people who care about the development of their team. It starts with the way you see your team. So we would, in workshops, work on that before we'd work on training a person how to coach. Because if we can't conceptually and then behaviorally get a person to care about others within the business, then teaching them how to coach is just a waste of time, it's irrelevant.

IAN SEGAIL: Okay.

PHIL ALLISON: So that's the first thing about being a great coach. The second thing is you've got to be able to ask outstanding questions. And it's just a skill. I know when I coach people and when I do development workshops with people and we talk about questions and how to question and show them how to coach, I can see that some people are intimidated because they come up and they'll ask you, "How do you know what questions to ask? You seem to know all the right questions." And I've got to remind them that when I did my very first coaching session, I actually started with a list of questions on a piece of paper.

IAN SEGAIL: Oh really?

PHIL ALLISON: Yeah. It's a true story. And I had them all written out, all typed out, and when I hit a wall, I would go back to my list. But I only ever used the list twice.

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: I never had to use it again. And every time I coached, I got better. Your ability to ask a great question is just a skill. Like every skill, you've got to practice it. If you don't do it, you'll never get good at it.

IAN SEGAIL: And so what's the essence of a good – what should a good question do?

PHIL ALLISON: A good question should be able to create awareness or responsibility or both. So what does that mean? It means that you need to be able to understand what you're actually looking for – what is it you need to delve into. And it leads into the third thing, so the first thing was you gotta care, the second thing you gotta be able to ask great questions – the third thing is you gotta be an active listener.

IAN SEGAIL: Can I – just before we go into listening, can you maybe give us an example of a question that you could ask which would stimulate the creation of a winner? So if we go back to the control freak manager who's got, you know, 20 different reports or people reporting to, what sort of question would you ask that person?

PHIL ALLISON: I would go straight into, "Why do you have this person reporting to you?"

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: And they would come along and say, "Well I think it's a very senior role and I think it's important that I am completely over the top of that." So, "How much time are you actually spending with that person? You're saying you need to be completely over the top of it, what structure do you have in place to be completely over the top of that?" And then as you're asking those questions and you know, "How well is that working for you? How much are you really over the top of that? Is there anything that he's waiting on right now with you that you're holding up?"

When you start to dig in and you're starting to ask these questions, which can be a little confronting, what you start to do is create awareness. "You know what? I'm actually not doing a very good job of leading this person." And it's that awareness which is absolutely necessary if you're going to change behaviour, it's that awareness that starts to kick in.

IAN SEGAIL: You get to that ah ha point of, "Oh, actually I'm not really doing what I think I'm doing."

PHIL ALLISON: Absolutely correct.

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: “I think I’m doing the right thing by having all these people report to me, but now I’m starting to realize that I’m not spending the quality time with them, I’m not giving them the quality direction they need, I’m not answering or responding to them as rapidly as they need to be responded to do what they need to do. In fact, I’m actually holding this thing up and if we change the structure, we could probably get around this.”

IAN SEGAIL: Have a new result. And what I’m hearing is I have to come to an awareness myself. You can’t, as the coach, say, “Oh, by the way, here’s what I’ve noticed.”

PHIL ALLISON: Yes.

IAN SEGAIL: “I see that you’ve got all these people reporting to you and you’re just not on top of it.” And because you just get a straight, “Of course I am.”

PHIL ALLISON: Look, as soon as they write the structure out, as soon as you see it diagrammatically – I’ll look at it and I think to myself, “Well, that’s wrong.” You know what I mean?

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: But you can’t just say, “It’s wrong and these guys here, a typical structure or more traditional structure would say that these people wouldn’t report to you.”

IAN SEGAIL: But that’s the tendency. And that’s what you have to, I suppose in coaching, is to actually hold back from that.

PHIL ALLISON: Absolutely correct.

IAN SEGAIL: Because that’s what a manager would do. A manager would say, “That’s wrong and you need to do this.”

PHIL ALLISON: That’s right. When you train people how to coach, the very first thing you notice is that people go straight into solving, they want to solve. They think, “My job here is to solve.” You know, one of the problems Ian, is that we are programmed or conditioned I believe from childhood that the person in charge, originally our parent, and then the teacher, and then our first boss, is the person who has all the

answers. And it's their job to make decisions, accept responsibility, do the thinking, and basically solve the problems.

So we're conditioned that way. And it's amazing how quickly that when we get our first job as a supervisor, manager or leader, and we're given a team to run, we can go from being dependent and subservient, to being the boss in an instant.

IAN SEGAIL: Just because we had a change in our business card.

PHIL ALLISON: Correct. Correct. Our behavior changes remarkably because we understand what we believe to be the role of the leader or the boss, and that is to tell people what to do.

IAN SEGAIL: Gotcha.

PHIL ALLISON: And that's something as a coach, one of the critical things as a coach is that we need to work with managers on to change that whole perception. You know, my view is quite clear on this. In fact, that it's not our job to tell people what to do, it's our job to question people on what they're doing. And the change in the response you get is remarkable in that you actually have people that have to start to think.

One of the things that we've been talking about in our business here at Corporate Edge is that our job is to create thinking cultures. And to create a thinking culture within an organization means that you've got to ask a lot of questions. You've actually got to have a culture of asking questions. You've got to have a culture of what we prefer to call challenging, challenge everything you do. Challenge what you're doing today. Challenge people as to where they're at. And this isn't a challenge in an aggressive way, this is a challenge in an exciting way.

IAN SEGAIL: And curiosity, it's like why do we do it that way?

PHIL ALLISON: Correct.

IAN SEGAIL: Yeah.

PHIL ALLISON: And there are no sacred cows. This is something where everything could be challenged. This doesn't mean you change things immediately. There's a process to changing, it just means that we need to question. And if we're not questioning enough in an organization, then to me, you're not growing. What you've done is you've probably settled into a comfort zone, you've settled into maintenance and you've forgotten how to grow.

IAN SEGAIL: Well it's interesting, with the current economic climate, it's forcing people to question.

PHIL ALLISON: Absolutely.

IAN SEGAIL: And so when you see people being retired and we're not replacing those people, someone must have asked the question, "Well do we really need to replace the person?" "What does the person do that's so critical that we actually have someone a bum on their seat?"

PHIL ALLISON: Correct.

IAN SEGAIL: And so that person might have been there for fifteen years, we've been paying their salary, but nobody would question it until now.

PHIL ALLISON: It's amazing as well. There's that and there's the other thing where you've seen a number of organizations just stop dead on projects, which apparently three to six months ago were mission critical. And now all of a sudden you've put them off for a year. So the question is, "Were they mission critical really or were they just good things to have? Were they a project that we worked on for project's sake?"

So in tough times, what happens is our thinking changes and we actually question with a lot more rigour. And really when you look at it it's that rigour we should have every day of the week. You know, all – all a correction in the economy does to us is brings us back to where we should be, puts us back to a platform where we can build an even better business.

IAN SEGAIL: Anything - correction in a relationship, correction in your health, all these things, they're all kind of awakened to.

PHIL ALLISON: It's the awakening, yeah.

IAN SEGAIL: It's the awareness.

PHIL ALLISON: Correct. And one thing about coaching, you know, with a good coach is you can actually have this awareness much sooner. You don't have to have something go wrong.

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: Because there's someone external to you, someone who's completely objective because they're not emotionally connected to any of your decisions.

That that can come in and really just challenge you to say, “Is this the right thing to do? Why are you doing this project? Why are you putting on this person? Why are you heading in this direction? Why are you restructuring?”

IAN SEGAIL: The question is to stimulate the awareness of what?

PHIL ALLISON: The awareness of what is actually happening. One of the critical things we try to get across to people is that self awareness is a bit like common sense. There’s an old saying that common sense just isn’t very common.

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: Self awareness is even less common. Most people are actually very unaware of some of the decisions they’re making, some of the things they’re doing. And what’s actually happening in their business – which is outside of their self awareness, but it’s very similar. Sometimes you just need to stop and look and if you have a challenge, you know, if you have any of the listeners here or anyone that you’ve worked with, certainly the people I’ve worked with – one of the challenges I have is, “Show me a diary and show me the time that you have logged into your diary for this week for thinking time or challenging time. Where you are specifically got something logged in there that’s going to challenge the way you currently do business.”

And in the fair majority of people’s diaries you might find what you’ll find is, in fact, a lot of stuff.

IAN SEGAIL: All the to dos.

PHIL ALLISON: Tasks.

IAN SEGAIL: Prioritizing the crisis that’s on our plate at the moment.

PHIL ALLISON: Yeah, tons of meetings and phone calls and things you need to do, and I think sometimes tasks get a bit of a – a bad rap. You got to do stuff, you’ve got to do all this stuff. To me, you need to lock them into a period of time and do planning time. Have strategy time, have what we call blue sky time. You know, what if time, what could we do? As important as it is Ian, most people don’t do it.

IAN SEGAIL: Yeah, of course.

PHIL ALLISON: I tend to coach for two hours a month for a person. It’s once a month for two hours. It’s not a big commitment of time and some people often thing, “Is that enough time to get change?” It is, because two hours in a person’s month of 100

percent thinking and challenging time, is actually a lot of time. And it is amazing how much comes out in those two hours and how quickly it goes.

Most people think they've been there for 15 or 20 minutes and you know, it's two, two and a half hours when you're finished. If there are issue that were much more urgent you might do a second meeting, but typically that's enough to get a person to actually have enough actions to implement over the next four weeks for you to then meet up again and hold that person accountable.

IAN SEGAIL: Okay. So the questioning to create the awareness of reality.

PHIL ALLISON: Reality.

IAN SEGAIL: What a concept. Yeah.

PHIL ALLISON: Because most people – correct, because most people actually are not aware of what the reality is.

IAN SEGAIL: Right. Okay. And then so the next step is actually listening as opposed to hearing.

PHIL ALLISON: Yeah, we hear it all the time about being in the moment. We need to be in the moment. And being in the moment is your ability to read a person. There is a lot more to listening than hearing. We train this in our workshops as well, but it's a lot more about active listening. It's about picking up on the voice. It's about picking up on the physical cues, the face, the nodding of the head or the shaking of the head. It's just the eyes, body language, you know whether a person's right or not right. Whether there's an issue or not an issue.

If you really do listen to a person completely, you'll know when to ask a question. So a lot of the times you'll be asking a question, a person will be going on about whatever – they'll talk about all this stuff and they'll be right in the middle of uh, you know, a longish diatribe if you like, and then all of a sudden I'll say, "Hang on a sec. Just tell me about that." And I'll stop them dead and they'll say, "What do you mean?" "That bit there that you said this happened." And they'll say, "That's not a big deal." And I'll say, "Yeah, but just tell me about that. I want to dig into that a little bit more."

And what you find is that sometimes the thing you just stumbled on – not always – but the thing you just stumbled on is actually one of the biggest issues. So if you're not listening for that, if you're not actually in the moment listening to what they're saying, they can skim across some of the critical issue that they're facing thinking that they are every day issues that everyone has. But to a third party, a person listening to what you're

thinking, “It doesn’t sound right. Why would that be happening?” And so you get in and you challenge that.

And even though it’s not even on their radar, it’s not in their self awareness, it becomes one of the critical learnings for the coaching session.

IAN SEGAIL: It takes quite a bit of courage actually to ask some of those type of questions.

PHIL ALLISON: Correct. So the fourth thing, we said there’s four things – one is you’ve got to care, second one is you’ve got to be able to ask the right questions, third one is you’ve got to be able to listen – the fourth thing is you must be able to hold people accountable.

If you are not prepared to hold people accountable, if you are not prepared to say to a person, “Look I’m sorry. I don’t think that’s right. Or you need to listen to what you just said.” A very common practice I will do is repeat back, word for word, and this is why you’ve got to listen – word for word, tone for tone, body language for body language, exactly what a person says to you. And it is amazing how people say, “Did I just say that?” I said, you did, “Yeah, did it sound like that?” “Yup.” “I can’t believe I talk like that. Do you think I do that in front of my team?” “So what do you think?” “I probably do.” “What do you think they’re thinking right now when you do that?” And they are amazed and shocked. So if you are not prepared to confront and hold people accountable, you simply can’t be a coach.

IAN SEGAIL: So it’s one thing to confront people say in your team, it’s another thing to confront people that sit around the executive table with you, correct? And then to confront your boss.

PHIL ALLISON: Correct.

IAN SEGAIL: All of whom do need to be challenged.

PHIL ALLISON: Correct.

IAN SEGAIL: Do you use a different set of tools for one than the other?

PHIL ALLISON: No, it’s exactly the same. It’s exactly the same. Here’s the thing, and we teach people how to give feedback and one of the first things we talk about is, “What is your motive for giving feedback?” And there can only be one. If your motive of feedback is anything other than to add value from the person you’re giving feedback to, don’t give it. Because I can’t understand why else you would want to do it. If I

wanted to give you feedback, it's because I care about you and I want to add value to you.

IAN SEGAIL: Well I could have an ulterior motive, I could want to schmooze you, I could pat you on the back to make you feel good.

PHIL ALLISON: Then don't do it.

IAN SEGAIL: Right. Because?

PHIL ALLISON: Because it's adding no value to that person.

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: We talk about constructive feedback, not positive or negative, and we'll have (inaudible) and it's a bit of semantics. But what we make very, very clear is schmoozing a person or just having a person feel good, adds zero value to the person and in fact, creates usually a false reality of where they are at. Telling a person they're the greatest or the best or you know, I think you're fantastic. Unless you're being very specific about the thing that they are fantastic in, you add no value to them. They might feel good for a couple of minutes, but later on they're wondering, "What am I fantastic at?"

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: Even worse, if you tell them a lot, they start to actually believe they are fantastic. Now, that on its own doesn't sound too bad, but if we think that we can't do anything wrong, what starts to happen is that we don't believe we have any faults. We don't believe we have any areas that need to be improved upon. We start to create this persona which is greater or larger than life, and you see these people in business all the time.

IAN SEGAIL: Oh, we see this in sales especially. I mean, we've got rainmaker who 80 percent of the sales are coming from his territory and his poo doesn't smell and you know, he can do not wrong.

PHIL ALLISON: Yup. One of my key clients, we call that person the monster. And it's very hard to originally get people to realize that the person who's the greatest sales person, the greatest profit maker in their team, is in fact, the person who's bringing their business down.

IAN SEGAIL: It's very hard because we've got to be hooked into that person, we've got a life line in there, we've got a hypodermic needle like a transfusion.

PHIL ALLISON: I'm not going to get my budgets, my targets, I'm not going to get any sales without them. I need this person. But in fact, what happens when that person's confronted one or two things happen – they either come into the fold and actually enjoy work more and so does everyone else, or they leave. Now and I can say with 100 percent accuracy, every person that's ever challenged their monster and the monster has left every single person I've had feedback on, every single person who's given me that feedback has told me their business improved once their best salesperson left.

IAN SEGAIL: Isn't that fascinating.

PHIL ALLISON: 100 percent accuracy. It is because the team steps up.

IAN SEGAIL: And we're not held hijacked by one person any more.

PHIL ALLISON: Correct. You'll talk to managers, leaders about, "Why don't you confront the behavior?" "I don't want to upset them." So this person gets away with truly with murder. They're getting away with not doing half of the things that the rest of the team have to do. They don't have to do any of the leg work or the donkey work, they just get to serve customers. They don't have to deal with customer complains. They just have to serve customers. Everyone else has to do that for them. And in the end, people resent it. You know, there was some statistics I saw, it was some time ago, that said that the climate of the organization has up to a 30 percent impact on performance. So a 30 percent positive or negative. So the climate is how does it feel today? How does it feel right now?

So if it feels fantastic, you can get 30 percent improvement of performance. If it feels terrible, you can get a 30 percent drop in performance. The reality is either the leader or people are highly influential can have up to a 70 percent impact on the climate. So if you have a person who is highly influential on the sales floor and they're the number one person, and they're seen as the greatest thing since sliced bread and they're treated differently and they're a protected species, this person is affecting the climate by up to 70 percent of that team. That, on its own, pulls the rest of the team up to 30 percent negatively down, instead of 30 percent positively up.

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: So once the person's removed, the climate improves dramatically and people perform at a whole new level. So rather than having one person performing, you've got a team that performs. It's a remarkable distinction that most people still find very difficult to deal with in my book.

IAN SEGAIL: Okay, but that's still challenging someone on your team, albeit he's your life blood at this point.

PHIL ALLISON: Yup.

IAN SEGAIL: What about challenging your boss? Because that's part of the same thing we're talking about here.

PHIL ALLISON: Yeah, I had a situation back in my early days where I was working with the national sales manager of a company. And he was working through all the stuff that he's dealing with and it was one of those situations where I said, "Hey stop! What did you just say?" And he told me that he had a situation, I'll tell the story very quickly, where a state manager had rung him up and said, "Look, I'm not going to get my budget for the year although the business is. And what I'd like to do is to go out and just flog some more product to my retailers" because they're a distribution company, wholesale. "And I'd like to put a catalogue out and I'd like to do a bit of discounting and that will help me get my budget for the year. I think I can reach it if you let me do that."

National sales manager who had only been in the role a month or so, had a look at his figures and come back and said, "Listen. If I allow you to do that, I've calculated that we'll miss our gross margin budget. But we're going to hit as a company our sales target, given by about 1 or 2 percent, we're right on line with gross margin dollars. We've been impacted quite heavily. So if I let you do that, we will miss gross margin dollars as a company and I can't allow you to do that. Sorry. You're going to have to take one for the team."

Anyway, a couple of days later, he gets a phone call from the same person to say, "Hey, look, we're going ahead with the catalogue." And he said, "What do you mean? I told you we can't go ahead with the catalogue or the discount offer." And he said, "I know. I just happened to be speaking to the managing director and bounced it off him and he said it's a great idea." So he's telling me this in this discussion and moving on as if – and he said to me what he said was, "Oh, there's not much you can do about that." And then he said, "And the other thing we're facing is..." and I said, "Stop. What do you mean there's nothing you can do about that? That needs to be confronted and it needs to be confronted now. The managing director needs to know that those decisions are yours and yours only. And if he wants to influence those decisions, he does that behind closed doors with you where no one else knows about it." "You're going to have to confront him."

IAN SEGAIL: Tough one.

PHIL ALLISON: Tough one. And this managing director was a very strong, powerful guy. And he said, "Phil, you know in the end this isn't going to happen." I

said, “Listen. If one month into this what’s going to happen if you don’t.” I said, “Let me ask you a question. If you don’t hit the gross margin dollars for the company or if the company doesn’t get it, who is the MD coming after?” And he said, “Me.” “In effect, he’s taken your ability to hit them off you and he’s going to hold you accountable. Let me tell you, he doesn’t know about your phone call. He doesn’t know about the fact that you’re going to miss gross profit dollars if this goes ahead. He’s been told all this other stuff.”

IAN SEGAIL: He only has one piece of the puzzle.

PHIL ALLISON: “One piece of the puzzle. Believe me, when you confront him, he will understand and he’ll appreciate it.” And he said, “Oh, okay, look I’ve got too much to do in the next week or so, I’ll do it in a couple of weeks.” I said, “What are you doing tomorrow afternoon? Let’s look at your diary.” It was a Thursday afternoon when I was coaching him, so it was a Friday. And he showed me his diary and I said, “There’s a gap.” And he said, “Tomorrow?” And I said, “Absolutely.”

So then we worked through a model called contact. And we went through the contact model and we went what’s the real issues, what is the outcome you’re looking for, and we rehearsed on how we should do it. Anyway, what happened on the Friday, I was working with another company doing some facilitation for the day. And we went quite late on the Friday. It was about 7 o’clock and I jumped in my car and I was taking my messages. And I had a message from the MD at this company at 2 o’clock in the afternoon saying, “Phil, it’s such and such, ring me.” That was the message.

I thought, and the tone was not great. I thought, “How did he get it wrong?” I was so sure I was right.

IAN SEGAIL: What kind of a coach am I?

PHIL ALLISON: It gets worse. 6:30 message, “Hi Phil. I am now at home, haven’t heard from you. I need to speak to you tonight. Ring me on this number. It’s my home number.”

IAN SEGAIL: Wow.

PHIL ALLISON: So immediately of course, I stopped taking my messages, ring the number and the wife answers, this guy’s wife answers, such and such here. And he came to the phone and I said, “Hi, it’s Phil.” And he says, “Ah Phil. I had a meeting with the national sales manager today.” I said, “Yeah, I’m aware of that.” And he says, “So have you met with him recently.” I said, “Yesterday.” He said, “I thought that must have had something to do with you, because his behavior was out of character.” I said, “So how did the meeting go?” And he said, “Let’s put it this way Phil, if that’s an example of

what coaching can do to my team, if that is the type of person you're going to create in my business, I'm not using you enough. And I just wanted to tell you before you went on your weekend that thank you and you're going to really add value to our business. I really do appreciate it because I was wrong."

IAN SEGAIL: That's huge.

PHIL ALLISON: And I went from nervous thinking I've just lost this contract if you like, to how good do I feel? And I still remember that phone call today. The reality is, as tough as this MD might have been, he's there to run a business and he wants his team to be able to make the right decisions and stand up for themselves. No one wants weakness within their ranks. No good MD or CEO certainly, and so you need to confront it. And it is hard? Absolutely, it's hard. But you know, so it getting up at 6 o'clock in the morning to go for a run, and we know we should probably do that as well. You know, the things we should do in life are not easy to do, Ian. And this is where I suppose a coach can actually challenge you to do something that you wouldn't normally do. No different than a personal trainer, might be the thing that gets you out of bed at 6 o'clock in the morning to go for a run.

IAN SEGAIL: Okay. So now that I'm aware, how do I go from awareness to responsibility?

PHIL ALLISON: Well, it's still in the questioning process. If you're truly coaching, you're still in the questioning process. Because once you're aware, the questions the move over to, "What do you think you need to do?" "How can you approach this? How can you do it differently?" Now, the responsibility comes from the simple fact that – and this is what we teach typical managers of businesses – if I tell you what to do, who owns the responsibility for the outcome?

IAN SEGAIL: I do as the manager.

PHIL ALLISON: The manager does. The person who tells owns the accountability. The other person could say, "Listen, I did exactly what you told me to do. The fact that it went pear shaped is not my fault."

IAN SEGAIL: I just did what I was told.

PHIL ALLISON: "I just did what I was told." Sure. No responsibility. But if you ask a person a question of, "What do you think you need to do? How can you approach this? How can you fix this? What's the one thing you can do to make this right?" And they said, "The thing I need to do is X or Y." Then the responsibility shifts, because they're the one making the decision.

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: So they're accepting responsibility at that point. So if they're going to do it, they can't say it was someone else's idea or it went pear shaped, "Well, it was my idea. I'm the one who came up with the idea. I have to accept that." The difference between responsibility and accountability is something that I think is also needed to be understood here. Because the coach holds the person accountable. The coachee (sic) accepts the responsibility. Accountability is something that is put on you. Someone else will always hold you accountable.

IAN SEGAIL: So it's externally driven?

PHIL ALLISON: It's externally driven. The responsibility is the response to being held accountable. It's my response to that, I will accept responsibility. So while the coachee (sic) will accept responsibility, it's the coach that needs to hold them accountable. And what a coachee (sic) will quickly learn is that if you don't follow up in your next meeting or with a phone call or with a discussion or give us a call tomorrow and let me know how you go with that, if you don't do that then the person's not held accountable. Then there's a chance for that responsibility you get in the meeting to disappear through busy-ness, because I'll just come back and say, "Look, I meant to do it, but I just got busy." I don't want to use their words, they'll say, "This happened, that happened, meetings happened and we had this and we had a bit of a crisis there and I still intend to do it, but I just had to put it back a couple of weeks." And you know what? All they're doing is putting it off.

IAN SEGAIL: Right because it's a tough one.

PHIL ALLISON: Right and no one's holding them accountable.

IAN SEGAIL: Right. So really what I'm hearing then, yes, coaching is asking the right questions and listening to the answers, creating awareness, but a big piece of it is actually the follow up and holding people accountable?

PHIL ALLISON: Absolutely correct.

IAN SEGAIL: Which is done pretty poorly in most situations.

PHIL ALLISON: Absolutely correct. And really, it's the essence of coaching. I think most people understand personal trainers. I think they're the best examples of coaches, because it's one that most people get. You meet a personal trainer for the first time, he's going to ask you a lot of questions. What are your goals? What are your outcomes? What are you wanting out of this? And from that, they might put together a package on how you're going to do that. And then they start to hold you accountable.

They'll start to ask you questions about, what have you been eating this week? What have you done? What runs or what activity have you had between our sessions? What are you planning to do over the weekend? And so they'll start to get you to think about those things and start to plan out your activities to move you towards your goals.

But then in the actual session itself, they will push you to a limit that you would never push yourself. They would hold you accountable to a point where you could never do it yourself.

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: They're the ones that get the extra rep, the extra run up the stairs, the extra this, the extra that, because it's those little extra things that they push yourself greater than what you would and therefore out of your comfort zone, is actually what makes the difference. If you're in your comfort zone, then you've stopped growing. If you're comfortable right now, you have stopped growing.

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: And either coach yourself or get someone to coach you right now because you need to get out of your comfort zone. Because why would we want to stop growing? Why would we want to not move to another level? Why would we just stagnate? You know, I don't believe it's human nature to do that, but we can get caught up in that mainly because we get busy.

IAN SEGAIL: Well, this is more philosophical, but maybe it is human nature to, I mean, Jim Roan (sp) always says, "How tall a tree grows is as tall as it can." Human beings are not trees and we have stuff that we get comfortable and we like to be comfortable and we work hard to get to the point where we can be comfortable. So now that I'm comfortable, why would I want to actually change?

PHIL ALLISON: You know, my philosophy's very simple one and you know, through the group this morning explaining this, I explain it as often as I can. Is the moment we think we've made it, the moment we think we've made it, the moment we think we're there – it's downhill from here. See what happens is we grow and we take a long time to grow, and we continue to grow, we continue to develop, we continue to challenge ourselves, and what we're doing is to get to someplace. With most people, they will believe that place might be financial security or financial stability or you know I've reached an age where I can not have to worry about that any more. Or you know what? I'm married with a couple of kids, I don't have to worry about that any more. Or you know, I own my house, so I don't have to worry about that any more. Or you know, I've got my dream job, I don't have to worry about it any more. Whatever it might be, but the fact is, if you want to get to the divorce thing, the moment you think you've made

it, the moment you stop working on your marriage, the moment you stop working in your job, the moment you stop trying to grow and improve and you think you've made it – it's going to go downhill from here.

IAN SEGAIL: It starts slipping.

PHIL ALLISON: Let me tell you, it might take you X amount of years to get to where you got to in that relationship or your financial status or your business or whatever it might be. Let me tell you, when you start sliding off the other side, it's much more rapid. I mean, it can happen in no time and you'll only have to look at business is like (inaudible), how long did it take them to become an iconic outstanding company? How long did it take them to fall?

IAN SEGAIL: Yeah.

PHIL ALLISON: Many many years to get up there. Very short period of time to slip off the other side. The moment we stop challenging, it's a downhill slide and it's very, very, very rapid. It's rapid with our health, it's rapid with our relationships, it's rapid with our finances. The moment we take our eye off the ball and stop doing what got us there in the first place, we slide. Now, I appreciate that most people might consider that to be, "Well, that's what happens in life." I don't agree with that. Tell that to – was that a 98 year old woman last year who got a degree. Tell that to her that you have to, "Hey, you can't do that at 98."

IAN SEGAIL: Of course.

PHIL ALLISON: Tell that to people who are in their 60s and 70s having kids. They're not looking at life along the point, "Hang on a minute, I've reached an age I can't do this any more. I should be settled now. I should be dealing with grandchildren." That's not what it's about. Tell that to people who are completing their first marathon in their 70s or 80s. See, I don't believe it's right. I think these are people who are realizing, "You know what? I don't want to slide off the other side. I just want to keep growing." You might not have to grow as fast as you grew when you were younger....

IAN SEGAIL: Because you're making smaller distinctions maybe.

PHIL ALLISON: Sure! But it is about challenging yourself. It is still about getting out of your comfort zone. It's still about feeling good about yourself. Still getting up today, every day with a purpose, you know.

IAN SEGAIL: The fact is, when we do challenge ourselves and actually succeed at that, that's actually where the juice is, that's where we do feel good about ourselves. That's where we continue to feel that esteem that we've been so long building.

PHIL ALLISON: Correct. One of the questions I ask people in my workshops then is, “What is a rut?” You know, people talk about ruts. And most people get that a rut is a routine. You know, there’s nothing wrong with a routine, per se. A routine itself I think makes us very efficient and effective.

IAN SEGAIL: As long as it’s effective (inaudible).

PHIL ALLISON: Correct, well done. As long as it’s a good routine, it will actually make us efficient and effective. When I talk about most people get is that everyone has a morning routine. They know from what time they get out of bed to what time they walk out the door they go to work. They’ve got it nailed to a minute, and for some people it might be an hour, for some people it might be ten minutes, some people it might be thirty minutes, but that’s their routine and it works every, single day. If they didn’t have the routine, they would not know what time to get up in the morning because they wouldn’t know what time they could get out. They would be late effectively.

So routines are actually good. So routines on their own are not bad. Of course, routines are a problem because they prevent us from getting thinking time. Because if our routine is just to do stuff, get a cup of coffee, turn on the computer, do the emails, have a couple of meetings, then go home, and then I would argue that’s not an effective routine.

But let’s people say that people get that a rut is about a routine. It’s not the routine, a rut is a routine without a vision or a purpose.

IAN SEGAIL: A rut is a routine without a vision or a purpose.

PHIL ALLISON: So what I’m saying is that the routine isn’t moving you anywhere. There’s no purpose to the routine.

IAN SEGAIL: So which case why would I question the routine in the first place.

PHIL ALLISON: Yeah, I think what happens when you’re in a rut, what happens is people start to realize I’m doing the same thing over and over again. I’m in groundhog day – I repeated my day, I repeated my day, repeated my day, repeated my weekend, repeated my weekdays, and it’s going to go – and sometimes they just stop and think, “Why am I doing this? What is it all about?”

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: I don’t get it. And the fact is it’s because they haven’t got anything to look forward, it’s not about them achieving something further down the track

in their life. See, if your routine, if your life, if your day is all about moving you towards something, and everything is exciting, but if it's not, it's just a routine.

IAN SEGAIL: Right. The other thing I think happens with a routine, if your routing is a, b, c, d and e, over time you go a, b, c, d, a, b, d, a, b, d, a, b and we drop off the c somewhere.

PHIL ALLISON: And you don't realize it.

IAN SEGAIL: Yeah.

PHIL ALLISON: And c is the – the c is a great one because the c is the challenge. The thing that people do drop off, you did it well, is the challenge. We drop off the challenge. We actually allow the routine to happen, because what happens is we start to get comfortable. And being comfortable means that, "You know, maybe I don't have to change my self any more. Maybe I don't have to keep – maybe I don't have to watch what I eat any more. You know, I'm married, I'm middle aged, you know, do I really have to worry?"

But then when their health fails them, it's a bit like, "When did that happen?"

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: When they stand on the scales, "When did that happen?" Or their wife starts to say, "You know what? I don't think this is working." When did that happen? And it's because they actually drop the c. You know, in their lives. And they thought that at some point, it's actually okay to be different, to be actually be – to settle. And I'm not a person that believes in settling. And some people might not agree with that and that's okay. I don't mean not settling down in life, having a wife and kids, I believe in that. That's okay if that's what you want to do, that's what you do. I mean, settling in who you are as an individual.

We're made to grow and the moment we stop, we in fact, become dissatisfied. Most people feel the dissatisfaction, they just don't understand what it is, what's creating it.

IAN SEGAIL: Absolutely. I just have one question I think needs to be asked.

PHIL ALLISON: Yeah.

IAN SEGAIL: When you're coaching, you will typically use a process if you take the John Whitmore process (inaudible), do you have a process that you use? Have you found anyone that's got a particularly wonderful process, that some processes are better than others?

PHIL ALLISON: Ian, I supposed I was alluding to this earlier, I've got an intuitive process now. I don't – I started using the grow model. We have a model called proact – which is effectively, essentially the same. I would rarely use it. I do for certain types of coaching. I think there needs to be a distinction between what you're doing when you're coaching. Sometimes you need to be the leader. Sometimes you need to help them see a vision, you coach them to be a leader. Sometimes you need to be inspirational. As a coach, they need to see your energy and that's you being a leader. I think you need to be a coach, you need to be able to ask the questions. Coaching's about asking questions. If you're doing anything but asking questions, you're not coaching.

IAN SEGAIL: You might move into training or something else.

PHIL ALLISON: Correct. Training is about giving them the skills and you need to be able to train. I have that as a aspect of coaching, but that really is training rather than questioning, which is the challenging. The other thing you're going to need to do in a coaching session is be a mentor. And at times, you need to be able to say to the person, "Look, can I just give you my opinion on this for what it's worth?" And the person will say yeah. And you say, "Look, you know, I've seen this a lot. I've experienced this a lot. And from what I've seen, I think this is an issue that you're currently facing and you're not getting it. Or this is something that you need to confront, because at the moment, to me, I'm looking at a person who is holding back, who is in fear of confronting this issue at the moment is at the core of every – all the concerns you currently have."

And that's not coaching. That's mentoring. And there's a distinctive difference there. This isn't about...

IAN SEGAIL: It's not telling either.

PHIL ALLISON: It's not telling, mentoring is not telling, that's managing.

IAN SEGAIL: Absolutely.

PHIL ALLISON: Mentoring is giving advice. The mentor is saying, "Do you want to hear it from my perspective, from what I see?" You know, a mentor is a person who gives advice when asked. The difference here is that you didn't necessarily ask me. Sometimes they do, sometimes you have to say, "Look, is it okay for me to give you my view on this or would you like to hear my opinion? Or would you like to hear some advice based upon what you're doing?" And they always say yes.

Now, the good thing about advice when you're a mentor, is the person doesn't have to take it.

IAN SEGAIL: Right.

PHIL ALLISON: But you know what? I've always felt that as the coach, if I feel it, if I see it and I know it then it's my job to tell it. Whether they want to listen or not, is up to them. But it would be wrong of me not to challenge the person by letting them know what I think. And that shift with some people is exactly what they need to get the behavioral change that's required.

IAN SEGAIL: And if you don't change the behavior, nothing changes.

PHIL ALLISON: Nothing changes. That's why we say – corporate people say, “What do you do?” We are into behavioural change, it's all about behavioural change. How do we do it? We challenge people. We challenge the way people think. Then we do some training and that sort of stuff, you know, fundamentally we challenge the way people think.

IAN SEGAIL: Well you certainly challenged my thinking today and people listening, you've challenged their thinking today. So I think it's a great place to end our time together. I've certainly gotten a (inaudible) thank you.

PHIL ALLISON: Ian, it's an absolute pleasure and I really do appreciate the fact you asked me.

IAN SEGAIL: Thank you.

(Music Closing)

For more information on Phil Allison and the services of Corporate Edge, you can contact Phil by his website at www.corporate-edge.com.au or you can call him here in Sydney, Australia, area code 61 for Australia 2 for Sydney, 9566 1422. And for further information on how salestutor can help you grow your sales revenue, feel free to contact us here in Sydney, Australia, 61 2 9460 7022. It's 61 2 9460 7022 and ask to speak to Claudia.

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