

Meet Don Fabio, Supercoach

JAMES P. MASCIARELLI

I took me 51 years to find Don Fabio. This guy is really amazing. Like Demosthenes searching the ancient world for an honest man, I finally came face to face with the giant himself. For a long time I wasn't sure he existed or, if he did, that he would find me worthy of his grace. After finally meeting him and experiencing his genius, depth, and style, I asked him to be my personal coach. Reaching him is not always so easy but when I do, the world becomes, well, almost magical.

Let me tell you about Don because in your part of the world you may not know this name.

Don is a winner and a leader. This is a relaxed but focused guy who sets very high standards. He also easily shifts from disciplined intensity to flashes of spontaneous humor. Don has had his share of winning and accomplishment but now seems to most enjoy coaching others to be their best. He is an advisor to some of the most visible business leaders in the country but is comfortable these days to work behind the scenes. He is active in his community and is always doing something special for other people without taking the credit. Sometimes I think he is purposefully mysterious. He is a very spiritual person, but I doubt if many people know where that comes from because he doesn't preach or lecture.

The Principle of Attraction

When life gets a little tough and I get grumpy or annoyed, I think about how Coach Fabio

would handle the situation. Just thinking about him often sets me on the right course. When I do connect with him, I know he is going to give me his conditional positive regard and hold me to the task and affirm my ability to follow through. This is not always so easy to take, but I find myself working very hard to earn his praise.

His insightful questioning and reflecting have snapped me to attention more than once because he not only gets me to see the truth but he also understands me deeply. This allows me to take the "tough love" that he dishes out. He seems to have a real knack for challenging and confronting me in a way that I can accept. It is not always so, because sometimes he will tell a story about his own mistakes in a way that I can learn, or just make me feel fantastic about what I have done and have the power to do. What is truly amazing is that in a five-minute conversation with Don, I can define a problem correctly, review the relevant facts, identify the choices, and get energized to do the right thing when only ten minutes before I was really stuck.

Come to think of it, Mr. Fabio is all about learning. He seems to always be into something new, creative, or exciting even when he is laid up from an injury from one of his adventures.

It is no wonder that people from many walks of life as well as top executives constantly seek him out as their trusted advisor. This is a rich man that never needs to sell anything. Things seem to just come his way, and he makes everything appear so simple and easy. He is a master of the principle of attraction. Sometimes I won-

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**Have you
tapped all
available
sources of
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der how Don can manage so many relationships and seem to add value to them without getting worn out. He always seems to have reserve energy to take on the unforeseen. I could easily write volumes about the attributes and insights of Coach Fabio because he has so many interesting friends, stories to share, and is so cool to hang out with.

Where Is Don Fabio?

By now, however, you have figured out that Don Fabio is a magnificent construction. He is my inner coach, my guiding light, and my inspiration. He is the very real embodiment of the best coaches I have had in my life. He is the best of the best behaviors and attributes from my mother, brother, teachers, friends, colleagues, historical figures, contemporary leaders, and even rivals.

As an advisor to top executives, keeping myself sharp and overcoming my own coaching blocks is a daily exercise. And being only human, I often fall short of my own expectations, knowing I can be better, do more or less, and get my own needs for security, approval, or control out of the picture to become fully present for my clients. It is not important to show our clients how smart we are but to add value in the process of their own growth. Having a knowledge of business from first-hand experience as well as a good understanding of human dynamics is a good foundation, but at the end of the day it is your behavior, attitude, intention, and style that will draw the clients to you and keep them coming back for more.

Effective coaches know the fundamentals of managing the moments of truth in the coaching moment. They know that coaching moments are disciplined conversations that begin with an agreement to discuss a specific goal and end with agreement about forwarding actions. They know that, in between, they are doing more asking than telling. They have mastered how to attend, inquire, reflect, confront, and affirm their clients. They also know the finer points of the applications for coaching.

Great coaches know how to coach one-to-one, and they know how to coach a team—whether they are the official designated coach



"Please do not be displeased, sire, but some of your subjects find you a bit unapproachable."

or not. Skilled at playing the players and adjusting to the many personality types while retaining and conveying their core values, experienced coaches have a genuineness and authenticity that is natural and unencumbered by technique. They know their own coaching blocks and hot buttons. They have the discipline to practice no-fault thinking. They maintain a developmental perspective about their clients as long as possible. They also know that when someone is not open to feedback or willing to change, it is time for the coach to move on.

While it is important to know these fundamentals, to be a supercoach you must recognize that coaching is a way of life—and that takes some introspection. It is a foolish proposition to set out to reform others but imperative to reform oneself. Visualizing and developing your inner coach is a way to do that inner work without the cost of years of psychotherapy or psychobabble to get there.

When I am off the track and fall into less noble behaviors or negative attitudes or modes of thinking, I invoke Mr. Fabio, Supercoach, just by bringing his image to mind. Here I will share my secret of how to find your very own inner coach. Fortunately, I have also cultivated a number of living, breathing coaches that are a lot

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Awaken and Activate Your Inner Coach

Divide a sheet of paper into three columns titled #1 Name, #2 Positive Impact on Me, and #3 Attributes I Seek. Go back in time to your early experiences with family, friends, teachers, coaches, counselors, bosses, and so on.

- In column #1, name at least five coaches or people who have had a lasting positive impact on you. (You could even list difficult people in your life whose impact, in the end, turned out to be positive.)
 - In column #2, write down the most specific positive impacts each person has had on you.
 - In column #3, cite the positive attributes you remember about each person that you would like to emulate. Ask yourself if you can remember any key turning points when these people provided some good coaching or set a positive memorable example for you.
- By the way, did you ever thank any of these people? There may still be time, you know. If you make the effort, you'll likely find this to be a rich and rewarding experience.
- Review your list of positive attributes from column #3. Now add one or two additional attributes that give your inner coach a memorable personality.
 - Visualize the image of this "transcendental coach" and the virtues that he or she possesses. Give your inner coach a fitting name. You may share this name with your close associates or keep it to yourself. Find a photo of yourself from a memorable vacation or in some similar setting where you look relaxed, happy, and wise. Place this photo where you can see it every day. Sign it with your inner coach's name.
 - Now work at closing the gap between your day-to-day behavior and the best way that you know how to be. You will find that as you grow, so will your inner coach. Do not get discouraged if you never completely close the gap. Commend yourself for your progress.

like Don Fabio whom I reach out to in my network. I am very grateful to them. Remember that "insight without action" is merely neurosis, so when you gain the insights on how you can improve, try to put them to work right away. After all, coaching is about being a learning leader who is focused on continuous improvement for clients and self.

Awaken and Activate Your Inner Coach

Take advantage of the "best stuff" inside you, with the powerful visualization exercise shown in the sidebar. It can be used to transform you into a better coach and a better person.

Sound silly? Give it a try. I assure you that when you find yourself backslicing into pedestrian behavior, you'll think about your inner coach and ask, "Now what would (your inner coach's name) think or do in this situation?" Before long, you'll be emulating desired behaviors, and people will start noticing and responding to you in new ways. After all, these are the "best parts" of you, not some phony you or your dark side. Demonstrate your best talents by calling upon your inner coach.

My inner coach's name is Don Fabio; maybe today will be one of those days when he shines his light on me. I know if I listen, my clients will be the better for it. ■

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