When she returned to Detroit, she was armed with the conviction to put herself at the center of her life. She gave notice on her job and ended her eight-year marriage.

After a year of unraveling old patterns and learning how to have fun again, Fisher began developing a program for helping executives discover how to express their vision of themselves. The result was her “Living Your Vision” process.

Fisher’s method starts by taking an executive or management team out of their usual environment for an intensive three days of self-reflection. This includes designing a personal vision and purpose statement and a list of values and principles, through which they explore nine areas of life — self, career, wealth & prosperity, family, relationships, health, wisdom, creativity, and fame & reputation.

They then craft a plan regarding actions that will result in fulfillment in each area. The follow-up includes six months to a year of coaching to support those objectives.

Following the three-day course, clients receive weekly coaching sessions that last 30 to 40 minutes each. Those sessions can be face-to-face or by telephone. The usual process is a weekly discussion by phone.

As the founder of Living Your Vision Enterprises, Frances Fisher wants to coach you to professional and personal fulfillment.

Here are some fundamental, yet life-changing questions that Frances Fisher says everyone needs to answer: What do you really want? How soon do you want it? What steps are you willing to take toward that goal right now? And what’s getting in the way?

Such questions may sound simple. But when taken seriously and answered truthfully, they can inspire a life transformation.

That is the belief of Fisher, a Bellevue-based executive coach who works with executives to help them find greater success on and off the job. The founder of Living Your Vision Enterprises, Inc., or LYV, blends the “art of visioning” with planning to help clients reach their goals.

“Living Your Vision, my executive and life coaching process, was born out of my workaholic recovery,” Fisher says. “In the last 15 years, I’ve changed from living the full-throttle, type-A lifestyle, to living an extraordinarily rewarding and deeply fulfilling life.”

Fisher’s near-evangelical tone is part of a growing trend among executive coaches who try to inspire clients well beyond the company doors.

Executive coaching has become increasingly known as the way to raise the bar for employee productivity, effectiveness and personal satisfaction. But it goes much further than that. These coaches tout methods and processes that not only improve performance at work, but also help clients lead personal lives that are happier, and more fulfilled.

**A LIFE CHANGE**

That tall order started for Fisher herself in the early 1990s. A 20-year veteran of 16-hour days as a high-rise property manager in Detroit, Fisher’s transformation began when she hit an emotional breaking point.

Needing to just get away from the stress of her job and life, Fisher took a week off, the first in years. She flew to the Oregon coast and walked the beach for days in solitude. There she had what she describes as “light-bulb moments” about dysfunctional patterns, misplaced loyalties, and insights into her fears that were keeping her stuck in a life that hardly resembled the one she was determined to live.

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The idea is there’s less distraction, less chit-chat. A phone call allows the coach and client to get right to business and laser in on the subject of the day. The client sets the agenda of each call. In fact, a basic principle of coaching is that the coach never has an agenda — coaching is not consulting.

“I believe Albert Einstein when he said, ‘A problem cannot be solved with the same thinking that created it.’” Fisher says. “An executive coach can help a leader shift perspectives and find new possibilities and new ways of relating to the circumstances.”

**A PLACE FOR COACHING**

For those who question the importance of coaching in the business world, Fisher veterans use the sports analogy. Every team or individual champion, no matter how great their talent, employs a coach or a team of coaches.

No sports franchise would assemble a group of talented athletes and expect them to perform up to their peak without a coach. “It would be sheer chaos,” Fisher says. “For sure, it would not bring forth the highest and best of each and every player like coaching will do. “And I believe it’s the same in corporations. Imagine your own personal [Seattle Seahawks head coach] Mike Holmgren on the sidelines of your career. Your life with a partner, confidant, and champion holding the bar high, being there with compassion in the trenches and with cheers at the celebrations.”

Fisher contends that coaching heightens trust, accountability, creativity and productivity. Those traits, in turn, will drive overall profitability. Employees are empowered to make better decisions, enhance their contribution to the enterprise, and experience greater fulfillment in the workplace.

“Coaching,” Fisher says, “boosts a company’s success by empowering the qualities of leadership at every level of the organization.”

Mike Johnston, a former director with the Environmental Protection Agency, agrees. Johnston first sought Fisher’s help when he was butting heads with another EPA director.

“What I came away with was a series of concrete steps,” says Johnston. “They were steps I could take toward the goals I wanted to realize in each of these various areas. That process helped me realize successes that, in the beginning, I did not believe could happen.”

Five years after the LYV process, Johnston still values the experience. “If you think you’re 100 percent where you want to be, you’re probably kidding yourself,” Johnston says. “I was far more effective as a supervisor in the last five years of my career, as a result of the coaching, than I was the first 25.”

**Office Exercise**

Here is a coaching exercise that Fran suggests will challenge your management team to live from “the inside-out.”

The team agrees on confidentiality and safety: no judgments or criticisms, verbal or non-verbal (rolling your eyes, etc). Each team member shares with the group a personal value, or picks one of the organizational values (integrity, respect for others, honesty, etc.). Then each member recalls a time when that value was honored in a specific way, and a time when it was not. Then, each member commits to honoring that value in a specific way over the course of the coming day or week.

Set a date to meet again and talk about the success and challenges. How did it feel to be consciously working from a personal value? And then celebrate the wins.

— Sherri Ziff Lester

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MOVING FORWARD
Fisher stresses her methods are not therapy. She says coaching is about moving forward, raising the bar, breaking through obstacles – and not about dwelling on the past. For the more complex “why” questions of life, Fisher advises clients to seek the help of a qualified psychotherapist.

As founder and chairperson of LYV, Fisher has built an organization that includes the Academy for Coach Training, which has trained hundreds of coaches in the Fisher method. The company also runs a non-profit organization, The Living Your Vision Foundation, which provides community service for youth.

Using Communication to Solve Corporate Problems
A newly hired CEO and a COO on the job for six months at an anonymous company found themselves butting heads.

Both had been the leaders and in control at their previous jobs. Their power struggles were beginning to detract from their ability to manage the company. The officials came to Frances Fisher for help.

“Fran provided us with an exercise which allowed us to cut through our egos and synchronize our efforts immediately,” explains the CEO.

Here’s how it worked: individually, each one identified the strengths that he brought to the company and the strengths he appreciated in the other. The two then met one-on-one and shared their findings. The two then designed a decision-making and communication structure that met their needs and played to their strengths.

“The ah-ha moment came when both men saw the possibilities of working in a new and more empowering structure that was different from what they had worked with in the past. “That’s what coaching does,” Fisher says. “It facilitates people to explore the possibilities rather than staying attached to the status quo. There’s a sense of freedom and collaboration now in their working relationship, versus competition.”

Sherri Ziff Lester is a freelance writer in Los Angeles.