



# InsideOut Development:

Do What You  
Already Know

Alan Fine

*A nine-year old tennis student stands on the court completely astonished.*

*Until now, this shy little girl has only been able to hit the ball over the net six times in a row. But she just made fifty-three successive, successful hits. That's a 1000 percent or "10X" improvement. How did she do it?*

In the final round of the 2006 World Match Play Event, professional golfer Stephen Ames loses to Tiger Woods "nine and eight" (almost as badly as it's possible to lose in match play). One month later, he surges six strokes ahead of his closest competitor (and fifteen strokes ahead of Tiger Woods), to win the Tournament Players Championship and take home the biggest check in golf history at the time (\$1,440,000). How did he make it happen?

The managing director of a multi-million design and manufacturing business in China shifts the defective product percentage from nine percent to less than one percent. The manager of a call center in a major U.S. corporation watches his unit surge from the bottom performing group to second place in only two weeks. A regional manager for a training company exceeds the challenging revenue goal increase he was given, retains his company's position with a customer who cut every other program, and doubles the company's income from that customer—all in the midst of a very difficult economy.

**What is it that enables each of these "performers" to achieve such dramatic improvement? And how can the answer to that question enable you to improve not only your own performance, but also the performance of any individual or team in your organization or your entire organization?**

# From Outside-in to Inside-out

Until that day on the court as I was coaching the “10X” girl, I had believed—as most people do—that the best way to improve performance is through the “outside-in” approach. If you want to get better, read a book, take a class, or hire an expert. There’s some bit of knowledge “out there” you don’t have, and if you can just figure out how to get it, your performance will dramatically improve.

But as I had begun to realize, if knowledge really were all it took to be a high performer, then all any of us would have to do would be to read that book or take that class and we’d all be winning championships. We’d all be incredible managers, great teachers, phenomenal parents and performance.

But we’re not. Why? *Because the biggest obstacle in performance isn’t not knowing what to do; it’s not doing what we already know.*

We can easily validate this in our own lives. We all know of things we could do that would make a huge difference in our performance, such as exercise regularly, eat better, or spend more time on professional development. Yet we don’t do these things. We can also validate this phenomenon in organizations, where research shows that of the billions of dollars spent on training and consulting, most of it is on information that is being repeated and still not implemented.

So what keeps us from doing what we know? Typically, it’s *interference*—or more often, *interFEARence*—created by those external and internal factors that slow us down, immobilize us, and keep us from performing at our best. That day on the tennis court with the 10x girl, for example, my well-intended instructions (“Shake hands with your racket.” “Hit the ball on its way down.” “Hit the back side of the ball”) were not only *not* helping her; they were actually getting in the way of her performance because she was focusing on trying to remember everything I said instead of on her own experience and what was happening in the moment.

The same thing was happening with Stephen Ames at the World Match Play Event. His brother Robert, who was also his caddy, had been feeding him information on yardages, advising him on club selection and helping him read the putts. While the information was accurate and would have been useful to many players, it was unintentionally creating interference for Stephen and causing him to doubt his own instincts.

In both instances, as we were able to help these athletes shift what they paid attention to and how they paid attention, the resulting performance improvement was dramatic. Using the same strategy, managers and leaders can significantly improve the performance of individuals and teams throughout their organizations.

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# Creating Focus Through GROW

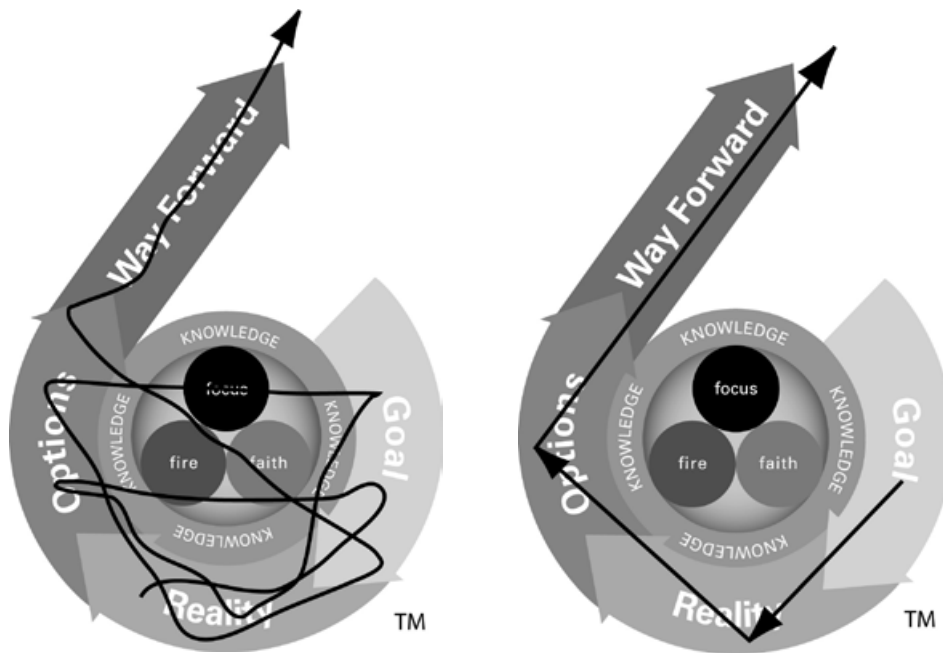
The key to getting rid of interference is to create *focus*; and the key to creating focus is a process called GROW. Basically, GROW is a map of human decision-making. Whenever we make a decision, we go through four stages:

- **G**oal (what we want to do)
- **R**eality (the circumstances we're dealing with—or how we perceive them)
- **O**ptions (how we might move from our Reality to our Goal),
- **W**ay Foreword (what action we want to take)

Typically, we go through these stages in a somewhat haphazard fashion. Our thoughts run from Goal to Options to Reality to Goal to Way Forward to Reality and back to Goal again. It's like trying to score runs in baseball by running all over the field between stepping on the bases. It's not impossible; it's just a whole lot more difficult.

By using GROW, we address these stages in an orderly, sequential way that creates focus, removes interference, and increases Decision Velocity™ (the speed and accuracy of decisions).

For a snapshot view of one way GROW can make a difference in the organization, compare a typical team meeting with a meeting where team members use GROW. In a typical meeting, people are usually dealing with all kinds of interference—personality differences, perspective



differences, hidden agendas, the desire to look good, minds wandering, fears about job security, “right/wrong” thinking (“if I’m right, that means you’re wrong”), compliance instead of commitment, etc. Team members interact around the four stages of GROW, but usually in a random (and not very effective) manner.

GROW shifts the focus of the group to something simple they believe they can do (go through the four stages in an orderly, sequential way). It shifts the thinking from *why* something *can’t* be done to *what* can be done and *how*.

Here’s one way this might play out. After deciding on someone to lead the discussion, team members focus on giving input concerning the **Goal** for the meeting—“Okay, what is it we want to get out of the next two hours? What do we want to walk away with?” Asking these questions encourages team members to:

- Focus on the purpose of the meeting (to the exclusion of the myriad of other distracting issues that could create interference)
- Feel a shared commitment to problem-solving within the time frame
- Be realistic about what can be accomplished in the time frame
- Work toward precision and accountability in the solution.

Someone captures all the ideas on a whiteboard in the upper right-hand square of a four-quadrant matrix. In harmony with the design of the GROW model, the quadrants are labeled *Goal*, *Reality*, *Options*, and *Way Forward* beginning with this upper right-hand quadrant and moving clockwise.

Team members then agree on the one or two specific goals that would make the most critical performance difference. Whatever Goal is set for the meeting is a “S.M.A.R.T.” goal (Specific, Meaningful, Agreed to, Realistic and Time phased).



Once the Goal is agreed upon, each person shares his/her view of the **Reality** the team is facing. These comments are captured on the lower right hand quadrant of the chart. In the Reality phase, there is rarely a need for a consensus. (This is where many typical team meetings get bogged down.) In fact, as long as there's an agreed upon Goal, divergent Realities actually bring more Options to the table. So what's important here is that all team members get “air time” and that everyone has the benefit of the perspective of everyone else on the team.

The agreed-upon process and time frame encourage team members to be precise and succinct in presenting their points of view. In addition, this phase enables team members to:

- Gain a more holistic and accurate perspective of the issue
- Listen to others with confidence that their own opinion will be heard
- Have confidence that the solution will include the thinking of everyone on the team—including the deep thinkers who are often the most quiet

With all the perspectives on the table, the team is ready to brainstorm **Options**, which are recorded in the lower left-hand quadrant on the chart. In this phase, it's important to withhold all evaluation and judgment until every idea is out. Doing so invites creativity, free “out-of-the-box” thinking, and “piggybacking” of ideas.

Once the ideas are all out, the team moves toward a **Way Forward**. Ideas are evaluated. Options are narrowed down to those that seem most likely to create the desired results, which are recorded on the upper left-hand square on the chart. From those, the team chooses a Way (or Ways) Forward that includes specific accountabilities with time frames.

One reason managers and leaders find this process so helpful in improving organizational performance is because the four stages of GROW are common to decision-making in every culture and with every experience level and personality type worldwide. While there may be *style* differences in various cultures and countries, there are not *stage* differences. Therefore, GROW provides a

powerful decision-making tool (and competitive advantage) for organizations and teams operating in today's global market.

One manager in a large multinational company team said this: "I have twelve people on my leadership team. It's very diverse. I am an American, and we have a Canadian, a Saudi Arabian, several Germans, a Brit, an Italian and an Austrian on the team. In the past, we tended to wallow in Reality. We really loved to talk about the details of our problems, but we were not able to move on to find Options to make a decision. So we started facilitating ourselves in these situations where we found ourselves becoming stuck. Now we stop, take out a flip chart, write the GROW model up on the flip chart and work from there. It really has helped us to move forward when we couldn't reach consensus to make a decision."

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# GROW Works on Every Level

Another reason why managers and leaders find GROW particularly helpful is that it can be used effectively by individuals and groups on every level throughout the organization.

**On the Organizational Level**, CEOs and senior managers can use GROW:

- To look outward. They can look at the environment and say, “What is our Goal? What is our purpose for existing as an organization? What need out there are we going to try to reach?” They can then look at the financial, physical, and market Realities and explore the Options generated by those Realities. They can then choose the Way Forward—the organizational strategy—that makes the most sense. This repeatable process is particularly useful in today’s world where the environment is changing so rapidly that you can’t just define organizational strategy once; you have to be constantly aware of what’s going on and make adjustments or you can quickly become irrelevant.
- To look inward. “How do we operationalize our strategy?” “What do we need to do as an organization to accomplish our purpose or meet those needs?” “Do our systems, structures, and policies Focus attention on critical variables, or do they distract or cause interference?” “What Realities are we dealing with?” “Where are we now?” “What are our strengths?” “What strengths are we missing?” “Who do we have on board?” “What do we know?” “What *don’t* we know?” Answers to questions such as these give birth to Options (expand research, partner with another group, realign a less-than-optimal system or policy, or invest in technology) and viable Ways Forward. The fact that the process is simple and repeatable makes it helpful in dealing with ongoing changes inside the organization.

**On the Team Level**, GROW takes effective decision making down to the marketing, advertising, customer service, and other teams created to make the Goals of the organization happen. Managers and team leaders can use GROW:

- To identify the Goals and deal with the Realities, Options, and Ways Forward unique to their specific areas of responsibility.
- *With* their teams to address performance issues.
- *On* their teams to improve the way people work together.
- To coach individual contributors within the team and to prepare for difficult conversations if needed.

**On the Individual Level**, with or without a coach, contributors can use GROW:

- To align their efforts with the Goals of the organization and work toward improved performance in their particular role.
- To prepare for difficult conversations with colleagues or even with a boss.

On every level, focused attention can help people translate intent into action and promise into performance with accuracy and speed. It opens the door for people to deal with real issues, real concerns, and viable implementation strategies in their specific roles and situations.

Let's take a look at how Suzanne, a manager in a large pharmaceutical company, used GROW on multiple levels to resolve a performance issue with her team. Shortly after hiring a temp to help with the growing workload, Suzanne was surprised to discover a tension developing between this temp and a long-standing coordinator. The coordinator would avoid the temp, belittle her, seldom explain her assignments adequately and speak negatively about her to other work teams and team members. The temp had expressed her desire to earn a full-time position, and her creativity and ingenuity seemed primed for that outcome. But the harder she tried, the harder the coordinator seemed to work against her.

Suzanne realized that the conflict between these two employees was rapidly eroding a critical competency of her team—collaboration. Both the temp and the coordinator were shutting down their ideas because they were focused on the problematic relationship instead of collaboration and teamwork. Suzanne had several conversations with the coordinator to discuss the problem, but the behavior did not improve.

After learning about GROW, Suzanne decided to try it. First, she used it on herself. She defined her Goal (to engage her coordinator in a conversation to resolve the issue). She listed the Realities of her situation, including the presence of the tension, her lack of understanding of the reason for it, and her failure at this point to engage the coordinator in resolving the problem. She considered her Options and discussed them with her director. She decided on a Way Forward, which included role-playing the coaching conversation she planned to have with the coordinator in advance so that she could reduce some of her own interference and also defining what she would do if the coordinator refused to engage in resolving the issue.

Suzanne then initiated a GROW conversation with her coordinator. Because this was an “engagement” rather than a “performance” conversation, she began with her own Goal as a manager—to eliminate the tension and free team members to collaborate. At first, the coordinator was defensive.

She blamed the temp for the problems and cited her own years of experience with the company as justification for her actions. Suzanne listened patiently and validated the coordinator’s many years of service and contribution, but she explained the Reality that she needed individuals in those roles who could collaborate. If the coordinator and the temp could not work together and share ideas, she would have to look for other resources. Once the coordinator became aware of the Reality and focused on the problem of collaboration, she agreed to discuss Options and try to find a Way Forward that would work.

The final resolution of the issue involved a mediated meeting in which the coordinator and the temp were able to uncover the root of the problem—their own fears. Because of downsizing in the organization, the coordinator feared that the temp had been hired to eventually replace her. Once she acknowledged that fear, Suzanne was able to reassure her of her position and importance with the company. The temp was afraid that if she admitted there was tension between her and the coordinator, she would not be considered for full-time employment. Suzanne was able to reassure the temp that full-time positions existed for her if she performed well.

In this circumstance, shifting the focus through GROW not only removed interference so that people could deal with the issue; it also removed the interFEARence that was at the very root of the problem.

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# GROW Works in Any Situation

With the growing emphasis on the development of the “whole person” in organizations, many managers and leaders also value the transferability of the GROW process to other areas outside the workplace. They recognize that application in multiple venues not only reinforces the process in an employee’s approach at work; it also provides a genuinely helpful tool for people to improve their wellbeing and therefore their ability to bring more of their best selves to their job.

I am constantly amazed at the number of people who approach me after a presentation in their work environment excited about the possibilities that have come into their minds about how they can also use GROW in their personal and family lives. I’ve seen people use GROW to create focus and remove interference in a variety of situations such as:

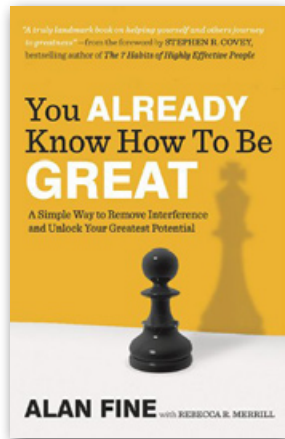
- Helping a spouse work through a career decision issue
- Helping a child learn his multiplication tables
- Helping a child learn to keep her room clean
- Coaching a neighborhood baseball team
- Uniting a family in dealing with a parent’s Alzheimer’s disease
- Helping a daughter overcome anorexia
- Helping a friend decide which guy to date
- Planning a day

As people experience the results of this simple approach in situations outside the workplace, they become more empowered to use it effectively both on and off the job. They also feel reinforced in the belief that the organization that has helped them learn this process is concerned about the whole person and is providing tools to help them achieve a happy, well-balanced life.

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Bottom line, GROW makes the “inside-out” approach actionable. It enables managers and leaders to reduce interference instead of creating it. In doing so, it gives “legs” to empowerment. It releases people’s **Faith** (belief that something can be done), **Fire** (energy about doing it) and **Focus** (attention to the critical variables necessary to make it happen).

**As experience shows, that’s a pretty powerful way to improve performance. 📌**



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[\*You Already Know How to Be Great.\*](#)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Building on a performance-changing discovery made twenty-five years ago as a tennis coach in Wales, Alan Fine expanded his career to include coaching and training top professional golfers, tennis players, musicians, and corporate executives worldwide. Alan's Company, InsideOut Development, offers leadership, management, and front-line employee training programs, executive coaching services, team performance workshops, and organizational consulting services to a large global clientele. Considered by many to be one of the fathers of the modern executive-coaching movement, Alan is in high demand as a speaker and thought leader.

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