

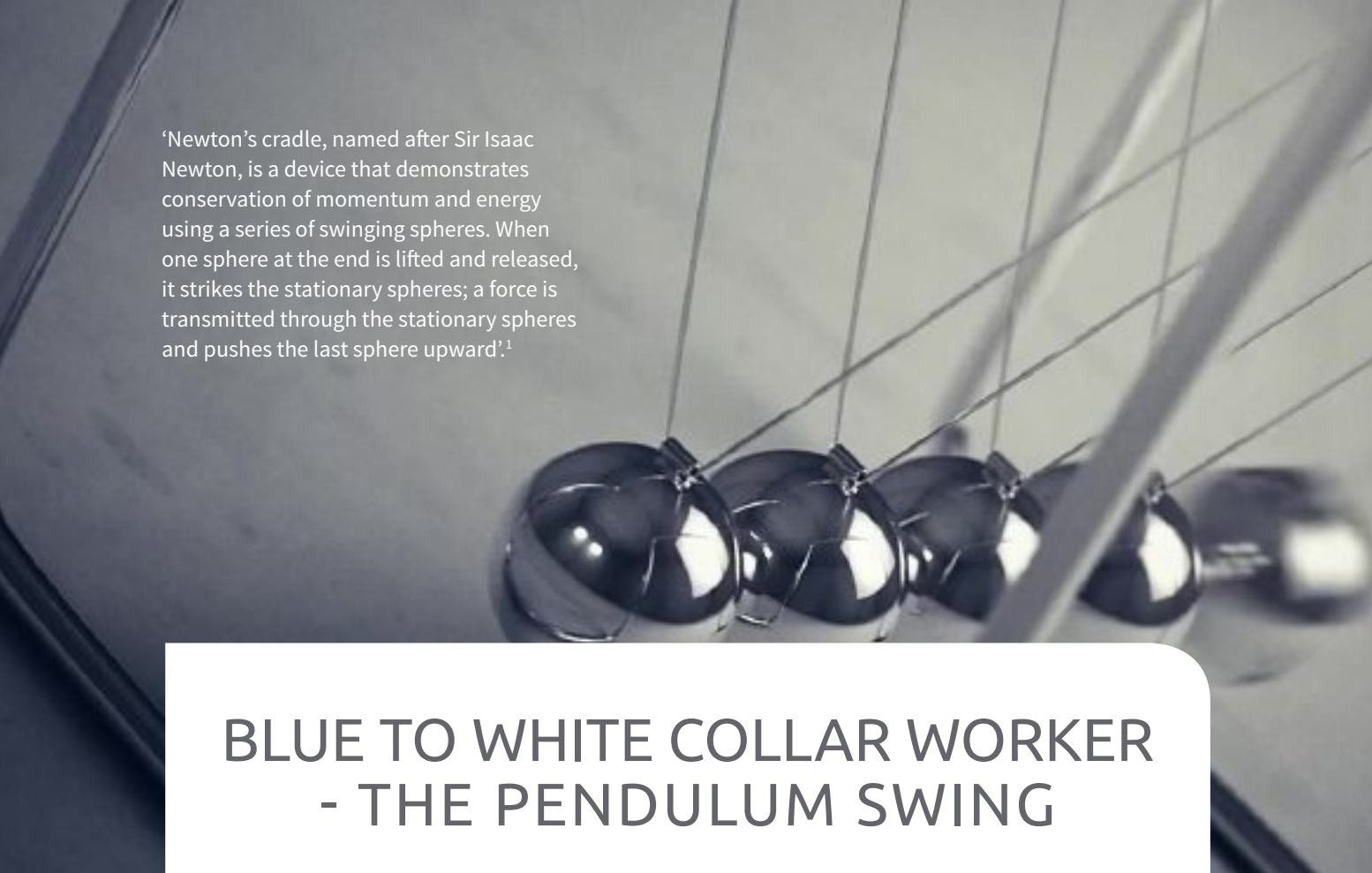
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Coaching Perspectives

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“PROMOTING EXCELLENCE & ETHICS IN COACHING”



‘Newton’s cradle, named after Sir Isaac Newton, is a device that demonstrates conservation of momentum and energy using a series of swinging spheres. When one sphere at the end is lifted and released, it strikes the stationary spheres; a force is transmitted through the stationary spheres and pushes the last sphere upward’.¹

BLUE TO WHITE COLLAR WORKER - THE PENDULUM SWING

The lack of support for young leaders stepping into leadership prompted coach **Karin Ovari** to examine the impact on the wellbeing and success of the leaders themselves and their organisations.

The pendulum swing is the name I give to the fluctuation within the organisation as employees oscillate between their previous, blue-collar roles and their new white-collar positions. They are continually moving between deploying their original, technical skill sets whilst aiming to meet the needs of management and their new (often inherited) team. Though it is more common in new, ‘immature’ leaders, the pendulum swing can affect even mature leaders, particularly within the operational layers of an organisation.

After many years of working with frontline leaders, supervisors, and emerging leaders, it is apparent to me that while individuals often possess excellent technical skills, they regularly find themselves leading people without much support or understanding of what is expected. Where once they could simply get on with the job and produce the goods, now they are required to get the job done through, and with, others. And herein lies the crux of much pain and struggle.

I recently shadow-coached supervisors working at the coal-face of an organisation. However, these people were also

told that they were the first line of the leadership team. This proved very confusing for them. Many had been supervisors for a long time, but with this new ‘title’ came different expectations. Remarkably, many of these expectations had always been in the job description, but inadequate training and support meant that the supervisors had never fully realised their potential, nor become fully effective. The coaching process provided the support they needed, enabling them to grow fully into their roles. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, this was the first support many had received - in 20 years, in some cases.

LACK OF LEADERSHIP TRAINING

In his 2015 article², blogger Ted Bauer cites:

- Most leaders get their first leadership position when they’re 30.*
- Most leaders get their first leadership training when they’re 42.

* (I believe first leadership roles happen earlier than this.)

That twelve-year gap, between starting to lead and being trained in leadership, should alarm us. A lot can happen in twelve years — especially between the ages of 30 and 42.

Those long intervals of neglect can result in damaged people, resentment, and broken leadership. Furthermore, as these people move up to the next leadership role, the damage compounds: Boom! – the next journey of pain and struggle begins, often ending in yet deeper resentment.

To exacerbate the problem, when leaders return from training full of enthusiasm to use their new skills, there is often little chance or support to embed the new learning, because their work has simply piled up whilst they were away. So leaders return to meet the needs of others - their teams and their managers - and they fall straight back into the same old routines, behaviours, and problems. Thus, the cycle continues.

The McKinsey Quarterly article 'Why Leadership-Development Programs Fail'¹³ discusses the almost \$14 billion spent annually in the US on leadership development. Of the top three human-capital priorities from the research, leadership development was the number one concern. It cites a UK business school poll of senior managers, where only 7 % felt their company developed leaders effectively, and around 30% of US companies admit that they fail in this area. After much research and discussion, the study highlighted the following four most common mistakes

1. **Overlooking Context** – A brilliant leader in one situation does not necessarily perform well in another. I believe this is also valid for a newly promoted leader, particularly if they have little to no development support. Too many training initiatives take a one-size-fits-all approach.
2. **Decoupling reflection from real work** – Sadly, even after the most basic off-site training, individuals (particularly those who learn by doing) typically retain only about 10% of their learning. Even the most engaged and talented leaders often struggle to transfer the newly acquired knowledge to the workplace.
3. **Underestimating mind-sets** – Becoming an effective leader often requires changing behaviour. A further challenge is identifying 'below the surface' feelings, thoughts, assumptions and beliefs. Often these key human aspects, vital for change to occur, are overlooked in the development of leadership programmes.
4. **Failing to measure results** – Many companies pay lip service to developing leadership skills, but rarely seek evidence to support the value of their investment. Too often, evaluation begins and ends with participant feedback. It should be an on-going process which measures changed behaviours over time back in the workplace.

The final statement of the article sums up where I see the potential for coaching to make an enormous difference.

'Companies can avoid the most common mistakes in leadership development and increase the odds of success by matching specific leadership skills and traits to the context at hand; embedding leadership development in real work; fearlessly investigating the mindsets that underpin behaviour; and monitoring the impact to make improvements over time.'

The more we encourage companies and organisations to start the coaching journey before the coachee or leader has problems, the better future leaders we will have. Imagine a world where the norm is coaching support for those moving from the blue-collar to the white-collar world.

Times are changing, and millennials will not put up with the lack of development on offer. They will simply move on to another organisation that is willing to provide the support they crave. These are all opportunities for coaches, who are uniquely qualified to play a major supporting role. For our part, we coaches need to move with the times, finding ways to provide services in a timely and cost-efficient manner.

Young leaders will be practising on the job whether trained or not. Let's look for ways to introduce coaching at a much earlier phase of the leadership journey - and put some fun into the pendulum swing!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karin Ovari is The Supervisors Coach. As a trained ontological coach, she focuses on you, the human: how we communicate, the impact of moods, emotions and physical well-being. As a Conversational Intelligence™ coach, she delves deeper into the neuroscience of human communication to build trust for individuals, teams and organisations. Her passion is helping front-line, operational and situational leaders have an easier day. Other tools include EQ-i20; EQ360; DiSC; Situational Leadership; ICSI Safety Culture Diagnostics, World Cafe, and more.

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1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newton's_cradle
2. Bauer, T. 'Here's an incredible stat about lack of leadership training' in *The Context of Things* [blog], January 2015. <http://thecontextofthings.com/2015/01/15/lack-of-leadership-training/>
3. Gurdjian, P., Halbeisen, T., Lane, K. 'Why Leadership Development Programs Fail' in *McKinsey Quarterly*, January 2014. <http://bit.ly/2obWlQt>