

The  
Economist

# Coaching and Mentoring

What they are and how  
to make the most of them

Jane Renton



## Tim Gallwey

*Born:* 1938

*Nationality:* American

### **Notable publications**

*The Inner Game of Tennis*, Random House, 1974

*The Inner Game of Golf*, Random House, 1981

*The Inner Game of Work*, Random House, 2000

### **Notable quotation**

*The greatest efforts in sports come when the mind is as still as a glass lake.*

Steve Martin look-alike and former captain of the Harvard University tennis team, Tim Gallwey took a sabbatical in 1971 from his career in higher education and experienced one of those life-defining moments that seem to abound in coaching: he found a job in California as a tennis professional, only to discover he was more of a hindrance to his students than a help:

*I realised that many of my teaching instructions were being incorporated in the student's mind as a kind of "command and control" self-dialogue that was significantly interfering with learning and performance.*

The former US naval officer had recently learned a meditation technique from the Divine Light Mission's Guru Maharajah Ji, an experience about which he went on record in the *New York Times* in 1973, along with his intention to live in an ashram and practise celibacy. His experience also made him look at his favourite sport in an entirely new way.

He discovered there was too much extraneous mind chatter going on in his students to allow them to fully focus on their game. He began to explore new and non-judgmental methods to help them observe the ball, body and racquet in a way that would heighten learning, performance and enjoyment. The "inner game" takes place within the mind of the player and is played against such obstacles as fear, self-doubt, lapses in focus and limiting concepts or assumptions, he said. The inner game is played to overcome these self-imposed obstacles, which stop an individual or team from fulfilling their potential.

His efforts in this direction culminated in his book *The Inner Game of Tennis*, which described his experiments in detail as well as their surprising results. It unexpectedly ended up on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

A six-part TV series based on the book followed and his principles were applied initially to other sports, such as skiing and golf. The common theme was overcoming self-doubt and fear of failure, which were getting in the way of concentration and enjoyment of the sport in question. There was even an *Inner Game of Music*, which he wrote in 1986 with Barry Green, principal bassist in the Cincinnati Philharmonic Orchestra.

Gallwey's technique, particularly in the golfing arena, brought him into contact with many business leaders, who began to see the implications of inner game concepts and models for bringing about desired changes in their own companies. One of his early clients was telecommunications giant AT&T, which needed help at that time in adjusting to the newly competitive marketplace of the early 1980s. He also worked with IBM:

*I was asked to help IBM change its prevailing corporate attitude of "we know it all", to that of a learning and coaching organisation.*

Other clients included Apple, which brought Gallwey in to work on its leadership development programme. He also worked with senior executives at Coca-Cola to help them develop the skills that would help the company move towards becoming what he describes as "a learning organisation" – in other words, one capable of adapting to change through the continuous acquisition of learning and knowledge.

Gallwey's work shaped much of the modern coaching movement, including the work of Sir John Whitmore and Graham Alexander, who brought his techniques to Europe and then developed them further.