

THE POWER OF STRING

by Heather Bradley

As I road the rails to Montreal, I reviewed my goals for the 2008 ICF conference. What I could not have anticipated was the discovery of a tool that would immediately revolutionize the way I sell team coaching services.



As a member of the CRR Booth Team in the Coaching Exchange, I arrived bright and early the first day to help put the finishing touches on the area that would become our home base for the next three days. Along with the usual collateral materials I noticed a skein of turquoise yarn but didn't pay much attention to it. I assumed it was there to serve its typical utilitarian purpose.

As I went about my tasks I noticed Chris and Lisa from the Center attaching string to CRR business cards. What a bizarre way to get your business cards noticed, I thought. As I later discovered, it turns out they were attaching the business cards to a very powerful sales tool – a piece of string.

Like many of you, I have struggled over the years to adequately explain systems coaching to potential clients. I typically launch into a mini demo or share an anecdote about how the coaching powerfully impacted a team. Now, all I need to remember is to make sure I have a string with me at all times.

As I learned, lots of people who visited our booth were discovering systems coaching for the first time. For those visitors, I picked up a string and asked the person if they were willing to hold the other end. When they agreed, I would say something like "I know we just met but we are already in relationship." Pointing to the string, I would then ask, "What do you notice about our relationship?" And so the dialogue would begin as we played with the string. I would tug playfully or let it droop, and encourage the visitor to notice what happened. After a minute or so, I would point to the string and say, "That's what we coach – the relationship between two or more people."

It didn't take too long to realize these brilliantly simple demonstrations were proof I was on to something transformational for my sales discussions. People got it right away!

And the learning didn't stop there. When one couple approached the booth, I engaged them in a conversation and learned they were from Brazil. When I realized they were not fluent in English and I didn't have time to learn Portuguese I thought, "Uh oh, I'm in trouble here." I wasn't sure how the conversation would unfold but I plunged in like a cliff diver anyway. Out came the string and I learned I had again underestimated its power to help convey the concept of systems coaching. This simple demonstration transcends language and culture.



As soon as I got back from the conference I was off to the yarn store.



Heather L. Bradley is President & CEO of The Flourishing Company, a workplace consulting firm. TFC works with executives committed to aligning their people with the strategic plan.

Formerly a Vice-President, Human Resources in a Fortune 500 company, Bradley understands the talent cycle in organizations and the systems required to align people with the strategic plan.

She is among the first 25 coaches in the world awarded the coveted ORSCC designation for her demonstrated competency as a systems coach.

As a published author, Bradley is credited with co-authoring two books, dozens of articles, a collection of on-line courses, skill-zines and the innovative *Teams Alignment and Productivity System*[™]. Bradley's most recent book, *Judge for Yourself: Clarity, Choice and Action in Your Legal Career* was published by the American Bar Association in cooperation with MCCA and includes introductory remarks by the Honorable Ruth Bader Ginsburg of the United States Supreme Court.

Bradley has served on the faculty of the U.S. Treasury Executive Institute, the Minority Corporate Counsel Association's Pathways to Diversity Conference, ACC's Corporate Counsel University and featured in a prominent article in *Human Resource Executive Magazine*.