



# *The* Look & Sound *of* Leadership™ SINCE 1990 *Executive Coaching Tips*

## TAMING THE WILD CHILD

TOM HENSCHHEL  
JUNE 2018

This month's coaching conversation features a high-performing client who sometimes wrestles with her fear. Aware that her fear can diminish her, she seeks a way out.

[LISTEN](#)

[DOWNLOAD MP3](#)

[SUBSCRIBE](#)

### “In Your Own Way”

Maxine was going to be a star – if she could just “get out of her own way.” Those were the words on the street about Maxine. They were even her words about herself.

During a coaching session, after she'd spoken the phrase once again, I asked her what it meant for her to “get in her own way.”

She replied without pause. “Oh, you've heard me do it, Tom. I suddenly start talking really fast and can't stop. I'm just jabbering away.”

“Why is that ‘getting in your own way’?” I asked.

“Because I suddenly sound like a girl. And being a girl around here gets you nowhere. But that's how I feel. Like a jumpy teenager. When it comes over me, I'm not effective at all.”

“And what is ‘it’ that ‘comes over you’?” I asked.



“Oh, golly!” She took a big breath as if the list of things that came over her was long. Then she breathed out, releasing the thought. Finally, after a moment, she shook her head and smiled. “It’s just hard work. That’s all. And getting the work right is important to me. We’ve talked about this, Tom. I really hate making mistakes. So when something feels important, I can get in my own way.”

I nodded but didn’t speak.

She went on. “Isn’t it ironic? I try so hard not to make mistakes that I get in my own way – which is a mistake.”

“What would you fix if you could?” I asked.

“I’d stop that babbling stream of words. And stop apologizing! That’s another one where I kick myself later. I look back and think, ‘What was that? You’ve known better than that since high school! What were you thinking?’”

“And the answer is?”

“I *wasn’t* thinking!”

### **Who’s behind the wheel?**

“Well, someone’s behind the wheel, Max. Someone is making the decision to keep talking. Or to apologize.”

“I don’t know,” she said. “It feels like some stressed out teenager.”

“Is it you? Were you a stressed out teenager? Did you talk really fast and apologize a lot?”

She laughed. “That was definitely one part of me. But I was super-serious, too. I was always one of the smart kids. And, yes, sometimes I babbled, for sure.”



“And what purpose did your babbling serve back then?”

“It was like, if I could talk fast enough, throw enough ideas up in the air, I’d distract everyone from noticing I wasn’t really as smart as everybody thought I was. My Little Miss Perfect mask was slipping and, well, you know, when in doubt, baffle ‘em with bullshit, right?”

“Did it work?”

“Sometimes! You bet!”

“So that babbling teenager served a purpose sometimes.”

“I suppose she did,” she said. “But I wouldn’t have said so.”

“Why? What would you have said?”

“I would’ve said her only purpose was to be scared. I got pretty frantic when I thought my Little Miss Perfect mask might be slipping.”

“What about these days? Are you nervous now? Is the crown slipping?”

She understood the connection and stared at me. Then, confidently, she said, “No, I don’t think so.” Then she narrowed her eyes. “But then why does she show up? The parallel’s not there.”

### **Little Tommy saboteur**

“Does there have to be a reason?” I asked.

“Well, doesn’t there? That babbling girl only showed up when I was afraid things were going wrong. So why is she showing up now? There’s nothing wrong!”

“Well, in my experience,” I said, “there’s not always a logical explanation. At least not one I can figure out



when it happens to me.”

“This happens to you?” she asked.

“Oh, yes. But my saboteur is younger than yours. Mine is Little Tommy.” I smiled fondly.

“Little Tommy?” she laughed. “And what does Little Tommy do?”

“Oh, sometimes he doesn’t do anything at all. Sometimes he’s just a feeling. Like you, it comes over me. I’m suddenly Little Tommy and I feel less than everyone else.”

She groaned in sympathy. “Yuck!”

“Agreed. But as far as I can tell, there’s not always a rational reason why he shows up. Sometimes I can look back and go, ‘Oh, yeah, all the trigger elements were in place. I understand why that happened.’ But other times I look back and I haven’t a clue.”

“But you have a Little Tommy,” she said with a bit of wonderment. “You even gave him a name!”

“I did! I’ve spent a lot of time with him. He’s just a kid. He means well.”

“This is hysterical. Like he’s a person!”

“Well, he is,” I said. “In the same way your teenager is a person. He’s a specific part of me that has habits and behaviors, like every other part of me. But the problem with the Little Tommy part of me is that he comes from my fear part. His very nature is to be afraid. Being fearful is all he can do. Fear is his only contribution.”

### **Wrestling Little Tommy**

I continued, “So when Little Tommy shows up – often for no reason at all! – I need to have an antidote. Little Tommy’s fear is contagious. When I catch what he’s got, I feel bad about myself. And that used to make me



angry. I'd think to myself, 'Dammit, kid, get out of here. You're going to make me look bad!' I'd find myself in this wrestling match with my Little Tommy, trying to get him to am-scray."

She laughed. "That's never happened to me but I completely get it!"

I sat back, changing gears. "Sometimes things got worse. Whatever part of me was taken up by Little Tommy, was not focused on the task at hand, right? So I literally had diminished capacity. I was not my best."

"Sounds familiar! But you make it sound like it's not that way anymore."

"Not as often," I concurred.

"So how'd you change it?" she asked.

"I stopped letting him upset me. I stopped being angry. Look, throwing a tantrum at a kid who is throwing a tantrum of his own is not a great strategy, right? Besides, I realized he wasn't trying to upset me. He was just frightened. He needed a little love."

She gave a thoughtful 'huh!' Then asked, "Which sounded like what?"

I looked down, as if talking to a child, and laid both hands palm-down in the air. Quietly, calmly, I said, "It's okay, kid. I'm the grownup here. I got this. Thanks for coming by. Love you.' And that's it. I'm done with Little Tommy. And he goes away."

She laughed. "Until next time!"

"Right!" I laughed, too. "He's going to show up sometime, right? But now, when he does, I'm fine. In fact, sometimes I seek him out. There are times I can look ahead on my calendar and see an event and think, 'That situation has a whole lot of Little Tommy's triggers. Let me calm him down before he gets riled up.'"



And I do. I think about Little Tommy and say, ‘I’ve got that meeting under control. Nothing to worry about, kid. Keep on sleeping. Everything’s fine.’”

She gave a little clap. “I love that! I’m going to do that.” Then, “This is talking back to your fear, right? I heard about this idea somewhere.”

“I’m sure! I imagine this is an old, old idea,” I said. “I used to do a form of this when I was an actor, and I’m sure the idea was old even then.” At which point I told her *the story* about my near-career-ending bout of nervousness when I was a performer on the stage.

During her coaching, Maxine dug into taming the fearful teenager who made her less than her best. Gaining control over that part of her allowed her to continue to manifest *The Look & Sound of Leadership*.

Check out our newest course:

**IMPROV FOR LEADERS**

TAUGHT BY AN IMPROV MASTER!

Boost confidence.  
Unlock power.  
Think on your feet.  
And have some fun!

---

### Core Concepts:

- Fear comes for us all sometime
- Tensing against your fear can be undermining
- Imagine your fear as a separate part of you
- Talk compassionately to your fear, as you would to a frightened child



### Related Categories in the Coaching Tips Archive:

[For Women](#)

[Managing Yourself](#)

[Perception – How You Perceive Yourself](#)

[Personal Growth & Self-Development](#)

[Self-Talk](#)

### Related Individual Tips & Episodes:

[Combating Emotional Hijacks](#)

[Conquering Fear](#)

[Managing Nervousness](#)

[Negative Self-Talk](#)

[Self-Limiting Beliefs](#)

[Self-Awareness & Self-Management](#)

[The Many Parts of You](#)

[Unmasking a Stand-In](#)

## CONNECT



### CONTRIBUTE

an idea for future Executive Coaching Tips



### SUBSCRIBE

to the Podcast



### LISTEN

to episodes of "The Look & Sound of Leadership" podcast



### VIEW

searchable archive of Executive Coaching Tips



### CONTACT

the Essential Communications team

818 788 5357

essentialcomm.com

info@essentialcomm.com



4+

MILLION  
PODCASTS  
DOWNLOADED

