

Authentic Coaching and the Exquisite Self

By Angus McLeod, PhD.

What can the coach do to improve their mindset for coaching? What philosophies, ideas and experiences may enhance the state for coaching?

I shall briefly discuss some philosophies that I believe support best practice in coaching. These include Servant Leadership and the compelling work of Monty Roberts with horses¹. But first, consider the importance of what I call Conscious Perception.

Conscious Perception re-evaluates the communication and looks at negative, neutral and positive possibilities in the message. More than that, Conscious Perception looks beyond the message to the possible states of mind of the originator. Thus, a voice-mail message from my boss's boss picked up one Friday evening stated simply,

"Angus, this is Mark, I've checked your program for next week and see a gap Monday morning and want to see you in my office ten o'clock."

What do you suppose my interpretation was?

1. He is unhappy with my performance
2. My immediate boss has died and I am up for that job
3. Mark really is unhappy with my performance

Conscious Perception forced me to look beyond the interpretations to explore Mark's state of mind. I noted that the communication was more brief than usual. This could mean that he was angry with me and did not want to say too much in case he blew up over the phone. It could also mean that he was under pressure. Suddenly I heard bells ringing in my head. The full Board on which Mark sat was due to meet the following Tuesday in Birmingham. Mark could be feeling short on business performance. Maybe he was seeking support from me to embellish his results with some healthy news on prospective business to boost the next quarter. That interpretation proved correct. I had increased my Conscious Perception by self-questioning.

Increasing Conscious Perception offers more choices and strategies for dealing with issues, for moving ahead effectively. More than that, the process starts a whole new habit of self-enquiry that improves all decision making and performance. All executives can do this and perform at a higher level. That is just one area where coaching can make a huge difference to executive performance - managers learn to self-coach. 'Managing' or 'telling' does not achieve such startling pro-activity and motivation.

¹ Roberts, M. (1997). *The Man Who Listens to Horses*. London: Arrow

Conscious Perception

Conscious Perception is stimulated by questioning and challenge around established realities. The art of the coach is to recognize inhibiting and unnatural perceptions and to encourage the coachee to new perceptions. Questions include the following:

Who says?

How do you know?

Say more, convince me?

Always? Can you think of an exception?

Why must you? What other choices are there?

Additionally, there are numerous coaching tools that encourage Conscious Perception.

Familiar tools from the world of NLP include the use of perceptual positions, positive intention and chunking.

Mindsets for the Coach

John Abulafia is an opera Director and Producer working on many of the world's finest stages. John also helps people to realize how minor changes of attitude, or mindset, can have stunning effects on others². These talents enable a solitary actor, without uttering a word, to cause several thousand people to hold their breath simultaneously. If an actor can find such impactful, non-verbal expression in their repertoire of authentic emotions, then what negative impact might a coach have after a tedious drive to the session? If a gesture, a look, a slight movement of the head can have such enormous effects, should the coach not take better care about their mindset prior to coaching? Will the coach's own disappointments, frustrations, desires and hopes express themselves non-verbally, affecting the coaching dynamic? Of course!

Many coaches prepare themselves by anchoring a resourceful 'coaching state' prior to a coaching session³. I have also referred to these mindsets as an 'attitude' for coaching⁴. The most useful mindset is one that is an authentic expression of traits and beliefs that the coach already has in their repertoire. This is no mind-game or attempt at modelling, but a carefully developed mindset created by focussing attention on specific and authentic traits (including values and beliefs) that are already part of the internal repertoire, but perhaps from different contexts.

A coach may display authentic tenderness towards their child, partner, family and friends but be highly competitive and aggressive in other contexts. If we ask this individual to coach, which underlying aspects of their character would we want them to display? We need to leave our emotional baggage outside, bringing the most appropriate traits into the coaching dynamic. In this case, the coach may recall and experience loving action as richly as they can. While maintaining this state, they then construct the coaching situation they are going into, and associate the state with the coaching context, again, as richly as possible. This can be done for a number of such traits and naturally, may be anchored too.

² McLeod, A.I. (2002). 'Mantras and Magic – State Management in Coaching' *Rapport* 56, 59

³ McLeod, A.I. (1997). 'Fundamentals for the Coach' *Rapport* 37, 15-16

⁴ McLeod, A.I. (2002). 'Mindsets for the Coach – Coach with Attitude' *Effective Consulting*, 1, 8, 29-30

Selecting and focussing on inherent, authentic traits, as described above, is easier and ethically more acceptable for many people. The alternative strategies, assuming extraneous traits by mimicry or NLP modelling are often resisted outside NLP. Selecting and focussing on authentic traits and anchoring a 'coaching state' helps to achieve a suitable working mindset.

Inner Game Coaching

Michael Hall discussed the Inner Game model of Tim Gallwey in the last issue of Anchor Point⁵. Here I seek to give a brief perspective of the model in respect of coaching mindset.

Tim Gallwey determined⁶ three stages of conversation in the coaching process. These are conversations for Awareness, Choice and Trust. Gallwey's Awareness phase is simply the step of clearly defining the situation. His Choice stage is about broadening the vision of how to get to a future desired outcome, in other words, the development of Conscious Perception. The last conversational stage, Trust, is about the coachee gaining greater access to both internal and external resources in order to move from Present State to Future Desired State.

Gallwey says that the most important outcome of coaching intervention is that the coachee should feel respected, valuable and capable of moving forward. He says that the coach's contribution to this stage starts from the coach's mindset that they trust the coachee more than the coachee trusts themselves.

Gallwey makes a clear differentiation between typical coaches and 'really good coaches'. The best coaches he experienced were those who made him believe in himself, in his value and in his capabilities (including his ability to learn).

Gallwey is certainly right. The coach who starts by accessing their own appropriate, authentic traits and focusing on them within the context of coaching will be better prepared than those who do not. The question of context is critical and one that Shelle Rose Charvet never fails to underline (in the context of metaprogrammes). It is not good enough to think of yourself as a caring person if the context of your caring is not held in the coaching context as well. This is the key to Authentic Coaching.

What gifts can be brought to the coaching dynamic that are most likely to help the coachee to experience self-belief, feel valued and feel capable? These might include:

- Respect
- Hopefulness
- Trust
- Patience
- Creativity
- Openness

⁵ Hall, L.H. (2003), 'Mind-states and the Inner Game' ***Anchor Point*** 17, 2, 3-14

⁶ Gallwey, W.T. (2002). ***The Inner Game of Work***, NY & London: Texere Publishing

Here are some of the unspoken values that determine the difference between the coach and the 'really good coach' that Gallwey describes. To achieve that level of coaching requires a mindset that acts as a blueprint for every expression, mannerism and inference that the coach displays in the coaching dynamic. To be truly effective, the mindset needs to be 'at one' or 'part of' the real belief and value structure that the coach has in their repertoire; in other words, authentic.

Beliefs in Mindsetting

Values and beliefs, underpinned by one's sense of identity make a mindset and provide the 'attitude' for coaching (see ref. 4). Above, we see a list of typical values that assist in the creation of a suitable (hopefully authentic) state for coaching. Empowering beliefs are also useful in developing an appropriate mindset. I write 'appropriate' since a belief that, "I make perfect interventions" might empower the coach but be counter-productive to the development of both the coach and coachee. Let us look at examples that are appropriate to the coaching dynamic:

I Believe that:

- I value myself and my coachee
- I have nothing to prove
- The coachee's solution is good enough
- The coachee's pace may be slow or startling, it does not matter which
- I offer my coachee opportunities for their growth and learning
- I am an instrument for learning and change
- The coachee has the resources necessary for their learning
- Silences belong to the coachee, not me

I believe that I can:

- Offer choices in my questioning (not solutions and instructions)
- Offer permission to myself and the coachee
- Give the coachee my best active attention at all times
- Remain flexible in my thinking and actions
- Check the coachee's commitment and their confidence level

In preparing to coach, the beliefs that you re-visit will be in your own words and be authentic with who you are in the context of coaching. If you have no faith in a belief then leave it off your list. It is uninspiring to work from dishonesty and method. The best way is through the depth of your own being, to be authentic. Jill Greenacre, the TV and stage actor works (like most actors today) from her authenticity and not by method; her stagework is utterly convincing and truly inspiring. The best coaches are also authentic and true to self. Here then begins the difference between coaches and truly excellent coaches, whatever their chosen toolkit.

Underpinning Values and Beliefs

Identity is also a factor in the coach's mindset (see ref. 2). Useful ones might look like this:

- I am a patient coach
- I am a tolerant coach
- I am a caring coach

Simple affirmations are useful in changing state. One can carefully recite a list of such affirmations. Some coaches use the Hierarchy of Logical Levels⁷ with one or more empowering beliefs. Having taken on the belief, they walk from 'Environment' towards 'Purpose' to install their mindset. This is a method encouraged by Lynne Kerry (the UK-based NLP trainer) in her coaching workshops for Vievolve. Lynne also suggests a methodology for accessing a coaching state involving a seven-step process:

- Empty your mind
- Get Comfortable
- Control your breathing (breathe slowly)
- Withdraw attention momentarily (focus internally)
- Concentrate on one thing (anything at all)
- Expand awareness (peripheral vision)
- Total Awareness (physical and emotional awareness of the space)

John Abulafia recommends the use of a mantra, or empowering phrase that sums up all the above in one brief line. That line should embrace all the positive aspects for coaching in a personal and significant way. This will be a single sentence that carries the key messages about being an effective coach for you. Here are some examples:

- I am an instrument for change
- I am a facilitator helping the coachee to their chosen goal

For those with a mastery of anchoring, it is possible to anchor these phrases to the state, or install it by walking the Hierarchy. Once installed, merely thinking the phrase triggers and recreates the state.

Other coaches use animal totems (like the owl and dolphin) to anchor a coaching state that inspires care, thoughtfulness and wisdom. The coach takes the essence of their thoughts and feelings about the positive attributes of the animal into the coaching dynamic. All these methods help to create the mindset. In all cases, the mindset is best composed of truly authentic aspects taken from the repertoire of traits.

In the same way, it is possible to imagine a useful mindset for the coachee⁸ but these are outside the scope of this article.

Servant Leadership

The work of Robert Greenleaf⁹ is worth mentioning in the context of coaching mindsets. The great servant-leaders of our time must include Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Theresa of

⁷ Adapted after Bateson, G. (1973) *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Colorado: Paladin Press

⁸ McLeod, A.I. (1998). 'Fundamentals for the Coachee' *Rapport* 40, 37

Calcutta and Nelson Mandela. These are people who inspired from a state of humility, who were optimistic about the human spirit and who led by example. Of course, they also held clear and inspiring visions of their targets. Coaches may usefully try and aspire to such mindsets.

In my view, the servant-leader does the following with grace:

- Helps people to be their best
- Is tolerant of error and sees mistakes as an opportunity for sustained learning
- Encourages and offers choices
- Helps people to create imagination, vision and direction
- Places others in a position of primary importance
- Understands the greater good and steps aside when necessary
- Is uncorrupted by fawning and idolatry and is humble
- Is always a pupil in learning

These simple statements hold a fabulous resource for the aspiring and practicing coach.

Facilitation

My interpretation of facilitation is that it means to assist people to work with their own resources in a holistic way and in the broad context of their life experience. Carl Rogers states^{10,11} that facilitators:

- Set the initial culture and trust for exploration
- Help to elicit and clarify purpose
- Act as a flexible resource
- Respond to expressions, intellectual content and emotional attitudes
- Give each individual the time and attention they warrant
- Take the initiative in sharing themselves in thought and feeling in ways that others can take or leave
- Accept and openly acknowledge their own limitations

Paul Barber, embracing his depth of experience in Gestalt, humanism and transpersonal psychology avers¹² that facilitators draw from their own personality and acquired store of practical skills and intuitive wisdom to:

- Generate understanding
- Liberate and refine new knowledge
- Raise personal and social awareness

⁹ See for example: Greenleaf, R.K. & Spears, L. (1998). **Power of Servant Leadership**. Berrett-Koehler, and Blanchard, K., Spears, L.C., Lawrence, M., & Spears, L. (2001). **Focus on Leadership: Servant-Leadership for the 21st Century**. NY: John Wiley

¹⁰ Rogers, C. (1967) **On Becoming a Person** London: Constable, or see Rogers, C.R. (1997). **On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy**. London: Constable & Robinson

¹¹ Rogers, C. (1983) **Freedom to Learn for the Eighties** Columbus, Ohio: Merrill, or see Rogers, C.R. & Freiberg, H.J. (1994). **Freedom to Learn**. New Jersey: Prentice Hall

¹² Barber, P. (2002). **Researching Personally & Transpersonally**. Guildford, UK: Gestalt in Action (University of Surrey)

- Educate and empower those involved

Notice again the hands-off position of the coach as servant and inquiring facilitator, not guru or advisor. This is not an omission but an acceptance that the best solutions are those that are motivated and that the most motivated actions are those that belong to the coachee.

Gestalt

Gestalt means 'pattern'. In coaching terms, Gestalt emphasizes the cultivation of an authentic 'I-Thou' relationship, wherein coach and coachee endeavor to co-create a culture where everything is open to question. In this relationship, robust challenge and experimentation are performed; difference is respected and encouraged; the relationship itself is seen as a metaphoric example that pan-illuminates the wider dimensions in which the coachee lives and works.

In the context of the above relationship the coach explores through dialogue and experimentation - rather than instructs; looks to the wider inner-relatedness of things - rather than isolates facts; raises awareness to the options - rather than provides ready answers.

As to its values, Gestalt emphasizes holism and organic development, while all the time drawing attention to what is happening in the moment. As Barber writes¹³, "so as to illuminate wisdom not only of the senses and intellect, but of the soma and the soul."

People Whispering

Monty Roberts 'the man who listens to horses', demonstrated that the old approach to communicating with horses was inadequate. The methods were widely used already but he elegantly brought them to the attention of the world. These radically fast methods have transformed the ability of humans to work with horses and reduced the terrible suffering of these wonderful animals. Phoebe Bervall has discussed¹⁴ the use of NLP and horses in helping with personal development issues. Andrew McFarlane¹⁵ and Pat Parelli have also shown that there are key messages (from work with horses) that are pertinent for managers.

My own experience with a company called Leadchange is a good example. I was able to find a motivated solution to a business issues while being coached with a mare in the round pen. The mare had no previous experience of such interaction but within fifteen minutes we had not only solved my issue but established what Monty Roberts calls 'join up'. This was manifested by the mare following me around wherever I went, her nose an inch or so from my right elbow. I have owned and ridden horses for many years and was astonished and overwhelmed by this experience. My only disappointment is that she does not write me!

¹³ Barber, P. (January 2003). Private Communication

¹⁴ Bervall, P. (2001) 'NLP and Horses' **Anchor Point** 31, 12, 31-33

¹⁵ McFarlane, A. (2002). 'Animals and NLP' **Rapport** 58, 5-7

Let's be clear, Whispering is not just a set of methods or tools. Without authenticity, the attempt at join-up will not take place. Whispering encourages powerful animals that have become very stuck in their behaviors and can radically enables them to change. What is evident is that there is no coercion, instead the horse is coached to be exquisitely and perfectly itself. Might this be a metaphor for coaching managers too?

How many managers are regularly 'looking over their shoulders' and 'watching their backs'? How many more feel over-pressured and frustrated by cultural limits? How many rarely, if ever, get positive strokes from their boss? If managers were horses, would we expect peak performance? I think not. Clearly, there is a challenge to many senior managers to encourage change and growth in their organization's cultures in order to stimulate the exquisite talents of their staff.

If we begin our coaching with individuals and teams with the idea that everyone wants to perform excellently and to do what they do best, how much better might those people succeed? To what extent are our team members constrained by our inability to nurture and motivate?

The metaphor of working with horses has more to tell the coach and manager. I suggest these:

Listen	Rather than tell
Invite	Rather than push
Encourage working with me	Rather than against me
Recognize and reward efforts now	Rather than ignore or pressure
Allow them to be their best	Rather than resist their excellence
Appeal to their motivations	Rather than tell them what to do
Permit them to be themselves	Rather than subdue them
Invite them to work with the culture	Rather than against it

With the right will at the top of organizations, it is not too hard to find a more productive and satisfying way forward. We can achieve this.

Conclusion

Managers may not need outside influences to feel directed, motivated and successful. They may need help from an authentic coach to make better use of their own resources and to perform better as a consequence of being more exquisitely themselves.

The exquisite self is one that is open and flexible to change¹⁶. It is an essentially human trait to learn, develop and grow. It is cultural conditioning, pain and pressure that subdues the exquisite in us. We can deal with conditioning at work by changing the culture to accept and nurture growth, releasing the best in all staff. Nurturing and reward within a framework of acceptable boundaries provides the safe space for releasing pain and pressure. Mutually derived targets and vision set the stage for dynamic productivity within a whole team.

¹⁶ McLeod, A.I. (2000). *Me, Myself, My Team* Carmathen, UK: Crown House Publishing

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Authentic Coaching will achieve a lot in freeing the exquisite in staff and raising their individual performance. However, it is senior managers who need to provide a culture in which the next level of productive work can be achieved in whole teams.

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This article is the second of our adaptations from the forthcoming book, 'Performance Coaching: The Handbook for Managers, HR Professionals & Coaches' to be published shortly, ISBN: 1904 424 058. And can be preordered from Crown House Publishing US., PO Box. 2223., Williston, VT-05495. Phone: (877) 925 1213 or web (purchasing):

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