

# Transforming Beliefs in Coaching

**By Dr Angus McLeod**

Judith Lowe made her first journey to the Coaching Foundation (formerly UK Coaching Group) and I hope the first of many. When Judith speaks about beliefs it is with conviction and passion for her subject and the walls were bulging with eager listeners.

Judith extended thinking from the work of Robert Dilts, underscoring the notion that beliefs cause behavioural motivations (hierarchy of logical levels). Thus, to promote action, the belief must also give permission. Well we already know that limiting beliefs get in the way of change and action. We also know that coaches can be susceptible to many such limiting notions by inadvertently placing labels (value judgements) on their clients. Many self-declared coaches do have judgements about their clients and that's why the Coaching Foundation exists, to educate and provide a practise platform for excellence in coaching.

Judith says we suffer from 'White Van Syndrome' a phenomenon that arises from imprinting and anchoring a belief around a mistaken judgement that, for example, all white vans are universally driven by careless idiots. So far so good. Each time we notice a white van it is being driven by a maniac and that supports our belief. We do not notice the white vans driven normally. I know this is true because I sometimes see the back of buses that were invisible to me on arrival because they did not arrive in a convoy of three!

Beliefs alter our expectations and internal states and, as we have seen, also our sensory experiences. They can also impact on our values and undermine our positive intention.

If we have noticed limiting beliefs then Judith suggests a five-point plan of attack:

- Find a positive intention
- Identify unspoken presuppositions/assumptions that underpin the belief
- Widen perception of cause & effect and complex-equivalence

- Provide 'how to' information and alternatives
- Clarify/update key relationships, mission/purpose and support at the Identity level

As always, these steps are supported by self-questioning strategies. Thus for complex-equivalence we might ask "How else could that be or arise?" and for cause and effect, "what other cause might there be?"

Judith likes the Bandura Model of motivating change. As its simple, I like it too. Thus verbal encouragements (like cheerleading) are low on the scale of effectiveness in motivating change. Expert modelling is more helpful and vicarious learning (as experienced in the Coaching Foundation with practical, peer experience) is good. At the top you have Enactive Mastery, a process of quantum learning by steps. All of this is fuelled or starved by the difference between actual learning/performance and expectation. In other words, keep both feet on the ground. Judith likes positive assertions that support the coaching process all the way across from identity, to behaviour and to desirable outcome. Thus she arrives at five independent beliefs that assist the coachee to a meta-state of motivation. These five elements embrace the following:

1. Desirable
2. Realistic/possible
3. Appropriate and Ecologically sound
4. Capable of self-actualization
5. That self is worthy of the outcome.

The coachee runs through each of these with the structure,  
 "To have <state outcome> is 1,2,3,4,5."

Of course, these new beliefs are co-dependent and so any of them can alter the belief structure and desired outcome. If it does, the coachee runs through the process again. Thus will arise what I call a 'mindset for change'. Judith agrees that the motivation to succeed is multifactorial. She says factors include the degree of congruence, how well one revisits the whole belief structure and the presence or absence of unconscious limiting beliefs. In all of this we have to ask the questions, whose beliefs are whose? Where is the coach truly outside the therapeutic space of the coachee? The answer to the latter has to be "rarely" and if we make many interventions (by questioning, challenge and posture) then we risk being part of the

problem rather than the solution. Fewer, quality interventions are better than a plethora! As if to demonstrate this, the evening ended with such a coaching session (more self-coaching than coaching) in which the coachee provided their own belief-change model.

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