

Fundamentals for the Coach

My dictionary defines the word coach as 'to teach' but many people now sense a real difference between coaching and teaching. For me, coaching starts with a primary pre-supposition that the coachee (client) has the resources necessary for learning and the coach is a catalyst for learning and change. Unfortunately, teaching often has the 'chalk and talk' structure to it, a 'doing style' rather than a 'facilitating style'. The therapeutic analogy might be the real difference between non-directive counselling techniques (coaching or facilitation methodologies) and therapies (I do something and you change!). Of course, not all teachers and therapists universally operate from 'doing styles' rather than facilitation or coaching styles.

The presupposition that 'the client has all the resources that they need' is freeing for both coach and client. As coach, I do not now have to take responsibility for the direction or outcome of the session if I fully take this empowering belief to heart. This brings me to the importance of permission for the coach in ridding him/herself of any need to DO something or ACHIEVE something. Needs, and particularly unexpressed needs, get in the way of rapport. The exception to this is when the client has the mirror-image of the coach's need. An example of mirrored need (or collusion) would be a coach needing to appear 'clever or professional' and a client needing to confirm their inferior position to 'clever people'. Even though this element in the dynamic may work towards temporary rapport, such symbiotic needs are unhealthy for learning and growth.

As part of a preparation for need-free coaching, the coach is therefore well-advised to run a state check and ask him/herself questions prior to the coaching session. "Do I need to prove anything? Do I need to fill silences? Do I need to create change in my client?"

Additionally, one can adopt a set of pre-suppositions and some of these are given in the box.

Fully entering into the coaching state will alter the coach's language towards a less-directive style. The coach can improve on this by making principally non-directive interventions. An example being to ask 'would you like to change anything in the relationship, and if you do, what would that be?' A directing question would be 'Why

not speak to her yourself?’ It is also important to ask questions which do not presume that a vision or feeling, for example, is being experienced. The client may not ‘see something in that’ or ‘feel anything’, a better intervention is ‘how do you experience that?’

Permission and attention are key elements of coaching. Strangely, the range of actual skills used (NLP or otherwise) are secondary to these key elements. Permission as used here, is both the ‘freeing up’ of the coach to operate without need (as indicated above) and also the quality necessary to allow the client to go through a period of intensive learning without obstruction from the coach. Permission allows the client to feel, hear and see more richly than would otherwise be possible. But for the client to undergo greater levels of learning, change and catharsis, other qualities are also necessary in coaching. These include rapport, excellent free-attention, unconditional love and flexibility.

NLP provides a matrix of skills for establishing rapport very quickly. But it is when those skills become like the master artist’s subconscious palette that they work most effectively on the canvas. This is because logical thought necessarily reduces the use of other inherent abilities in the coach. These other abilities include physical sensing as well as ‘right brain’ perceptive sensing or ‘intuitive perception’.

Logical processing also reduces the quality of attention. On balance, if one feels unsure about what to do in a given coaching situation then it may be better to suspend thought (rather than increase it) improve the quality of attention and be fully open to sensing at all levels. Quality of attention is paramount in establishing a safe space in which the client can work. Free of need, the attention given is most excellent when it embraces both physical and perceptive sensing. Free attention keeps the coach in real-time and permits pacing at the highest level of competence.

Unconditional love is the melding chord that brings beauty from discordant abilities. Using the Dilts model of logical levels as a framework, if my purpose is unconditional love, then everything else should fall into place through identity, beliefs and so on. The ‘unconditional’ is important since it is necessarily ‘need-free’ as discussed above, providing coach and client with the permission necessary for learning and change. The quality of unconditional love will naturally ensure rapport, pacing and safety. In practice though, my manifestation of unconditional love is imperfect. Just as it should

be amongst mortals! So, I need to do work from time to time at the other levels in order to reduce the chance of placing need, consciously or otherwise, into my relationship with the client.

Flexibility has more to do with the 'skills and capabilities' logical level of Dilt. I work with a palette of skills but use the palette both intuitively and logically. One manifestation of flexibility in coaching has to do with the willingness of the coach to trust in these different abilities and to work flexibly **in the moment**. Self trust and flexibility are partners. Harnessing this team together increases the possibility of the client to work at a new level.

Flexibility also involves the ease with which the coach can operate with either content or context. If the coaching skills are well installed and flexible in style, then the coach does not need to ask questions to improve his/her own understanding (rather than for that of the client). An example of contextual or 'content-free' work is where one works with experiential information about feelings, for example, or with metaphor. In this case, the actual content or detail surrounding the issue may never need to be known by the coach. But the issue can still be satisfactorily resolved by the client and checked for its efficacy by future-pacing: 'If you will, take your present state with you into the future. A similar situation is happening, experience this new situation fully, and if it is now different, to what extent is it different?'

It is my experience that counselling of individuals through personal change tends to be far more content-based. When coaching a business client for greater performance at work or a sportman for increased speed I find the work which the client expresses tends to be more context-based. Contextual work is often over-valued, but if the coaching is need-free and the coach skilled then whether the work is content or context-based at any moment is irrelevant. And the flexibility and skill to operate in either way means that interventions can be reduced. A further benefit of this reduction in intervention is that the outcome of the work is better 'owned' by the client. In the business coaching arena this makes for sustained change and is part of the value-added of good coaching for business. Any skilled NLP practitioner should be able to encourage a client to learn something or 'move on' with their thinking within a session. It is quite another quality to allow the client to fully possess their own work. When the client does this, they take their learning away and make a permanent

change in their development rather than a temporary one. Its the difference between a sledgehammer and a miracle. I prefer the arena of miracles!

Angus McLeod

Contact:

e-mail: ourinfo@angusmcLeod.com

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