

# Self & SOCIETY

*'In so far as men and women live and move and act in this world, they can experience meaningfulness only because they can talk with and make sense to each other and themselves*

H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*

What place does coaching have in our society today, what individual, societal and spiritual purpose does it fulfil, how does it dovetail (or not) with therapy and other methods of personal development, how should it be organised (or not) and what future does it have – will it even supersede therapy in some areas? These and other questions may provide the springboard for dialogue in future issues of S&S. In this issue we have invited coaches to talk about diverse aspects of their journey, models and ways of working. If what the writers say sparks a response in you, let us know; you are warmly invited to tell us about your experiences both as coaches and coachees.

But what exactly is coaching, this recent cultural phenomenon that seems to be growing exponentially and features regularly in the business and popular press and media? Coaching can cover a 'multiplicity of specialisations' (UK College of Coaching). Some broader categories are life coaching, personal coaching, executive coaching and mentoring, and a scan of the literature reveals considerable confusion in this use of labels. Some major coaching organisations are gradually developing consensus in the use of terminology and guidance for the consumer to understand what is meant, but there is still much debate over the different kinds of coaching and how they overlap.

The UK College report (2004) calls executive coaching 'a way of honing professional

**editorial  
introduction**

Alexandra Chalfont

**COACHING**

**valuable  
conversations**

development', whether for individuals, teams or organisations. Sir John Whitmore calls coaching 'high quality interaction that promotes clarity of purpose, fast and accurate recognition of situations and of possible ways forward, and commitment to the chosen action steps.' The International Coach Federation (ICF) is the largest 'trade group' in coaching, with around 7000 members. At its conference symposium in November 2003, Anthony Grant, a psychologist at the University of Sydney, Australia, said that coaching aims to 'enhance well being, improve performance and facilitate individual human and organisational change' and the ICF itself says that: 'professional coaches provide an ongoing partnership designed to help clients produce fulfilling results in their personal and professional lives.'

In the UK, the Association for Coaching was formed in 2002 as an independent non-profit organisation with the goal to promote best practice, raise awareness and standards across the UK coaching industry. Around fifty per cent plus of its honorary officers have a psychology or therapy career. It offers the following definitions:

*Personal/Life Coaching:* 'A collaborative solution-focused, results-orientated and systematic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of work performance, life experience, self-directed learning and personal growth of the coachee.' (Anthony Grant, University of Sydney, 2000)

*Executive Coaching:* 'As for personal coaching, but it is specifically focused at senior management level where there is an expectation for the coach to feel as comfortable exploring business related topics, as personal development topics with the client in order to improve their personal performance.'

*Corporate/Business Coaching:* 'As for personal coaching, but the specific remit of a corporate coach is to focus on supporting an employee, either as an individual, as part of a team and/or organisation to achieve improved business performance and operational effectiveness.'

*Speciality/Niche Coaching:* 'As for personal coaching, but the coach is expert in addressing one particular aspect of a person's life e.g. stress, career, or the coach is focused on enhancing a particular section of the population e.g. doctors, youths.'

*Group Coaching:* 'As for personal coaching, but the coach is working with a number or individuals either to achieve a common goal within the group, or create an environment where individuals can co-coach each other.'

## Business Coaching and Counselling

Improving individual and group performance and the organisational bottom line is the primary aim of executive coaching. The CIPD guide to coaching and buying coaching services makes some useful distinctions between coaching and mentoring, two activities which sometimes overlap but are often confused. It also lists some distinctions between coaching and counselling (see fig. 1). In our society business people tend to run a mile at the word therapy (at least when they are in

their work environment). Many coaches argue a rigid distinction, and the prevailing (often mistaken) belief in the business world at large is that psychotherapy concentrates on psychological deficits and that it concentrates on the past and ignores the future. The assumption in business coaching is 'that clients are from a non-clinical population without significant levels of psychopathology or emotional distress' (Grant), and the ICF states: 'Coaching does not focus directly on relieving psychological pain or treating cognitive or emotional disorders.'

But whether coach or therapist, the skilled practitioner will concentrate on potential rather than deficit. I have heard therapists who also work as coaches say that they are working in exactly the same way in both roles, but under a different label.

In business, clients may have difficulty with relating skills in working with colleagues or a team, or they may suffer from low confidence in some areas, but this is often regarded as a coaching issue rather than one calling for therapeutic intervention, unless the client is clearly unable to be or become self-aware. It is important when initiating coaching to recognise any degree of difficulty with living that the client experiences and brings to the conversation. Assessing the extent, depth and implications of that experience and matching it against one's own level of competence is an essential skill for a coach to be able to know when to refer on. The CIPD guide advises that 'a professional coach will be keen to maintain the professional boundaries between coaching and the traditional therapies and will refer a client to an appropriate therapist/ counsellor if they feel it will be useful and appropriate.' One sample coaching agreement even suggests that clients are requested to agree explicitly not to use coaching for therapeutic issues. (Williams & Davis)

<b>Counselling</b>	<b>Coaching</b>
Broader focus and greater depth	Narrower focus
Goal is to help people understand the root causes of long-standing performance problems/issues at work	The goal is to improve an individual's performance at work
A short-term intervention, but can last for longer time periods due to the breadth of issues to be addressed	Tends for be a short-term intervention
Counselling can be used to address psycho-social as well as performance issues	Coaching does not seek to resolve any underlying psychological problems. It assumes a person does not require a psycho-social intervention
The agenda is generally agreed by the individuals and the counsellor	The agenda is typically set by the individual, but in agreement/consultation with the organisation
Other stakeholders are rarely involved	Other stakeholders (e.g. manager) are involved

Figure 1. *Coaching and Counselling*

## Purpose, potential, relationship and meaning

In most coaching there is an emphasis on collaborative goal-setting between coach and coachee. 'Coaches seek to elicit solutions and strategies from the client; they believe that the client is naturally creative and resourceful. The coach's job is to provide support to enhance the skills, resources, and creativity that the client already has.' (Grant) He says that in order to facilitate sustained change, the 'coaching process should be directed at fostering the on-going self-directed learning and personal growth of the coachee.'

Whether the ultimate goal is the organisational bottom line or purely the development of the individual, recognising the client's unique potential is vital and common to coaching as well as counselling / psychotherapy: 'Every human being is special and life coaching supports and encourages each individual to acknowledge their own uniqueness.' (UK College). Peter Oliver, Training Consultancy Manager at HSBC Bank plc, says: 'My advice for other organisations wanting to introduce coaching comes in two parts. First, believe your people are enough – that understanding is absolutely critical. Second, you might have

to convince them of that fact. You have to show them, demonstrate to them, that they are enough.' (Bavister and Vickers)

Like therapy, coaching is essentially about change, and as Benton points out, if the client doesn't want to change, then nothing will. A client's potential for self-awareness and self-knowledge is the prerequisite for both therapeutic and developmental success, and some candidates for coaching will prove unsuitable if they are unwilling to explore this area. 'Being encouraged to look at ourselves and within ourselves is the very ethos of coaching' says Sir John Whitmore.

In its position statement on psychotherapy the Humanistic Division of the American Psychology Association (APA Div. 32) declares that:

'Humanistic practitioners recognize that their job is to place their expertise at the service of their clients and to establish a collaborative dialogical relationship with them. The joint project of client and psychotherapist is to work towards individualized goals that are framed in the clients' world view and understandings of their own aspirations ...'

Well, replace the word psychotherapy with coaching and this could be just as applicable an ethos to many coaching approaches. The heart of coaching lies in skilled one-to-one developmental conversations based on trust. The heart of psychotherapy lies within the space of skilled one-to-one healing and developmental conversations,

which are based on trust, and in which the client is the healer and the therapist facilitator.

As in psychotherapy, the quality of relationship is paramount in coaching. Core constructs in coaching include an egalitarian and collaborative relationship between coach and coachee. As one change agent says: 'sustainable business success depends on how we address people and relationships' (Tony Page). Gallwey notes that coaching is '... the art of creating an environment, through conversation and a way of being, that facilitates the process by which a person can move toward desired goals in a fulfilling manner. It requires one essential ingredient that cannot be taught: caring not only for external results but for the person being coached.'

In practice, coaching styles range from the purely instrumental and directive through the collaborative and sometimes even to the spiritual. At one extreme, some coaches take an overtly directive stance. One, styling himself 'Europe's No1 Life Coach', says his coaching is for those 'that ... are prepared to **listen** to what I say – and **do** what I say!' (Gerard O'Donovan). Some coachees may expect and even want this approach. The broadcaster Peter Day, in a piece in the Radio programme 'In Business' earlier this year, went to life coach curly Martin for a sample session, expecting and wanting to be directed. He was initially frustrated by her detachment, but she insisted that he as the client find the solution inside himself. He came away making small, but quite significant, self-empowered changes which made a real difference.

Many coachees are managers and leaders. An ontological coach, Alan Sieler, explains that 'Leadership and management effectiveness is fundamentally about conversations and relationships. Shifts in way of being, individually and collectively, underpin the enhancement of conversational and relational competence, and are central to improved work practices, cultural change and lasting organisational transformation.' One provider company markets

their competencies as including 'insight into the reality of a person's situation, intimacy in relationships which allow exploration in depth and the courage to promote flexibility, reveal new opportunities and challenge behaviour.' (Maynard Leigh Associates). It seems clear that the best coaching and the best therapy demand similar relationship-building and communication skills in the practitioner.

In business the primary ostensible goal in hiring a coach is to add value to the organisation and improve the bottom line. The Economist (13.11.03) quoted Edgar Schein of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who admits that a lot of coaching is about 'self socialisation' – getting the individual to conform to patterns of behaviour acceptable to the firm. There is also pressure to assess professionalism of potential coaches and quantify and provide evidence of results. To help assess the professionalism of a prospective coach, Myles Downey suggests asking: 'How do you propose to measure the success of the coaching?' Some organisations have highly developed selection procedures for coaches, whom they require to be fully aligned with the company values and mission as a prerequisite.

However, during the process of coaching issues quite different to bottom line concerns may surface. Sir John Whitmore was struck by the number of people in business asking the eternal questions: 'What is my life all about? What is the value of what I am doing? Do I need to be under such stress and for what? Why does my life feel so meaningless? What about life balance and my family?' He asks companies three questions on potential, and the answers reflect a sense that only 40-50% of people's potential normally manifests at work, evidenced by 'the amazing things people do outside work and how well ordinary people respond to a crisis.' The obstacles preventing more potential from emerging are 'external ones - structures and strictures of business and management style and negative peer

pressure, and internal ones, including fear, self-doubt or lack of self-belief.' His profoundly humanistic message is that 'If we put people first, profits will follow.'

Coaching is a special relationship built on rapport and trust, nurturing existential needs. As coachees our development is encouraged and our growth recognised; we experience a witness to our existing beyond the context of work or other relationships. If as a coach you provide this essential quality of trust, '... and you have the experience to call upon, then you will be able to get out of the way. ... You create a space in which you can be non-judgmental, you don't require a result, you're not out to demonstrate your own expertise. It's a space in which you and the person you are working with can explore, be vulnerable, be magnificent.' (McDermott in Bavister & Vickers)

What factors are decisive in being able to create this kind of relationship? Nielson and Eisenbach found in their (limited) study on critical factors of high-quality mentoring relationships that *homophily* was the most significant factor in relationship quality in mentoring and coaching – that is, compatibility in values and attitudes. Your background and status can be significantly different from those of your coachee; if your values and attitudes are similar (and this can be a dilemma when the purseholder's/organisation's values differ from those of the coachee) you are likely to be able to build a valuable trust relationship.

## Models and skills

Of course coaches need structure, process, tools and techniques, and there is a plethora of models as well as approaches used in coaching. Often individuals develop their own, or work with a synthesis of models, as some of our contributors in this issue demonstrate. Many papers in the 1990's focused on delineating theoretical frameworks for coaching. These include ontological approaches, integrative models, psychodynamic and systems approaches, cognitive and behavioural frameworks, reality therapy, experiential learning,

psychosynthesis and Adlerian perspectives among others. (Grant)

Whatever theoretical framework the coach employs, it is primarily relational and thinking skills that determine his or her competence. The ICF identifies eleven core coaching competencies under four headings: *Setting the foundation; Co-creating the relationship; Communicating effectively; Facilitating learning and results*. As in psychotherapy, the coach's main working tools are questioning, listening, observation and reflection (Starr). Listening as a coach involves hearing the client's values, visions and purpose, with a commitment to the client's agenda, not listening for a solution or quick fix. (Williams & Davis). This kind of listening 'with the client' aligns with Nancy Kline's superb questioning style: her 'incisive question' technique allows the coachee to find their own solutions in a 'thinking space' that promotes a reflective process (Kline). Coaching involves advanced thinking skills, and Judy Whittaker (CIPD) defines the coach/mentor as a 'thinking performer' whose skills include strategic, analytical, intuitive and creative thinking. But with so many coaches claiming to have requisite competencies, how can the consumer sort out the valuable from the ineffective or even potentially damaging?

## Professionalisation and the future of coaching

Eric Parsloe thinks: 'Coaching is large, growing and here to stay.' (Radio 4, In Business) The CIPD guide points out that: 'Future success is likely to be determined by the quality and professionalism of coaches and their ability to deliver demonstrable value to their clients. This is now being taken seriously and both suppliers and buyers are pushing for greater professionalism, quality standards and more ethical practice'.

Like psychotherapy, coaching is undergoing a drive towards professionalisation. To meet an increasing demand for evidence of the effectiveness of different types of coaching, some professional coaches are seeking to work within the scientist-practitioner model, which Grant sees as a critical factor as 'coaching

seeks to further establish itself as a respected, cross-disciplinary means of facilitating human and organisational change'. The UK College also urges acquisition of all the paraphernalia of a profession, including registration, CPD, research, 'peer review and control' and publications, for 'legitimation within the world of established institutions and professions.' Their report recommends the development of an 'objective, ethically-driven and innovation-focussed profession.'

Eric Parsloe champions ethical standards and clear, unambiguous guidelines, and warns against the dangers of too much conformity when he notes that 'the challenge to the emerging coaching (and mentoring) profession is to recognise, respect and celebrate diversity in establishing professional standards.' (OSC&M newsletter 2003)

Coaching can encompass more than the individual or organisational. It is essential to keep in mind the implications of coaching both for the individual and for society. Whitmore (2003) calls coaching a location for 'inner authority' and says that '...coaching is about an individual becoming a more effective human being. But it's also a contribution to the wider humanity'. As more and more people acquire the skills, the social significance of coaching could become immense, particularly in a world in need of wise leadership. My own sense is echoed in this quote from Williams and Davis: 'We believe coaching will become the prevailing way to get help or to learn how to bring out your strengths and overcome obstacles and challenges, while pursuing possibilities. We believe this is what the human potential movement of the 1970's intended.'

### Further Reading

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