BECOMING A

PROFESSIONAL LIFE COACH LESSONS FROM THE INSTITUTE FOR LIFE COACH TRAINING

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ADVANCE ACCLAIM "What a resource! This is the definitive book on life coaching, as useful to the master coach as it is - Richard]. Leider, Founder and Chairman, to the novice. An essential book worth own ing l" The Inventure Group, and author of The Power of Purpose and Repacking Your Bags "This is Ihe definitive book on how to become a whole-person life coach. Taking theory to practicality, it gives readers basic to advanced steps for using coaching as a paradigm for any changes or goals th eir clients may desire. Many helping profess ionals now say they are coaching ... this book will teach them the key competencies for doing it."-Hale Dwoskin, author of the New York Times Bestseller, The Sedona Method: Your Key to Lasting Happiness, Success, Peace, and Emotional Well-being

**Introduction to Life Coaching**

One way to develop an understanding of **life coaching** is to contrast it with counseling and mentoring, also, executive and workplace coaching.

**Counselling** tends to focus on helping people regain functionality in their lives, whereas **mentoring** involves one person with expertise in a specific area assisting another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking.

**Executive coaching** focuses on helping clients who have managerial responsibility in organisations to achieve goals that improve their professional performance, and consequently, the effectiveness of the client’s organisation. Executive coaching is typically (but not always) paid for by the organisation.

**Workplace coaching** takes place in work settings with non-executive employees. It may include on-the-job coaching by line managers and supervisors, aimed at improving **productivity** and developing an individual worker’s **skill**.

In contrast to the above, **life coaching** is less about restoring or improving functionality and more about enhancing existing well-being. It typically tends to focus on goals that fall within the personal sphere rather than the work or employment sphere. Thus the overarching aim of life coaching is sustained cognitive, emotional and behavioural changes that facilitate goal attainment and the enhancement of performance and well-being in one’s life.

Life coaching takes a **personal value-based, holistic approach** to personal change and development: the coachee spends time examining and evaluating his or her life, and then systematically makes life-enhancing changes with the support of a coach.

**Key issues** often focus on:

* work-life balance
* dealing with stress
* managing finances
* enhancing relationships
* finally, developing a more fulfilling and purposeful life.

Some life coaches have specialties, such as a focus on helping people work through significant life transitions or developing new career directions; others focus on assisting people in developing a clear sense of purpose and life direction. Life coaches tend to provide a service to individual clients, rather than organisations, and the clients themselves invariably pay for the coaching services.

**The Human Potential Movement and Life Coaching**

The roots of contemporary life coaching appear to emerge from humanistic traditions of psychology, and the practices of the **Human Potential Movement (HPM)**. One of the key influences was the **Erhard Seminars Training or EST** programme, developed by Werner Erhard. These were marketed as personal transformation, and as such, can be considered as drawing on the same social impetus that later gave rise to life coaching.

Parallel with the growth of HPM and the life coaching genre, and psychologists were also drawing on validated clinical and counselling psychology and offering life coaching services. Albert Ellis, one of the founders of the cognitive-behavioural approach, frequently prefigures life coaching, although he did not use the term in his work. Similarly, commentators such as Thompson predicted that by the year 2000, psychologists would have increased their emphasis on life quality enhancement as opposed to remedial therapy.

However, there has been a significant shift towards a theoretically-grounded and empirically-validated approach to life coaching. Some of the drivers have gained interest from researchers and academics as they used life coaching as a methodology for developing their understanding of the processes. A number of universities worldwide now offer postgraduate degrees in coaching.

The literature on life coaching also reflects this shift, with increasing numbers of life coaching books being published that are explicitly grounded in evidence-based methodologies. This trend toward a more professional approach is also reflected in the fact that professional bodies such as the Psychological Societies of Australia, Britain, Denmark, Ireland, South Africa and others have established groups focused on coaching.

**The Emergence of Evidence-based Approaches**

An **evidence-based approach** to life coaching can be distinguished from approaches to coaching that are based on ad hoc adaptations of ‘pop-psychology’ or personal development programmes. Adapted from its use in medical settings, the term **‘evidence-based coaching’** refers to the intelligent and conscientious use of best current knowledge in making decisions about how to deliver coaching to coaching clients, and in designing and teaching coach training programmes. Best current knowledge is up-to-date, empirically valid and conceptually coherent, from relevant areas such as behavioural science, adult education, business, and philosophy.

Evidence-based approaches to life coaching came to the fore with the establishment of peer-reviewed coaching-specific journals such as the International Journal of Evidence-based Coaching and Mentoring, the International Coaching Psychology Review, and Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice. Indeed, the total number of peer-reviewed coaching-specific publications has increased dramatically. However, despite these recent developments and the increased flow of coaching-related research, **research specifically into life coaching is surprisingly scarce.**

**Main Assumptions and Links to Theoretical Traditions**

Understandings of life coaching vary in the extent to which they focus on personal development compared to the achievement of performance targets. Approaches fall on a continuum between facilitation of self-directed learning at one end and the sort of direct instruction found in sports coaching or educational tutoring at the other**. Most approaches to life coaching fall between these two ends of the continuum.** The role of the life coach is seen as conducting coaching conversations in which the coach asks direct, personal and often challenging questions that help the coachee focus on **clarifying and exploring ways to achieve their goals.** In the life coaching relationship, the coach primarily plays the role of a facilitator of change; it is the client’s responsibility **to enact change**.

**Underlying the practise of life coaching are the assumptions that:**

* People have considerable **latent potential**.
* Significant human change is possible.
* The client is **resourceful** (although they may not be aware of such resources).
* There is an absence of serious mental health problems in the life coaching client.
* Life coaching is **not focused on repairing psychopathologies**.
* Life coaching is an inherently **goal-focused process**.
* Change can happen in a short period of time.
* The client is willing to do the work of change.

Such assumptions suggest that professional life coaching has obvious links to at least **four established theoretical traditions**.

* **First,** life coaching tends to make explicit the relationships between **thinking, feelings, behavioural** and **the external situation** **on the environment**, echoing the central aspects of cognitive-behavioural approaches.
* **Second,** life coaching is **solution-focused**, focuses on goals rather than the past, and assumes that the client has **resources, strengths** and **abilities** that are yet to be recognised.
* **Third,** life coaching draws very heavily on **humanistic values** central to the person-centred tradition.
* **Finally,** life coaching is increasingly aligned with **positive psychology**, with its emphasis on understanding the nature of a life well-lived and the use of a grounded systematic approach to achieving that life.

The notion that **most people have latent potential** dates back to **Aristotle** and can be followed through to **Maslow** and more recently into the **Positive Psychology movement**. Indeed, there is substantial empirical evidence that people have considerable **latent potential** which can be brought to the fore in many areas of life, including sports, human performance broadly defined, education, business and mental health. Further, **solution-focused approaches** to human change, which explicitly operationalise the assumption that people have unacknowledged resources, have been found to be effective ways of helping people in a wide range of settings.

However, the prior assumption that clients who are present for life coaching do not have clinically significant levels of mental health problems may not be justified. Green, Oades and Grant surveyed a total of lO7 potential life coaching clients from a community sample and found that **52% had clinically elevated scores** (a score of two standard deviations above the mean) on the **Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI)**. The BSI is a frequently used and well-validated screening tool that is designed to be used with both clinical and non-clinical populations.

Spence and Grant found that 25% of 84 participants in life coaching had clinically elevated BSI scores. These findings suggest that **some individuals who seek life coaching may have higher than average levels of psychopathology**, and these **findings** clearly do not support the assumption that there is an absence of serious mental health problems in life coaching clients. These findings have important implications and challenges for the ethical practice of life coaching.

**Approaches, Processes and the Coach-Client Relationship**

Much life coaching takes place over the telephone. Indeed, some life coaches never meet their clients face-to-face. There has been some controversy over whether **face-to-face or phone** life coaching is more effective, although some of this debate appears to have been fuelled by a need to promote specific proprietary coach training systems that use face-to-face coaching methodologies. In fact there is a growing body of evidence from the mental health area that **phone coaching can be effective**, and it has been shown that peer coaching by phone can be very effective in enhancing professional skills in the workplace, **but there is little or no empirical outcome research in life coaching** that compares phone with face-to-face coaching. Its exponents argue that phone coaching, when conducted properly, is very time efficient and facilitates a direct, honest, and intimate relationship in which the absence of physical cues actually enhances rapport through the need for in-depth listening.

**The internal structuring of life coaching sessions**, whether by phone or face-to-face, is a key area in need of further research. There is evidence that **highly structured interventions** may be very effective. For example Howard, Kopta, Krause and Orlinsky found that the frequency of counselling sessions was not related to client improvements, rather the **structure** and **intensity** of sessions were the key important factors.

Furthermore, there is good evidence that effective change requires scaffolding. **Scaffolding** is a strategy that involves supporting novice learners by making the initial learning context quite simple and this is done by initially limiting the complexities of the context and gradually removing those as learners gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to cope with the full complexity of learning target. At the same time, an **over-structured approach** to life coaching may be alienating for some clients, particularly where the coach’s relationship-building skills are not sophisticated or where the coach is not able to tailor their approach to suit the needs of the individual client.

**Individual approaches to life coaching will vary depending on factors** such as:

* the coach’s training
* theoretical approach
* personal preferences and personality
* client needs and expectations

However, the degree to which life coaches adopt a systematic structured approach to coaching is unclear. What is clear is that many of the proprietary commercial life coach training programmes place great emphasis on **structure**. This is because highly structured, systemised life coaching programmes that **emphasise technique and methodology are more accessible to teach** to potential life coaches than programmes that require a broad understanding of theoretical principles and empirical evidence. The ‘seven steps to your ideal life’ approach are easier to understand than programmes that teach from theory into practice. Thus **a highly structured, systemised approach is well-suited to the teleclass teaching** and the highly heterogeneous student populations that are frequently found in commercial life coach training programmes.

**Contracting and Payment Issues**

The great majority of problems that might emerge in life coaching can be circumvented by having clear, detailed and explicit up-front contracting. **Contracting** is a core process in life coaching and is used to make explicit the nature of the coaching relationship, the expectations and responsibilities of all parties, including costs, confidentiality issues, legal disclaimers and payment procedures and cancellation fees. A life coaching contracting agreement typically also includes a mental health/illness disclosure clause along the lines of ‘coaching is not therapy and does not aim to treat psychological problems. The client agrees to disclose full details of past or present psychological or psychiatric treatment. If such issues become salient during the coaching relationship the coach may recommend referral to an appropriate and qualified specialist’. Written contracting can also be an effective way of enhancing commitment to the change process.

Life coaching clients are often asked to pay for their coaching service in advance and this requirement may also be part of the written coaching agreement. However, the issue of advance payment for coaching services is somewhat **controversial**. It is often justified to clients by claiming that it enhances commitment to the coaching process. But the emphasis on advance payment may be distasteful for some life coaching clients, giving the impression that the life coach is more interested in running a smooth, coach focused business operation than focusing on client needs. Interestingly, executive coaching services, which are perceived as being more professional than life coaching services, are typically paid for following the delivery.

A key difference between **life coaching** and **executive or workplace coaching** is that **the life coaching client is typically paying for the coaching service themselves**, and this can impact on the dynamics of the coach-client relationship. But, in executive coaching the coaching engagement is frequently overseen by an internal sponsor such as human resources or learning and development professional, in life coaching the coachee is the paying client and there is **no third party involved**. This means that life coaching may be at greater risk of derailment, and life-coaching clients should always check to see if their life coach has a supervisor or mentor coach who oversees their life coaching practice.

**Goal Setting In Life Coaching**

Little research has focused on the process of goal setting in life coaching, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the completion of some type of structured life inventory is often used as a precursor to goal setting in this context. These inventories can range from idiosyncratic ‘ideal life’ checklists to the use of scientifically validated inventories such as the Quality of Life Inventory (QOLI). Inventories such as the QOLI are well suited for goal setting in life coaching because of their clear non-pathological orientation and their emphasis on strengths as well as problems. The QOLI assesses life satisfaction in 16 domains of life including health, home, money, work, relationships and play and can be used as an outcome measure to assess the effectiveness of the coaching intervention.

The number of goals set in life coaching will vary. Some life coaches suggest that clients focus on only one or two goals, others encourage clients to set more and address the whole of life issues. Often, life coaching clients will be encouraged to complete a written pre-prepared form detailing their goals, and possibly writing down the costs and benefits of goal attainment.

On the other hand, some life coaching programmes pay little attention to the quality of the goal identification process itself. Rather, the main focus of attention is placed on developing the motivation to change, designing action plans, overcoming barriers to change and supporting the client in making these changes. While these are important facets of coaching, they are dependent on the quality of the goal. Motivation will pall, and the best action plan will ultimately fail to deliver what the coachee is looking for if the goal is inappropriate.

Many life coach training organisations teach relatively simplistic approaches to goal setting; for example, goal setting approaches that stop at the notion of **‘SMART’ goals** (specific and stretching, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-framed). While there is good evidence that goals that meet these criteria can be effective, other dimensions of goals are also important. For example, goals should be **self-concordant**. That is, they should align with the client’s personal values. Similarly, locus of control and whether goals are **approach goals or avoidance goals** have a major impact on satisfaction and well-being. Some life coaching programmes do indeed place great emphasis on the explicit articulation of the client’s values in the goal-setting process. However, **it is equally important that sufficient time is given to discussing the goals under consideration**, rather than rushing to set a goal and quickly moving on to action: the **‘rush to closure’** can lead to derailment later in the coaching process.

**Monitoring and Evaluation Between Sessions**

Good quality life coaching interventions place significant emphasis on pre-session preparation and the **monitoring and evaluation** of between-session action steps (sometimes called fieldwork or homework). Life coaching clients are often asked to complete a pre-session form in which they detail their progress to date, how they have been feeling since the last session, and what they want to get out of the upcoming session. Although such forms may appear simplistic, such pre-session work may help the client move from a **contemplative to deliberative or action-focused mindset** and such mindset shifts can significantly impact on client engagement and goal attainment.

Following the life coaching session, many coaches ask their clients to complete a post-session self-evaluation form detailing the specific action steps to be completed before the next session and asking the client to reflect on any insights or learnings that may have arisen in the coaching session. Such reflective practices are fundamental to creating purposeful change and are part of the self-regulation cycle of goal setting, action planning, acting, monitoring, evaluating and change that essentially underpins all forms of purposeful human change.

A significant part of the life coach’s role involves **keeping the client on track for success**. This is not always easy. Many people come to life coaching with the desire to create change. Fewer stay self-motivated as the work of change becomes real and difficult. **For most people purposeful change is not easy.** If it were easy then there would be no need for coaches or other professional change agents. Some life coaches request an email from the client each time the client completes one of the between-session action tasks. It can be helpful in maintaining motivation for the client to have to report their progress to the coach between coaching sessions. However, in their quest to help the client achieve their goals, novice or unskilled life coaches may seek too much between-session contact with the client and this may result in fostering dependency on the coach, a reduction in the client’s sense of control and autonomy, or simply creating too much for the client to do, leading to feelings of overwhelm. In these cases, goals set in coaching can begin to feel like goals.

**Ending the Coaching Relationship**

Even with clear upfront contracting about the coaching relationship, the termination phase of the life coaching relationship, as in therapy and mentoring, can be a difficult process for both coach and client. Where the coaching relationship has not been great, both parties may avoid discussing issues related to the termination of the coaching. In this situation at best there may be a brief ‘thanks for your help, I’ll be in touch’ comment. Even worse, the client, feeling resentful and somewhat aggrieved, may simply keep cancelling meetings and let the coaching relationship drift away. Where the coaching relationship has been good, both parties may avoid the question of whether the coaching engagement has reached a natural end-point and may seek to continue coaching beyond its usefulness. **It is natural to feel sadness when an important relationship is coming to an end** – such close relationships have typically been formed based on the discussion of personal and often emotionally-laden material. However, it is important for both coach and client to **recognise that coaching is ultimately a professional relationship, not a personal one.** The coach’s role is to prepare the client for the termination phase from the beginning of the coaching engagement. After all, **one key aim of coaching is that the client becomes their own coach!**

Ideally, the initial life coaching contract should detail how the coaching relationship will be reviewed and terminated. Many coaching contracts state a set period of time or a fixed number of sessions following which the coaching will be reviewed, and a decision made to continue or not. The **temptation for the inexperienced life coach** may be to press for continuation in the pursuit of building their coaching business. The **temptation for the client** in this situation may be to avoid a discussion about the termination process, and carry on with the coaching in order not to upset the coach. The danger in this is that **the client may come to feel that coaching (and the coach) is not serving their needs and at worst, come to resent the time and costs coaching places on them**. Clearly, this is an unsatisfactory outcome for both coach and coachee.

Given that coaching relationships per se can arouse significant emotions for both the coach and the client, the professional coach has a responsibility to proactively manage the termination process. It is important to recognise that the coaching relationship is a multifaceted one with at least three sub-themes:

* **a valued relationship**,
* **trust** and
* **transparency**

Termination should, therefore, be dealt with in a way that is **transparent**, builds **trust**, and recognises the **value of the past relationship**.

Termination of a life coaching engagement may be brought about not only by a pre-agreed timeframe. It may happen quite organically. It should be recognised by the coach that the dynamics of the relationship will change significantly over time. When the client first starts coaching, and intimacy between the coach and client is relatively low, the coach’s energy and enthusiasm may be high, and delivering tangible benefits may be at the forefront of the coach’s mind in each session. As the relationship develops, greater intimacy between coach and client may lead to less focus on tangible benefits. In short, the coaching sessions become **less about goal attainment and more like supportive counselling**, or even friends having a nice chat. When this starts to happen, it may be a **sign** that the coaching relationship has run a natural course, irrespective of any predetermined timeframe. The coach needs to address this issue by holding an open and frank review session in which the client has the opportunity to talk about the coaching and then set new goals, make purposeful and specific changes in how the coaching is conducted, or take a break from coaching for a while.

**Controversial points in life coaching: coach or couch?**

Although the relationship between coaching and counselling is complex, one key difference between life coaching and therapeutic counselling or psychotherapy is that therapeutic counselling and psychotherapy mainly focus on helping people recover from psychological distresses, and life coaching is not focused on addressing this. Rather, life coaching is about **fine-tuning one’s life**.

The reason for emphasising the distinction between the therapeutic foci of counselling and the aim of life coaching is because most coaches are not trained, registered or licenced as mental health professionals. Clearly, the public is at risk when coaches who are untrained in mental health interventions attempt to treat psychological problems such as depression, acute anxiety, substance abuse or major relationship difficulties, or because they do not recognise or take into account the nature of the vulnerabilities of people with mental health problems.

This is not to say that coaches cannot coach people who are suffering from such problems. There is emerging research suggesting that coaching in conjunction with medical interventions can be very successful. Indeed, a well-trained life coach who works in conjunction with a trained (mental) health professional may be able to significantly speed the client’s recovery. The key issue here is that coaches should know the limits of their expertise and they should work with appropriately trained professionals in designing interventions with the client.

However, the boundaries between a life coaching relationship and a counselling or psychotherapeutic relationship are not clearly defined. The conversation can easily turn from coaching to counselling. Given that it has been found that between 25% and 50% of people seeking life coaching have clinically significant levels of psychopathology, it may well be that some clients are using life coaching as de facto forms of therapy. Thus, life coaches have an unequivocal duty of care to ensure that they can recognise the limits of their competencies and make appropriate referrals.

**The Challenges and Limitations of Life Coaching**

From the perspective of practice, the lack of clear training guidelines, industry regulation and rigorous accreditation represent real risks to the emerging profession of coaching. At present, there are no barriers to entry in life coaching. Anyone, with or without training, can offer life coaching services. It is this **lack of standards** that has led to the variability in the quality of service offered by life coaches and in turn, led to its poor reputation even within the wider coaching industry.

There is a further challenge that faces life coaching that is perhaps more worrying than the quality of service issues that arise with under-trained coaches. A basic tenet of all professional codes of ethics is the requirement that professionals know the limits of their expertise and operate within those limits. There are within the wider life coaching industry individuals who are offering services aimed at addressing serious difficulties for which the individual has no training or qualification beyond their own assertion of expertise. Furthermore, some coaches make claims of efficacy unsupported by any data. Such behaviour threatens the very integrity of the coaching endeavour.

In the area of practice development, the grounding of practice in theoretically coherent and **evidence-based models** is the major challenge facing life coaching. For the industry to develop into a recognised area of professional practice, the development of a **research-based body of knowledge** is essential. This raises a further challenge for life coaching – namely moving from an individual proprietary approach to practice towards a community of practice approach. To date, the coaching industry has tended strongly toward basing practice on commercially owned proprietary models of coaching – many claiming to be the most or even only effective coaching model available. For coaching to progress beyond a proprietary product model of service to a genuine profession, there needs to be greater openness to having one’s models of practice held up to rigorous peer-reviewed evaluation. More importantly, the widespread sharing of this research for the information and development of industry-wide practice is a key element in the creation of a profession of life coaching. This is a significant challenge to the way the life coaching industry appears to be organised at the moment.

**Evaluation**

**Evidence-based life coaching** conducted by properly trained coaches who work within a scholar-practitioner model has terrific potential to contribute to the well-being of individual clients and communities. In effect, evidence-based life coaching conducted by well-trained practitioners has the potential to offer a much-needed service in our society, where people can take time to review their life directions, take stock, explore new life options, develop new directions and get support in creating purposeful change and enhancing their well-being.

An evidence-based approach to life coaching has great potential as a means of facilitating positive change. Yet life coaching is frequently undervalued as a human change methodology. Greater status appears to go to the executive, business or workplace coaching. There is something of false distinction in this. Drawing strong boundaries between life coaching and other forms of coaching neglect the commonalities of practise among them. At present, there are few encouragements for practising life coaches to develop a stronger research and knowledge base. However, this is a challenge to the industry – to step into the power of its own change methodology – both in terms of practice development, and demonstration of the efficacy and value of that practice. Perhaps the last word on the relative value of life coaching compared to other applications of coaching should go to Doctor.

**History of Life Coaching**

**THE ORIGINATORS (1960s-1970s)**

When did we start talking about our lives using metaphors from sports? What’s next–do we need our own cheerleaders?

Well, it’s true, the life coaching metaphor draws inspiration from the practice of sports coaching. A “coach” meant any form of a tutor from about the 1830s. It was probably an extension of the idea of transporting people from one place to another associated with the original meaning for “coach,” which was a vehicle (a word borrowed into English in the mid-16th century). And we do talk about other types of coaches, such as voice coaches. But certainly, the most common use in contemporary society has been its application to sports coaching.

**The Inner Game of Cricket**

And indeed, life coaching drew important inspiration from the application of sports coaching to other areas. Timothy Gallwey’s book *The Inner Game of Cricket (1974)*has been widely cited as a significant influence on the development of coaching.

Gallwey talks about how in the game of cricket, the opponent on the other side of the net isn’t the only one working against you. You also have an **inner opponent**, or inner critic, which takes the form of your **ego-mind**. This is the voice that judges, criticises and second guesses your every move. Instead of helping you to improve, it actually hampers you.

Instead of listening to your inner critic, you need to:

* Learn to **observe yourself from a detached point of view**, to assess what you have to do objectively and without judgment.
* Program new learning using images and examples.
* Let it happen.

Gallwey’s principles can be applied to many domains—and in fact he has done so himself, by writing about the inner games of golf, music, skiing and work. In relation to the evolution of coaching, Gallwey’s book was central to the creation of the GROW model, probably the most influential model of coaching around, as we’ll see later.

Brock’s work, which was the first comprehensive study of the history and origins of coaching, revealed 82 people who were influential in the development of coaching. But of these, only a few had a strong influence. Gallwey was one of these, cited by a good number of respondents as being significant to coaching.

**Werner Erhard’s “est” Training**

Werner Erhard has been the second most important influence on coaching, according to Vicki Brock (the first being Thomas Leonard, who we’ll meet below). In her survey of 1310 coaches, Erhard was second only to Leonard in being named as key to the development and spread of coaching.

So who is Werner Erhard? In the ’70s, Erhard ran “est,” or Erhard Seminars Training at the Esalan institute. These were intensive self-empowerment workshops. They were part of the broader human potential movement which developed in the ’60s and was about cultivating wellness and personal transformation.

O’Connor and Lages suggest Erhard was a “connector.” Those of you familiar with Malcolm Gladwell will recognise connectors as part of his description of agents of change responsible for a tipping point. A tipping point is **“the moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point”** where an idea catches on.

Connectors are great networkers. They know and link up a lot of people. Indeed in Brock’s interview data, approximately 30% of those identified as key influencers of coaching had some connection to Erhard.

**THE TRANSMITTERS (the 1980s)**

So the contribution of Erhard as a connector was one important way coaching started to catch on. Those familiar with Gladwell’s tipping point theory will know that connectors aren’t the only agents of change. So-called mavens are also important. That brings us to the only person who was mentioned more for his influence on coaching than Erhard: Thomas Leonard.

**Thomas Leonard**

Thomas Leonard’s story continues on from est and Werner Erhard. Erhard sold the intellectual rights of est to an employee-owned organisation which eventually became known as Landmark Education.

Leonard worked as the Budget Director for Landmark Education in the 1980s. As a financial advisor, he found that people were often seeking more than just financial guidance when they came to him. It turns out finances are often just a small part of the problem, and what people are really craving is advice about their lives in general.

So, Thomas Leonard started being a life advisor, and calling himself a coach. When coaching others, he drew together knowledge from a number of different fields along with instruments used by est and Landmark. A coaching methodology began to take shape.

It is this **ability to bring together different strands of knowledge from different fields** which prompted O’Connor and Lages (2007) to call Thomas Leonard a “maven.” In Gladwell’s tipping point theory, mavens are individuals who have the special ability to accumulate knowledge from different sources and **combine it in new ways**. They often start “word-of-mouth epidemics” this way.

Leonard fits the description because he was capable of lateral thinking, transferring knowledge of the financial field to the general self-help field. He had knowledge of many different disciplines, including business, psychology and personal development. And he was pivotal in the spread of coaching by word of mouth in the 1990s. According to Brock, “Leonard’s contribution as a transmitter was codifying, popularising, and globalising the discipline of coaching.” Her interviewees give Leonard credit for popularising coaching.

**John Whitmore, Graham Alexander and the GROW model**

Where Thomas Leonard was pivotal in the US, John Whitmore and Graham Alexander were influential in spreading coaching in the UK and Europe.

Significantly, Whitmore and Alexander “transmitted” the ideas of originator Timothy Gallwey’s book the Inner Game of Cricket. According to Brock, “Trained by Gallwey, Whitmore and Alexander brought the Inner Game approach to Britain in 1981 and called it coaching.”

Alexander drew on Erhard’s est training and Gallwey’s Inner Game to develop a new model of coaching in 1985 which would become highly influential: the GROW model.

Whitmore incorporated Gallwey’s ideas into a business coaching context with Coaching for Performance (1992), a book which Brock states were the first to see coaching emerge as a separate profession. He also popularised the GROW model in this book.

**COACHING AS A DISTINCT PROFESSION (the 1990s AND BEYOND)**

For O’Connor and Lages, the real tipping point in the spread of coaching was probably the mid-’90s when business coaching really took off. IBM was the first large company that made use of coaching, which “took coaching from being a personal development vehicle for individuals to a way of developing people in the business.”

* The ’90s saw big changes in the nature of work as companies downsized, outsourcing work to contractors, and changing the way people related to their jobs. Instead of staying in one job for a lifetime, people change careers on average three times.
* The loss of good personnel for an organisation can be costly, and ongoing training helps keep good people. But it turns out training is not enough because people often forget what they have learned when they return to “business as usual.” Coaching helps **consolidate and solidify learning from training**, keeping its effects going.
* Coaching also helped people **deal with the stress and time pressures** of these turbulent times,
* The rise of flatter organisations that eliminated a lot of middle managers also saw a **leadership vacuum**. Business and executive coaching fill that role by providing an ongoing dialogic relationship with employees instead of just training or consulting.

Brock argues that the period from 1990 to 2004 saw coaching emerge as a distinct profession. She says the period is characterised by an “exponential growth” of coaching and “coaching’s visibility in the public sector.”

According to Merriam and Brockett (1997), the professionalisation of discipline is demonstrated by the rise of professional associations, literature and graduate study. The ’90s saw the emergence of professional coaching associations, training programs and publications.

So given all these factors, by 2000, according to Brock, coaching had reached its tipping point and become widely known.

**THE HISTORY OF LIFE COACHING IN A NUTSHELL**

In all, coaching has a number of theoretical origins, including sports psychology, the human potential movement and business management. It’s started to percolate into self-help and business in the ’70s and ’80s but really took off in the ’90s when key transmitters were influential in the ideas taking hold of the social imagination.

**Listening as a Coach**

Kafka understood the value of paying close attention. **Listening** is a deceptively straightforward skill that’s often overlooked in its power. Listening as a coach is very different from normal, everyday listening. Even when done extraordinarily well, common conversational listening lacks the intentional focus the coach brings to the coaching conversation. The coach listens with a very different quality of attention that includes an impulse to be of service (without having an agenda aside from listening carefully for what “wants” to happen).

As Carl Rogers demonstrated, active listening, accompanied by unconditional positive regard, supports clients in making tremendous positive changes. The coach’s ability to be fully present to the client, patiently listening, communicates fundamental acceptance of the client. **This quality of listening and acceptance allows the client to be vulnerable in sessions.** Clients seldom experience the patient listening from others that they receive from their coaches. **This explains why coaching can feel therapeutic**, even though coaching definitely is not therapy. Coaches often refer to this as creating a sacred space or an inspiring space in which the client experiences the impact of **powerful listening**. This space supports the client’s personal unfolding. If lapses occur in the coach’s ability to listen with patience and undeniable focus, or to create an inspiring space, the client’s trust will erode.

Lapses in being present and patiently listening can take these forms:

* Interrupting clients or speaking as soon as clients finish a sentence; allowing no space for clients to hear themselves, to feel the impact of what they have said
* Beginning to speak while clients finish the last few words of a sentence-this doesn’t allow clients the choice to continue and elaborate.
* Attending superficially, missing signals provided by the clients’ tone of voice or body language
* Breaking eye contact or doodling during a face-to-face session
* Multitasking, with sounds clients hear during phone coaching
* Random or fidgety movements unrelated to clients’ statements that grow out of the coaches’ interior thoughts or feelings

Helping professionals in a wide variety of fields use listening skills as an integral aspect of their work. Helping professionals know how valuable it can be to **simply listen** and focus their attention on a client. However, coaches listen in unique ways that support the goals of the coaching relationship and maximise opportunities for achieving those goals. **Listening forms the cornerstone of coaching**, just as it remains the bedrock for every human relationship. Like every professional with extensive education, training, and experience, we develop habits as listeners. Most helping professionals listen instinctively for the client’s feelings, and just as instinctively they reflect, probe, and work with the client toward therapeutic change. As coaches, we listen to the client’s feelings, too. However, we pay equal attention to other domains of the client’s life.

**THREE KINDS OF LISTENING AS A COACH**

Coaches use three main kinds of listening skills: listening to, listening for, and listening with:

**Listening To**

Listening to is what many people call **active listening**. Listen to what the client says and does not say. Listen to the content and to what is beyond the words. This is the kind of listening that most of us learn readily to do as students, as parents, and as partners. A basic skill in active listening includes **knowing when and how to mirror back** to the client what was heard. When mirroring, the coach repeats back to the client what he said so that he feels fully heard. **Artful mirroring** allows the client to hear himself. However, masterful coaches go beyond elementary mirroring. People new to practising mirroring sometimes make the mistake of parroting back what they heard, rather than offering a nuanced interpretation that captures the client’s attention. New coaches sometimes mirror too often, interrupting the client’s flow. Coaches also listen to by observing the client’s body movements, gestures, tone of voice, speech pacing, pauses, and eye movements. Paying attention to the congruence of words and nonverbal behaviour, the coach can begin to sense dimensions of the experience that clients may not fully have brought into their consciousness.

**Listening For**

The second kind of listening we do as coaches are listening for. Laura Whitworth describes this well: “The coach listens for clients’ vision, values, commitment, and purpose in their words and demeanour”. To listen for is to listen in search of something.

* The coach listens with **consciousness**, with a purpose and focus that come from the alliance that was designed with the client. The alliance includes the client’s goals and desires, what many coaches refer to as “the client’s agenda.”
* The coach listens to forward **the client’s agenda**, not the coach’s agenda. We sometimes call this listening for the large life. For example, a particular client’s agenda includes improving work-life balance. His coach listens for expanding the possibilities beyond just having balance, instead of creating the most authentic and designed life that the client can imagine.
* The coach listens for the bigger picture, the richer possibilities available, beyond just the obvious improvements like reprioritising time, focusing on time for self, and so on. What life can the client create so that balance would simply be a “given”?
* The coach listens as if asking, “What crucible can contain the presenting goal, providing an expanded container to support the client’s unfolding?” One kind of listening for that is not useful, however, is **listening for “the solution**.”

As coaches, we do not need to be an expert. People who enter professions such as coaching, counselling, and consulting are often under the impression that they need to know or are expected to know what’s best for other people. Their impulse to make a difference can get confused with an inclination to impose their own values on their clients. **Novice coaches,** as well as coaches who have not devoted much attention to their own development and inner life, are especially prone to overlay their values onto clients. More **seasoned coaches** with firsthand experience of how this orientation can distort or derail a coach-client relationship are clearer about the need to release their conviction that they know what’s best for a client. Coaches learn to observe their own process and let go of their investment in being the expert and having the answer.

Coaching is not about listening for problems, pathologies, history, pain, and blocks-instead, it’s about listening for possibilities, goals, dreams, and aspirations. **It’s about discovering, harnessing, and expanding on strengths and tools clients have, not about rooting out problems and tackling them** (which, in addition to being disempowering, is not an appropriate focus in the coaching relationship). **Listening for solutions is, in fact, a block to the coaching process**: it distorts the process by superimposing an artificial agenda onto it. The agenda might be:

* To advise or teach something the coach is passionate about. While coaching sometimes includes brief moments of teaching, these need to be labelled as such and used at a minimum. A coach who has expertise in a domain **needs to be vigilant about not listening for opportunities** in this area. One new coach we worked with was passionate about nutrition and tended to insert his knowledge in coaching conversations where it didn’t belong. In general, we recommend that coaches steer clients to resources when the client needs to learn something. The new coach could easily have recommended specific texts or Web sites to clients who needed to learn more about nutrition. He didn’t need to use the coaching time for teaching.
* To find answers (often too quickly). The coach needs to **avoid pushing for answers**. New coaches can find it hard to not be hooked into a client’s urgency around finding answers.
* To have the coach feel successful (fulfilling the coach’s need, not the client’s). This is a definite mistake. The coach, in this case, is listening to her internal dialogue or to her own needs, not the clients.

A metaphor we use with clients is to explore the difference between flying from London to Manchester and driving there. Driving allows for adventures, unexpected insights and meetings. Flying is more predictable and efficient. However, “flying” a client to his or her goal skips important steps and reduces the possibility that the growth will become grounded or rooted in the client’s life. When we coach clients in the domain of work, listening for includes paying attention to the particular interdependence of the fundamental results of the client’s work. Michael O’Brien describes this as “The Work Triangle”.

Most conversations people have at work focus on performance. Clients can bring this habit to coaching. Coaches listen for how the clients’ satisfaction and learning grow from their work because these are critical to maintaining performance. If individuals are not learning, their performance will decline over time. If the clients’ predominant experience of work is boredom or stress, both learning and performance will suffer.

**Listening With**

Coaches do a third kind of listening-listening with. There are many ways to **listen with**. The best way we have found is to consider **listening to the whole self.**

This includes:

* listening with **heart**
* listening with **intuition**
* listening with the **body**

**Listening with heart,** coaches notice what emotions are emerging as they resonate with clients.

**Listening with intuition**, coaches pay attention to the images, metaphors, and internal words or phrases that emerge from within as an intuitive connection.

**Listening with the body**, coaches notice where in their body they are reacting to what they are hearing or sensing from the presence of the client.

An everyday example occurs when people say they have a “**gut feeling**.” That’s a somatic response to a situation or conversation that lacks a logical explanation. However, the coach’s “gut reaction” or “intuitive hit” needs to be checked out for accuracy. Oftentimes physical or intuitive reactions lead to an understanding that neither coach nor client had before. A coach might say to the client, “I just had this sense that you may be ambivalent and I want to check out whether that’s on target or not. You say you want to start this new business, and yet I don’t sense that your energy or excitement is present or convincing as you speak about it.” Sharing the intuition might lead to a deepening or a shift in the coaching conversation.

***Skilful coaches listen and resonate with clients’ words, meanings, and tones. They listen consciously to what is evoked in them by clients.***

They listen deeply from the heart and attend to the images, feelings, and senses that arise. These are sources of insight and resources for both coach and client.

Coaches are careful to avoid “me too” listening. We see this kind of listening every day when one person shares a thought or feeling, and the other replies, “Gee, that happened to me, too!” That kind of listening shifts the focus away from the client’s experience.

However, a unique feature of the coaching relationship is an appropriate use of self-disclosure by the coach. A masterful coach must know the difference between self-disclosure to enhance the client’s learning and disclosure that interferes. Self-disclosure must serve one of two purposes: to increase the connection with the client or to function as a learning point. For example, a coach might say to a client that she, too, had jitters about leaving a full-time job to start a business. Through coaching many other clients who are starting businesses, she’s learned how normal that is in the situation. That enables the client to put his own jitters into perspective.

For therapists becoming coaches, learning to self-disclose at all can be difficult. Most therapists were taught not to do any self-disclosure with clients because it interferes with the clients’ healing and shifts the relationship out of the professional role. Since coaches work with clients who are not emotionally fragile, occasional self-disclosure deepens the relationship as clients see coaches as fully human.

The great gift of coaching is that we can freely share our intuition with clients because the relationship is one of partnership. Often, how freely we share what we hear is one of the key differences between the kind of listening we do as therapists and the kind of listening we do as coaches.

Coaches need to be cautious about what psychologists know as transference and countertransference. In simple terms, transference means that a person is unconsciously bringing their experience and feelings from another situation into a current one. Clients may bring into coaching the unconscious expectation that coaches will solve their life issues for them, thereby hooking natural tendency coaches may have to rescue or fix. Countertransference can happen to coaches when clients’ conversations evoke in them an unconscious reaction based on something in their own life. Coaches, for example, may be listening to clients talk about the desire to have another child or to live on a Caribbean island. That story might evoke in coaches their own longings, and their internal reactions are transferred to the coaching conversation. This is likely to get in the way of powerful listening. Coaching relationships have a quality of intimacy about them that makes it critical for coaches to commit to reflecting on any leaks of their own “stuff” into the coaching relationship. To be effective and powerful, coaches at their best must recognise what might trigger or hook them when it occurs, and let it go.

**A USEFUL LISTENING TEMPLATE**

Just as maps help travellers find their way, listening templates help coaches pay attention to what can be listened for by providing a structure to guide their attention. Templates help coaches see gaps that might lend themselves to the starting points for the coaching conversation.

**Listening for the “Big Five”**

One powerful tool ILCT-trained coaches use is the ability **to listen for the “Big Five”**. In early coaching sessions with clients, the focus is on **understanding the clients’ goals** and **discovering what needs to shift** so the clients can create what they most want. Once clients have articulated the goals for change, it is time to start listening for the clients’ strengths and any potential blocks they may encounter in achieving their goals. Discovering potential blocks helps both coaches and clients identify what the clients will need to do-or become-to achieve their goal.

The Big Five provides a generic listening template that helps coaches to discern what is currently in place and what needs to be added to the clients’ repertoire. The Big Five are frequently the source of guidance about the specific fieldwork and coaching coaches will do with clients. These five factors are drawn from sports psychology and personal coaching experiences.

**Focus Clients’** focuses are the characteristic parts of their work and life that draw their attention at the current time. An ideal focus is appropriate, steady, flexible, able to be maintained, and related to goals that foster the clients’ well-being. Clients may come into coaching with a **“fuzzy focus.”**

They come to coaching with a sense that they want to do something different. They are not happy in their current situation, but they are not clear on what needs to be different or what they want to create. That’s a common coaching conversation. Coaching takes the sense of something missing or something desired and **assists clients in gaining clarity and choice by asking powerful questions, working with clients on their vision-how they want life to be**. Through powerful questions, journal exercises, and reflections, clients will gain more clarity of focus and be able to move toward what they want. A metaphor we use with clients is that clarifying their focus is like charting a course on a sailboat. They know they want to get there, and they have many choices about how to get there. But they can’t start sailing until they know what island they want to visit. Coaching helps clients determine the destination so that the coaching can move ahead to exploring the various routes clients can choose to get there. Knowing the routes helps, and successful sailors also need to be able to adjust to various circumstances, such as wind shifts, and storms.

One of the coaches’ tasks is to work with clients to **assess whether the clients’ goals are feasible**-whether they are appropriate and achievable for the clients at this time. One of our faculty worked with a client who wanted to open a new business, a retail outlet, at the same time when she was three months pregnant with her third child. While this isn’t something that we would want to do under the circumstances, the coaching conversation helped the client determine that yes, she could do this, and helped her strategize how to open the business as well as support the upcoming birth. So if your client has a goal of expanding his business, and that’s his reason for seeking coaching, you will ask yourself, “Does he have a focus? Is the focus clear?” If the focus seems fuzzy, that may be a starting point for coaching. For example, he may talk about expanding but not be clear about how he would measure the expansion. Would it be the numbers of clients? Bottom line revenue? New markets? New products? If he isn’t clear, the coach needs to help him explore and gain clarity about the focus for expansion-in other words, what expansion really means to him. If he holds his focus too generally, he will not be able to achieve his goals.

It is, of course, possible to be over-focused. Over focusing does not allow clients to discover options because they are so focused on just one direction. Being highly motivated isn’t the same as being overfocused, which is like having tunnel vision. Clients can overfocus on work achievements, ignoring other aspects of their lives. Coaches support the clients in exploring this by bringing a broad perspective to the clients’ lives. Another benefit of coaching is that **it expands the view and puts goals in the context of the rest of clients’ lives.** The client who wants to expand his business may be overfocused on that goal and may almost obsessively focus all his attention and energy on it. That could lead to coaching conversations about work-life balance, the needs of other people in his life, and how he will maintain his health and physical well-being during the expansion. Life coaching unlike pure business coaching-takes a **whole-person perspective** on any client who comes for coaching.

**Mind-set/Attitude** Coaches consider the clients’ mindset by observing and listening to the clients. How do the clients tend to interpret their experiences-negatively, seeing only problems? Positively, seeing possibilities? Is the clients’ mindset helpful, or is it limiting? The coaching conversations can help clients **shift away from limiting beliefs and toward powerful possibilities and a more “can do” attitude**. **Mindset and attitude** are the characteristic or current mental and emotional positions from which clients view themselves, other people, events, and the world. Mind-set and attitude can often be the source of or have a significant impact on on-clients’ motivational patterns. For example, if clients are frequently fear-driven, it is hard to move toward things-including goals clients have set. The key factor is whether the clients are aware of their mindset and attitude. Are the mind-set and attitude appropriate? Do they support the clients to reach the goal? Mind-set includes the characteristic ways clients view themselves and the world. As a coach listens, over time clients will reveal mind-set through:

* The ways they characteristically approach people and relationships
* The ways they define success and themselves in relation to people, events, and circumstances
* Whether they tend to see themselves as actors, participants, or victims
* How they draw conclusions about events, experiences, and why they have unfolded as they have
* How they think about their ability to create and to influence
* How they evaluate the importance and value of people, situations, experiences, and results

For our client who is interested in expanding his business, the coach will look for whether he holds a positive attitude about the opportunity. Does he want to expand his business but describes that process pessimistically? Does he say things like, “I have a great idea but I’m not a businessman; I don’t know what to do; I can’t afford to hire the right people?” In this case, the coach would notice that working on mindset will be important. This client seems to have limiting beliefs: he is focused on what can’t happen, what limits him, what he can’t afford. If this is a habitual way of thinking, he could end up inadvertently sabotaging his goal by not directing his efforts appropriately.

Skills and Capacities Given the clients’ goals, the key question is whether they have the necessary skills and capabilities required for success. Skills tend to be learnable and teachable. Capacities, on the other hand, can be developed but generally are not things we expect to build through teaching. An example of capacity might be a client’s ability to tolerate ambiguity without rushing to action. Capacities can be found by discovering what the client has the patience for and can tolerate, or what the client has impatience for and can’t tolerate.

Clients may need to develop, for example, their capacity for staying engaged when conflict occurs, instead of retreating or running away because they don’t have the capacity to stay calm in conflict. Coaches can help clients develop their capacities, as we describe later in when we discuss assigning practices as fieldwork in coaching. First, coaches and clients identify current skills and capacities the clients have that will support the coaching goals. These are the resources the clients can draw upon. The coaching helps the clients determine whether to learn other needed skills or to delegate or hire someone. For example, a client starting a new business will need some basic skills to run a business: bookkeeping, marketing, staffing, Web site development, and so on. As we know, he doesn’t need to be hands-on with all of these, but he does need to identify who can assist him or provide the service.

**The key questions are:**

* What are the gaps between what he currently can do or acquire and what is needed?
* What is the most effective way to fill these gaps?

This assessment can also help the client determine whether the goal he has set is feasible within the time he wants to achieve it. Assessing skills and capabilities sometimes becomes an entry point back to examining the goal, as well as to other areas within the Big Five.

For the client wanting to expand his business, you may begin to notice skills and capabilities such as time management, networking (or the lack thereof), marketing knowledge, follow-through, and project management. Does the client complete things on time? Take on too many requests from others? Can the client work satisfactorily with the level of detail required to manage the business as well as expand it? If any of these are not current capabilities, the client will need to develop them or delegate them to others. Many business owners discover that to expand their business, they need to engage more support staff or outsource things they have been doing themselves.

**Habits, Practices, and Patterns**

These are what clients do automatically-without thinking or planning.

These can be habits, practices, and patterns in physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual realms. Key questions are: “Are the clients’ habits, practices, and patterns supporting them in achieving the goal? Do they need to be shifted in some way? Can they be unlearned, noticed, or developed into new patterns? Note: This is not an invitation to judge clients. Avoid labelling the habits as bad or good. Simply discover whether they are useful or not whether they support the clients in effectively attaining their goals.

A common example is **time management**, especially if clients move into a home-based business, a romantic notion for many people. The good news is that they are working from home. The bad news is that they are working from home. Time management as a habit becomes crucial in how they organise their work time versus play time amid the distractions from family and pets, and the temptation to go outside and sit in the sun.

Can they set the boundaries they will need to do their work? Coaches will help them explore their time management habits and determine whether they are sufficient.

Clients may have a pattern of thinking that they need to do all the work themselves. They may be reluctant to delegate and then get overwhelmed with administrivia. If they want to start a business, they must develop new patterns. They will need to find people who can support their business; otherwise, they risk not launching it successfully. Common goal clients set in a case like this would be to gradually move from working in the business (providing direct service) to working on the business (leading, strategising, and so on). This may be where you assess whether clients habitually overpromise and underdeliver. Clients who want to expand their business may need to have a deliberate habit or practice of regularly contacting current and former customers, which is an accepted business strategy, sometimes describes as TOMA, “top of mind awareness.” Keeping the business in the forefront of the customer’s mind often leads to repeat business or the willingness to buy new products or services. TOMA also creates referrals.

If clients lack these habits, coaches need to move back to examining skills and capabilities: what would the client need to learn in order to have TOMA become a new business practice?

In the corporate environment, a pattern could show up like a boss paging an employee at all hours of the evening and expecting the employee to respond. Unless they have an agreement that the employee is to be “on-call,” the client will begin to experience demotivated employees. In a case like this, the coach would explore the source of the after-hours calls. Are they occurring because the client doesn’t plan?

Does this client make a distinction between home and work life? Does the client treat situations as crises and initiate a reactive pattern, so that every crisis the client experiences becomes a crisis for his people?

**Attending to Clients’ Energy**

This factor is the clients’ ability to bring forth, as needed, an appropriate amount of physical/emotional/mental/spiritual energy in a timely and appropriate way. Energy serves as a gateway to clients’ health, motivation, commitment, and way of being in the world. Energy may be either sourced or blocked by the previous four factors. A good coach will notice regularly how clients motivate themselves and generate energy, as well as whether their physical well-being impacts their energy. For example, ageing, menopause, illness, and parenting or caregiving all can have an impact on available energy. Even when coaching by phone, coaches can sense clients’ energy. It is critical for coaches to **have a sense of their clients’ energy through the enthusiasm they express about the goal**. Are they excited about the goal? Does the energy they communicate to coaches dissipate after the coaching conversation? Can clients maintain their energy level? On the other hand, this might be the entry point for coaching: the clients’ goals are valid, but they have so many energy drainers in other places in their lives that they are unable to move forward as they want to. They simply don’t have the required energy available. Their intentions are great, and the prospects of growing the business are solid. But the coaches notice that they need to have more energy available consistently in order to make progress.

**WHAT LISTENING IS NOT**

* Coaching is not about listening for problems, pathologies, history, pain, and blocks-instead, it’s about listening for possibilities, goals, dreams, aspirations. Coaching is about **discovering, harnessing, and expanding on strengths** and tools clients have, not about rooting out problems and tackling them (which, in addition to being disempowering, is not an appropriate focus in the coaching relationship).
* Coaching is not about listening to solutions. We distinguish possibilities from solutions and encourage coaches to begin **listening for possibilities** from the beginning of their work. Coaches need to remain open to clients’ creativity in generating solutions. Listening for solutions is a block to coaching because it distorts the process by superimposing an artificial agenda onto it. The agenda might be:
	+ To find answers (often too quickly), -coaches need to not push for this and also need not to be hooked into clients’ urgency around coming to conclusions.
	+ For the coach to feel successful. This fulfils coaches’ needs, not the cIients’ needs.
* Coaching is not advising or training. Sometimes coaches do need to teach their clients something briefly in order to help them build a skill or capability. A coach, for example, may take 15 minutes of a coaching session to teach a stressed client how to do breath-counting meditation. The coach would ask the client’s permission to teach and would label the work as such.

**CONCLUSION**

We begin this course with a focus on listening because listening creates the foundation for great coaching. One of our colleagues, Dave Ellis, believes that coaches should spend 80 per cent of their time simply listening and nondirectively working with what the client says. In terms of what an observer would notice, the coach would be doing any of the following:

* Listening fully and then affirming the client. This would involve feeding back to clients what seems to be inspiring to them, which helps the clients feel affirmed as well as hear themselves. Coaches acknowledge the goals and help the clients feel heard.
* Listening fully and then feeding back clients’ desires. Coaches feedback on what the clients want in a way that clarifies and focuses the clients’ attention. This helps clients notice the “key points” that the coaches create out of what could have been a sustained description by the clients.
* Listen fully and ask the client to generate a few new possibilities. This might involve a question such as: “What can you think of that would help you take the first steps toward this goal?”

Later on, in the coaching relationship, coaches may offer possibilities to clients or teach a skill on a limited basis. But early in the relationship, coaches focus on listening to the clients and helping the clients discover what they want, what they believe, and what is possible. The coaches’ responses as listeners focus on clarifying and magnifying the clients’ desires.

**The Language of Coaching (Part 1)**

**THE BASIC COACHING MODEL**

Our course is based on a blend of many of the theories from humanistic psychology (Maslow, Rogers, and others), the recent research in positive psychology and its strength-based approach, and the early theories of Jung, Adler, and Assagioli. We also believe that conversations create action. And, through coaching, as narrative therapy describes, clients rewrite old stories and create new stories of their lives and possibilities.

When coaches work with clients, they simultaneously attend to **three aspects of coaching**:

* the relationship with the clients
* the overall process of coaching (its goals, framework, and expectations)
* the coaching conversations that occur

In this module, we refer to the coaching conversation as a template for a specific type of dialogue, which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Within one coaching session, several cycles of the coaching conversation may occur. Or a coaching session may focus only on the first parts of the conversation, depending on the depth. But the steps or phases all will be **repeated** throughout each session.

Coaching engages clients in commitment and action of some kind. Coaching is, above all, a conversation. A coaching relationship begins when coaches engage clients in a conversation around their visions, goals, wants, and desires. Like all good conversations, coaching requires us to listen, to pace the conversations, and to genuinely enter into a dialogue with clients. This creates what in coaching we call the sacred or inspiring space. David Bohm’s work on dialogue provides a good model for coaches to follow in attending to the client.

However, the coaching conversation is special because clients grant coaches permission to challenge and support. There is an agreement in place that enables the coaching conversation to occur. Without that agreement, you can have a great conversation, but it will not necessarily lead to the kind of change that coaching can facilitate.

In the coaching conversation, the dialogue between coaches and clients is designed to further the clients’ growth, learning, and action toward their **desires and intentions**. It is a creative conversation where coaches dance with clients, intuitively following their pace and style while at the same time adding to and elaborating on what is unfolding at the moment. Moore and colleagues (2006) have researched this phenomenon and written an excellent description of this process.

The magic of coaching conversations is that they are conversations that would not take place within the clients’ usual lives. No two coaching conversations are alike, but there is a basic flow to the conversation that we repeat again and again. This flow is the framework for a coaching session. This module describes **the components of a coaching conversation**-its beginning, middle, and end. You can have good conversations with a lot of people, but it’s not a coaching conversation until it’s purposefully directed to the client’s agenda and has all the components delineated in this module.

The coaching conversation impacts clients because it takes a whole-person approach. Tim Gallwey (2000) articulated this in his groundbreaking books, where he used the metaphor of the inner game, the internal world of clients. He described three critical conversations that need to occur for clients to be successful in making a change. Each of these pays attention to both the inner and outer world of clients.

Gallwey said that coaching includes three levels of conversation:

* A conversation for awareness (getting the clearest possible picture of current reality)
* a conversation for choice (getting the clearest possible picture of the desired future outcome)
* a conversation for trust (in which the client gains greater access to internal and external resources in order to move from current reality to the desired future).

**Increasing clients’ awareness is key** because with awareness comes choice. Clients must become aware of their current situational reality what’s true, what is so, and what is available to them. The increased choice comes when clients become aware that they can respond creatively to life rather than just reacting to it.

Our normal stance as human beings is to react, particularly to challenges. When even the smallest portions of fear or anxiety arise, the human brain and nervous system are programmed to **react** with the fight, flight, or freeze reaction. Increased awareness through coaching allows clients to see that they always have choices available to them.

**THE FLOW OF COACHING CONVERSATIONS**

Clients typically hire coaches because they want to achieve something or enhance something in their lives. The results they want to create in their lives generally fall into three areas:

* **Performance goals** (for example, improving results as a business owner, eliminating clutter, or meeting daily standards for numbers of contacts with potential clients). These goals usually can be measured objectively, such as by examining the balance sheet of a business, measuring business processes, or tracking sales contacts.
* **Learning goals** (for example, improving public speaking, becoming a parent who is patient with one’s children, or learning how to meditate and to do it consistently). The measurement standards for these goals may be either external or internal to clients. External measures for public speaking could come from observers’ feedback. Parents might use both external and internal measures by keeping a log of daily interactions with children and rating themselves on their patience in each, as well as seeking feedback from their spouses and their children.
* **Fulfilment goals** (for example, achieving work-life balance, a satisfying relationship with a spouse, or the ability to work from the heart as well as from the head, which is a common issue for corporate leaders). The determination of whether these goals have been achieved rests with the clients’ sense of fulfilment. Clients can track their felt sense of fulfilment on a daily or weekly basis. Then they can judge subjectively whether they are feeling more fulfilled. Clients can also create measures for themselves: time at work, time with family, time for fun, and so on, to provide an external source of learning for themselves. Generally, fulfilment goals may also bring clients in tune with their life purpose.

In the real world of coaching, most of the time a coach works with the client in all three of these areas during the time they coach together. For example, a client comes in wanting to improve her small business results (a performance goal), as measured by the number of sales per customer. In the process of identifying what needs to happen to create that result, the client discovers that she needs to be able to make contact with more potential customers. In order to do that, she realizes that she needs to become a better networker (learning goal). As she begins to attend more networking organization meetings, she discovers that she is spending less time at home with her children. She sets a new goal: to spend quality time with her children that are mutually enjoyable, because she deeply desires to be a caring and loving parent to them (fulfilment goal). Our clients bring with them their goals and desires. They also bring the stories they tell themselves (and others) about those goals and desires-why they are attainable or not, what it will take to achieve them, and more. To paraphrase Bill O’Hanlon (O’Hanlon & Hudson, 1995), a well-known speaker and author in the field of solution-oriented therapy, every human being gets ***“lost in storyland.”***

Each of us has our own point of view about things that happen [in our lives]. We call these explanations stories to emphasize the fact that our points of view are not The Truth. Facts are different from stories. Facts are things we can all agree upon, what we can all verify with our senses. Stories involve opinions, interpretations, theories and explanations. Facts are the “what”; stories are the “why.” Most of us are caught up in the stories we believe about ourselves, other people, our relationships; we have forgotten that these stories are stories and that we made them up. We are convinced that our stories contain The Truth.

As you engage in a coaching conversation with clients, you bring this **awareness** to the conversation: to assist clients in getting what they want, you will be working with their stories about the goals, themselves, and what is possible. Clients may or may not recognize that their stories aren’t the truth. As the coach, you will need to discover how tightly clients are bound to any confusion about the stories actually being the reality. The more the clients confuse stories with truth, the more difficult it will be for clients to make changes. Sometimes the first piece of work in coaching is to help clients be able to reflect on how they created and continue to create the stories so that they can rewrite them. As you read the description of the coaching conversation, refer to the transcript of a session. As we describe the structure of this conversation, we will do so from the coach’s perspective because the coach is responsible for structuring the conversation. The 5 steps of our coaching model are presented below.

**The Situation and the Desire**

**Step 1:** Ask, What do you want from coaching? Coaching sessions usually start with a minute or two of small talk and check-in. Then the coach begins the session. The flow of the coaching conversation begins when the coaches inquire into the clients’ desires.

The coaches ask the open-ended questions-some version of ***“What do you want?”*** which starts the conversation-to engage the clients in articulating what they want and in clarifying the meaning of that desire. Subsequent questions will probe for more specific aspects of the current situation or the desire. These initial questions can be about a specific situation or about the entirety of the clients’ life (for example, “What do you want from your vacation?” or “What legacy do you want to leave?”). In either case**, a powerful question** engages the clients in identifying more clearly what they want because, without that, the clients will continue to think, act, and live no differently than they have been to date. The coaches’ questions **initiate a process of discovery and awareness** for both clients and coaches. The coaches ask powerful questions, inquiring into the depths of the desire, the vision the clients have for what is desired, the subtleties of the situation, and why the desire is important to the client. Powerful questioning is a hallmark of life coaching and is explored later in this chapter.

**Enter the Flow of the Coaching Conversation**

**Step 2:** **Listen and Clarify** Like any great conversationalist, coaches pay exquisitely close attention to what the clients say. When you pay attention, your world gets bigger. The coaches’ ability to listen and reflect back helps the clients’ world seem more spacious, more alive, and more vibrant. As coaches listen and clarify, they may reframe what the clients see by providing perspective and creating possibilities that mirror or build on the clients’ statements. Coaches sometimes say that they coach to the gap. This means that the coaches help the clients identify wants and wishes, and compare them to what currently exists. The coaches help clients examine the present situation. The gap is the difference between the two. Once the gap is identified, coaches can help the clients find ways to close it. In listening and clarifying, coaches ask questions to discover what is, what is wanted, and gaps that exist. While the intention first is to help the clients clarify, coaches are examining whether or not they fully understand what the clients are communicating. That is done by checking in with the clients.

Coaches summarize and ask questions that verify their understanding: “Am I understanding you fully? Do I seem to have it all? Am I hearing you clearly? What else is there for you? Is there anything I’m missing?” An important point of this step is for the coaches to not own or be attached to their perception of what the clients are saying. Masterful coaches always check in with the clients and are willing to be wrong. Good coaching is about helping the clients get very clear, and not tainting the conversation by colouring what the clients meant in a way that doesn’t reflect the clients’ intentions. The importance of gaining this level of clarity is that, once clear, the conversation can move forward. “Okay, we’re both clear about what you want. Now, what can you do about it?” The coaching can move to create new strategies for the clients to get what they want.

**Giving Honest Feedback and Observation**

**Step 3:** Say What Is So Once coaches are clear and reflect back to the clients their understanding, they can add perspective by sharing what they see. This can be the point of most potency and the highest leverage for change because **the coaches’ perspectives shed a powerful floodlight on the story the clients tell about their goals and motivation. Coaches are truth-tellers, sharing the truth of the client’s situation as they see it. They bring clarity to the clients’ situation by articulating what they see, from their perspective-the gaps, the opportunities, the strengths, and the possibilities in a way that is clear, respectful, and communicated in a manner that is heard by the clients as the coaches’ best understanding in the moment.** It is never meant to be the truth–only the coaches’ perspective. It is offered as the coaches’ observation of the situation. Masterful coaches do not think they know something the clients do not, but they respect the fact that power to change comes from being able to see circumstances from more than one perspective.

Coaches say what is so by sharing their perception of the truth in a way that is respectful, warm, and inviting. The coaches’ language needs to be attractive and intriguing to clients, capturing their attention.

Coaches share intuitions about possibilities and obstacles. Coaches share the truth about themselves, as well as about the clients. Since our coaching clients are not fragile, we do not need to withhold information from them. One meaning of happiness is living in tune with the way things are. When coaches share what is so, they are also humbly aware that it is just one version of the way things are-their version. When coaches share what is so, clients gain another perspective on the way things are. When someone recognizes what is so, the transformation can begin. At this point coaches often share their assessment of the situation the coaches’ take on what’s going on.

Coaches assist clients in seeing the situation more fully in order to evoke fresh insights about both the situations and the clients in general.

Ideally, these insights also shed light on factors that contribute to stagnating the situation.

**Return to Listening**

**Step 4:** Listen More Once coaches have acknowledged reality, it is time to listen again. They may find themselves asking clarifying questions to deepen the clients’ ability to listen to themselves fully. A skilled coach allows the client time and space to examine what is so, to play with it, to explore it, and to discover its possibilities. Through the quality of the coaches’ work during this step, they are inviting the clients to listen to themselves, too. **Giving clients the time and space to respond can create new possibilities by legitimizing the process of listening to oneself deeply and honouring what one hears**. Insight occurs when clients begin to see the situation in a fresh way. They may reshape the story they tell themselves about what is possible. Seeing the situation in a new way will likely free them to take new action.

**Create Accountability**

**Step 5:** Request Action, The action the coaches request, although definitely a change of some kind, is not necessarily a performance goal. It could be a change in behaviour, a change in the way of being, or a change in a thought pattern or mind-set-any change that creates momentum. In this step, coaches **challenge clients** to do what they perhaps had been wanting to do, but had never before had the push to do. Coaches ask for a new way; the old way has not helped the clients create what they want.

A request for **action** may sound like this: “What will you do as your first step?” At this time, the coaches need to assess whether the clients are committed to the actions they identify. In other words, it’s essential to make sure that the clients own the action and are not doing it for the sake of their coach. Skilled coaches are aware of pacing and check in with the clients to ensure that the goals and the actions are in line with **their desired outcomes** and fit with what is possible, given the rest of their life. Appropriate action combined with the clients’ willingness, furthers the clients’ agenda.

Actions that are too big or too small may derail the clients’ motivation. The coaches need to check in with the clients to determine whether the clients own the action: Are they excited? Do they show excitement and commitment through their voice, their energy, and their statements? The Big Five is a useful method for discernment here. Don’t underestimate the importance of discernment. Some experienced clients get pumped up by declaring that they’re committed to some big goal that, although in line with their life path, seems to coaches to be too big or too soon. When clients declare their commitment, they can be fueled by the excitement of the adrenaline rush that comes with having a big vision or a big desire. They have every intention of agreeing to something that might require too much too soon. These are situations where coaches may notice clients overpromising and underdelivering, which would be assessed in subsequent coaching sessions. In such cases, clients come back for the next session not having completed the intended actions.

Coaches explore what happened that blocked the intended actions, with an eye toward assessing whether the clients have in this case overextended themselves. Overextension might be a onetime situation, or it could be a pattern. Coaches pay attention to which of these might be the case. The clients may need to learn how to check in with themselves to assess appropriate pacing. In this or the next session, the coaches would help the clients begin. A coach might ask a client: “Take a moment now and check-in with yourself before you finalise this commitment. Get your calendar and notice what your next week looks like. Where do you see the space, time, and energy to do what you agree to do? Can you write this action in your calendar, so you will know that you have a place for it? Finally, check-in with your body as you imagine yourself completing this action. Do you notice any places where you are tightening? If so, what’s the message for you about this commitment?”

 A good rule of thumb is to have clients take action in two ways:

* + 1. Ask them to take the specified action,
		2. Ask them to observe themselves during the next period of time, so that they stay attuned to what they think, feel, and sense as they engage in taking action and practising new habits beyond the status quo.

Several things generally happen within this part of the flow:

* You **identify choices**. When the truth has been told, the story identified, and the gap between current and desired situations cleared, it’s time to identify choices the clients can make to close the gap. Some may be obvious; others may tap the coaches’ and clients’’ creativity to generate.
* You **examine commitment**. Since the clients will choose a path, examining their commitment to take action is an important aspect of the process. A conversation about what it would take to commit to a choice may be in order, as would a conversation about why a choice is or isn’t attractive to the clients. Sometimes the choice gets modified in order to increase the clients’ level of commitment to it.
* You **identify the action(s).** The clients are about to take action that they feel some commitment to take. The coaching conversation needs to deal with the specifics of what the clients will do, when they will do it, and how they will do it. To some extent, your work here is to identify the next steps the clients will take to forward the action for themselves. Leaving this step fuzzy leads to frustration on the part of both clients and coaches. As clients take action, they will learn from it, particularly if coaches ask them to self-observe. This, in turn, will lead to other possibilities and other actions. This might be a place where coaches might consider how the clients could gather some internal feedback to verify that the new action is appropriate for them at this time.
* You **ensure accountability**. Accountability is the cornerstone of coaching. Clients are accountable to the coaches, but at a deeper level, they are accountable to themselves. Coaches serve clients and ask for accountability. Don’t leave the session before ensuring that the what, when, and how of your clients’ next steps are clear. (Sometimes it’s also helpful to ask clients why the action is important.)

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

In any coaching session, you may repeat this basic 5-step coaching framework several times, or one basic coaching cycle may occupy the entire session. How you use the model within a session depends on the focus, the length of the session, the style and pace of the client, and the alliance you have created together. Sometimes you will linger within a step or recycle back to an earlier step for completion before progressing. Generally, though, a session is not complete without a request for movement of some kind. That is what makes coaching uniquely able to create momentum toward the client’s goals.

**A TRANSCRIPT OF A COACHING SESSION**

The following transcript was taken from a coaching conversation that occurred within the context of an ILCT foundational class. Pat Williams was the coach.

COACH: Hey there, last week we had a healthy conversation about rediscovering the fun in life. You seemed very enthusiastic about doing the things you love. Surely, it will help you feel better.

CLIENT: Yes.

COACH: SO, what do you want to be different regarding fun and recreation in your life right now? CLIENT: Well, several years ago I had serious knee surgery and had to stop playing cricket. I noticed that ever since, I stopped being able to play cricket and have injuries in my body and don’t really feel the athletic person that I was, let’s say, 20 years ago.  I’ll choose staying in the house and organising because I like that-I’ll want other activities rather than plan something with my partner that would be fun. Things have become pretty dull and boring in my life after that.

COACH: Right. And yet it used to be a big important part … because cricket was the way you did it, right? CLIENT: Yeah, I loved it. I had so much fun.

COACH: Well, before we talk about other options for a redesign of your life, tell me what was it about the cricket activity?

CLIENT: I used to be playing on outdoors in the sun, which I don’t do that much anymore. And it was playing with strangers sometimes, or just meeting new people, making friends and making life active and happening…. And it was the physical activity and the contact sport … getting better at something. Getting better, taking lessons, practising my serve, you know, that kind of thing. It was a dream life for me.

COACH: And your physical limitations now prevent cricket?

CLIENT: Yes. They prevent any kind of sport like that, any kind of repetitive sport.

COACH: Where else in your life can you imagine being outdoors, meeting new people, engaging in some meaningful activity … it still could be physical to the degree that it’s able to be physical. … What comes to mind?

CLIENT: Hmmm …. That’s an interesting question.

COACH: What do you see in other people that you notice, “Oh, that’s something to consider?” You could start making a list of things you think could be fun that meet those.

CLIENT: I think that’s good, only I always come up with that the people who think they have the most fun have a sport-have something like either cricket or golf, which doesn’t interest me-they have something that they … or sailing, or things that don’t interest me. So that’s my problem. I feel like I almost have to reframe fun, and I don’t know how to do that.

COACH: Good, good. What I picked from your conversation were some ingredients that … If being outdoors and meeting people were two parts of playing cricket, you can still have those. What you can’t have is playing cricket. I don’t know if you can’t have that, but right now your belief is that you can’t have that.

CLIENT: No, I absolutely can’t ever play again.

COACH: Okay …. I’m closing my eyes a minute as I try to imagine … What I’m hearing is it would be very important for you to find a way for fun to be a big factor in your life again, and it wouldn’t be just doing busyness to distract you from the time you used to use getting outdoors and doing something …

CLIENT: Right.

COACH: … and there are physical limitations we know about …

CLIENT: Right.

COACH: SO who do you know in your life, either that you really know or that you see publicly, like celebrities or anybody that you know of … people that have physical limitations and still seem to have fun in their life? Any models that you can think of?

CLIENT: (laughing) No.

COACH: SO that would be a great research project, wouldn’t it?

CLIENT: Yeah.

COACH: You chuckle. What is chuckling?

CLIENT: Well, it’s funny, because I don’t know anyone who would say they have fun. I mean, I heard Ann in class say she has fun with her kindergarten kids doing drawing or scribbling or something like that, and that was fun to her. And I thought that was great. I wish I had something like that, something that I could call fun.

COACH: Yes. And it sounds as if it really is a reframe of … shifting … “Damn it, my fun used to be cricket, and now I can’t do it, and it’s a big loss for me and I can’t think of anything else to have fun with.” That’s what I’m hearing.

CLIENT: Yes. That’s correct. You know, it might be interesting, when I see people, I could ask them what they do that they call fun.

COACH: Yeah, that’s a thought-do some fun interviews with people, what we call informational interviews.

CLIENT: Yeah, what do you do for fun? Ask them that.

COACH: What do you consider fun? Because there’s a myriad of activities that aren’t physical that some people consider fun. They might be more mental, they might be some community activity-I’m trying to think creatively with you now …. But it feels to me, my intuition tells me … without getting into great details, I almost need to know the degree of your physical limitations, what the current situation is.

CLIENT: Well, I have problems with my feet, problems with my toes, and so I had to have hammertoe surgery, so every time I kept playing cricket, I had to have another surgery. It was eventually about not being able to walk easily, so I stopped playing. But I still have pain in the bottom of my foot, now that my foot was anatomically changed. Now I have problems in the metatarsal region, so I have pain. So I have orthotics and all that, but I don’t enjoy just walking-it’s not fun for me.

COACH: SO you are ambulatory?

CLIENT: Yes, I can walk, I can hike, but that’s not fun. I can’t walk fast, I can’t run, I can’t jump on my toes.

COACH: A little bit of history-when did you take up the game?

CLIENT: In my teens, when I was about 12.

COACH: And played it from then on, very voraciously?

CLIENT: Yes. And then right before I had the surgeries. I played almost every day.

COACH: What did you do for fun before age 12?

CLIENT: I rode a bike and played baseball. I ran around.

COACH: Is bicycling anything that interests you?

CLIENT: No, not anymore. I fell. (laughing) I live in the mountains now, and it’s really hard to bike unless you’re really strong. And where I live there’s nothing flat, and it’s a huge hassle going down to the ocean where everybody is crowded. So there doesn’t seem to be a sport. And I think maybe one of the things I’m feeling right now is I’m feeling kind of sad ….

COACH: Yeah …

CLIENT: … the mourning of the fact that there isn’t going to be that kind of sport that I’ve done my whole life.

COACH: Yeah-and if sport equals fun, then that’s a big limitation for you.

CLIENT: Right.

COACH: And sport isn’t the only kind of fun. It just seems right now that that’s the fun you lost. CLIENT: Right.

COACH: Let’s move into the future. Let’s just imagine … I’m trying to get into your mental space here, by phone, because I really want to believe … I mean, I absolutely do believe, not just want to, that there is an unknown for you, of having a life of fun, because not only do you deserve it, I think there’s also a unique experience that we haven’t yet come upon, that would be fun for you at some time in the future. Could be next week, could be next year. So, if you had a future that had fun in it, how would you be different? Who would you become if that were part of your life?

CLIENT: I would feel more rounded. I would feel that my life was more balanced. My life feels out of balance. COACH: Out of balance, and there’s a part missing.

CLIENT: Right. So I would feel more whole. And I would feel happier, I think, because I’d be doing something that doesn’t always involve my mind, or busywork that then helps me relax … I’d be doing something that wasn’t just mind oriented or organisation oriented. So that feels better, that there would be something … There is something I just thought of something.

COACH: Good.

CLIENT: If I could envision a future that had fun, I think I would be involved more in drumming…

COACH: Ahhh …

CLIENT: (laughing and sounding more animated) … because I went to this drumming circle two times, and I’m going to go this Friday night. And it’s involved because you have to buy a drum, and find people to drum with if you’re going to do it in a circle. But it made me have that same sense of connection to strangers, people I wouldn’t normally meet.

COACH: Yeah, that’s what we were looking for earlier, and that can be done outdoors.

CLIENT: It’s actually done indoors, but I suppose …

COACH: Oh, there are drum circles that meet down by the beach on a full moon or up in the mountains.

CLIENT: (laughing)

COACH: Trust me, you can find them if you’re looking for them.

CLIENT: Right.

COACH: Well, so did you hear the energy shift in your voice and your whole body?

CLIENT: Yeah-it does excite me, that one new thing I only did twice but it did feel like it was fun.

COACH: Yeah, and we don’t want to put our eggs all in one basket, but to me, it sounds like-okay, that’s something to research and make a big part of your life. It’s not going to replace cricket. I know that. But it is going to replace the part of you that’s missing-for social connection, for laughter, for fun, for relaxation, for something that’s totally away from business and work. This resonates with me as a very good alternative.

CLIENT: Yes. The two times I did it, I really couldn’t believe it.

COACH: Here’s something else I know about fun, just from life experience, that I’d like you to consider. If you just follow your heart, or your intuition, in drumming, my guess is that that’s going to be a door opener to other things as well. There’s going to be somebody in a drumming group who does something else. Maybe they do … what’s that new kind of bicycle I’m going to buy?

CLIENT: An elliptical?

COACH: No, where you sit and bicycle…

CLIENT: A stationary bike? ANOTHER CLASSMATE: A recumbent bike?

COACH: Yeah, a recumbent bike.

CLIENT: You mean they actually have bikes like that?

COACH: Yeah, I’m buying one next week because I just test-drove six of them. I love it. I mean, I happen to have knee problems, too, and I don’t like the seats on most bicycles … so that’s something to consider. I’m just saying that things will come from being in a drumming group because everybody in that drumming group will do other things in their life for fun.

CLIENT: Right. And the thing about the drumming is that it would really help with that other aspect of my life that is very small, which has to do with the spiritual.

COACH: Ahhh …

CLIENT: … because when people get into drumming, you get into a kind of an altered state.

COACH: Yeah, I love it. It excites me. Well, I’m going to ask you this big coaching question. That’s what you want in the future is for fun to come back in your life, and it sounds as if some of that can be in the immediate future with this drumming.

CLIENT: Right.

COACH: What else do you want?

CLIENT: What else do I want in my life in general?

COACH: For fun.

CLIENT: Umm …

COACH: I guess the question is really this: so fun becomes part of your life again. That’s great. What’s the bigger question? What do you really want all that to lead to-really, really, really want?

CLIENT: I want more balance in my life, and more time with my husband.

COACH: Okay. Do you begin to see how all of these are interconnected?

CLIENT: (laughing) Yeah, I see.

COACH: I mean, when you’ve got a gap in a big area that you’ve kind of put in a drawer like Peter Pan’s shadow, it’s like you’ve hidden that away.

CLIENT: Right.

COACH: And what I know about shadow work, if you will, and this is not coaching right now, it’s just some pontificating, from what’s coming up in my mind … is that our shadow holds what we don’t want to look at anymore, but it also holds the part of us that hasn’t been expressed yet, that has greatness within what we unclaim. And it sounds to me like your expression is missing that. Fun enlivens your spirit, it increases the partnership you have with your husband, it increases the benefit of that, the happiness of that, the connection. CLIENT: Yeah, you’re touching something-because some tears just formed in my eyes, and I took a big sigh, and leaned back in my chair … so I feel like … it’s interesting.

COACH: Yeah, well good, because those are just feelings. Tears are great.

CLIENT: Yeah, I know.

COACH: SO we’re touching something that connects heart and spirit, aren’t we?

CLIENT: Right. Exactly.

COACH: It’s amazing that sometimes we say fun is just fun. It’s anything but just fun. It’s a demand from your soul that you have some way of getting into this human being part of you instead of just the human busy and human doing part of you. This is a great example of that. Think of what we call fun. What’s the word when people play that we often use?

CLIENT: You mean recreation?

COACH: Exactly. Now look at that word in a new way.

CLIENT: Re-creation. Oh my god! (laughing) That’s great.

COACH: SO my invitation to you is to try to create a formula in your mind where fun equals re-creation, but put a hyphen between the “re” and the “creation.” Because that’s really what I sense that you’re up to.

CLIENT: (laughing) Yeah, that’s totally cool! I never would have thought of that.

COACH: Well, we went from tears to ecstasy there. That’s pretty good. (laughing) Do you feel finished enough for this conversation?

CLIENT: Oh yeah. Thank you.

COACH: SO I’m just going to end here with a coaching request that you do follow-up with the drumming group and allow yourself to be open to the newness of that. Don’t throw it away easily.

CLIENT: Right.

COACH: See what you can do to make it fun, and who you’re going to meet, what other social contacts come from that.

CLIENT: Right.

COACH: I don’t know if your husband goes with you or not. That’s up to you.

CLIENT: Yes, he does.

COACH: Okay, so there’s partnership time together, too. And then learn what else comes from that while you’re thinking, “What I’m really doing is re-creating who I am in that newfound way.”

CLIENT: That’s wonderful. Thank you.

**Our Comments on This Session**

* + A coaching conversation is a sacred space, an inspiring space. You need to **prepare the** **space: be focused, be ready to receive the client, be of service**. Whether in person or over the phone, limit the distractions. One of the advantages of phone coaching for the coach is that you can stand up. You may want to close your eyes, move around the room, trying to sense the client, the client’s world and experience. Do whatever it takes so that your coaching presence serves the client and the client’s agenda. Be available.
	+ The transcript illustrates the coach **getting the client to do the work** instead of handing answers to the client. The skill of powerful questions was used frequently. The coach’s assumption is that the client has the answers that are right for her, and it’s just the coach’s role to facilitate their emergence. The questions evoked from the client meaningful qualities and characteristics from the past, which let her map over to what she’s experiencing now. The coach encouraged her to draw on the past for clues about what’s fulfilling.
	+ The coach and client **didn’t hurry** through the session, although they did work within the time allotted for this session, which was 20 to 25 minutes. This created space for the client to get to a deep place with the issue. Silence allowed the coach to just stand shoulder to shoulder with the client, without knowing, or needing to know, where the process was leading.

* The coach **believed** 11 0 per cent that the conversation with the client would lead to a shift in thinking about some possibility, and that the results weren’t just magical because she had the answer within-they were magical because **both of them (client and coach) were having this conversation. (2-way conversation)**
* The client felt supported because the coach was “just there with her”-she felt that there was a space for her to just be, without an answer, and that felt like a very powerful space.
* Later in this chapter we focus on **asking powerful questions**, the kinds that clients don’t normally focus on. In this session, note the power of the question, “What else do you want?”
* Moving into the future shifted things toward greater wholeness something bigger than “fun” as an activity. This session became a conversation about bigger fulfilment. This is typical of **how small issues in a client’s life are microcosms of the larger issues. Coaches can use a single issue as a doorway to deeper desires or into habitual patterns of thinking and behaving**.
* This session shows the coach and client-focused around one area on the coaching tool, the Wheel of Life, **“Design Your Life.”** The coach’s absolute conviction that people have a right to incorporate fun in their everyday life is a personal assumption he makes, and it illustrates the importance of examining the assumptions coaches bring to their coaching (e.g., Is fun just something for vacations? Does it have to be a big activity? How about 1-minute fun breaks during the day?)
* The coach’s implicit assumption is that people know on some level what’s true for them and what brings them joy**. Creating space for clients to get in touch with it and articulate it opens the door to inner wisdom**, and ultimately, the surfacing of inner solutions and possibilities.
* The coach’s questions lead the client to examining all the needs previously met by playing cricket. It was more than just physical activity for her, which led her to thoughtfully consider the issue she brought to coaching in such a way that she would come away with a rich alternative for cricket, one that met needs and desires she had that weren’t immediately obvious to her. This is one reason why clients can often maintain the shifts they make because the obvious answers aren’t the ones they come away with from coaching.
* Coaching often draws on models of various **possibilities**, as this session shows. If the client says, “I don’t know anyone like that,” the coach and client can create a research project to find people who might be models. This is a creative way of dealing with a client who has no experience of something.
* The session illustrates the importance of the coach respecting and validating the emotions that arise in the process of exploring an issue. Remember that clients bring to coaching conversations the issues they feel strongly about, and there’s likely to be an emotional current to the issues. The coach must allow space for that and convey respect for the information communicated by the emotions-from client to coach, and more important, from the client’s soul to the client’s conscious self. When the coach says, “And sport isn’t the only kind of fun. It just seems right now that that’s the fun you lost,” the statement validates the client’s emotions while still holding out possibilities. The coach’s reflection acknowledges the importance of sport at the same time as it opens up other sources for fun. It expands the client’s possibilities instead of probing the depth of the loss.
* **Pointing out to the client the shift in voice, energy, and body helps the client become more aware of what enhances her aliveness, and grounds insights and breakthroughs in the body**. This session was a phone coaching session; the coach does not have to be physically present with the client to focus attention on the body.
* The coaching in this case was effective because the coach did not put himself in the role of expert. The illustration of the recumbent bike and having knee problems let the client know that she was not isolated in her need to make decisions based on physical limitations. It normalised the client’s experience, which could help the client feel less isolated and more hopeful.
* The coach asked the client, “What do you really, really, really want?” People who are overachievers and overdoers often lose sight of this question and forget to ask themselves this. It breaks through a lot of shoulds and helps people reconnect with their centre, the place from which great wisdom often emerges.
* The conversation about the shadow being in part about the unclaimed parts of ourselves was very powerful and non-pathologizing and a different way to look at the shadow, which contains unrealised creative aspects of ourselves as well as the hidden and sometimes less acceptable aspects.
* The word re-creation serves as a kind of touchstone for the whole session. (The client’s goal was recreation, and the coach realised that this was about re-creation.) When the client gets a concise takeaway-a symbol, thought, or phrase-this helps to ground a session and the learning that took place. The client also gets an action step so she is clear about what’s next to support follow-through.

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