



The Listener

A journal for coaches

Sharing knowledge and developing practice in the coaching community

New Series #1 May 2012

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Welcome to the first edition in the new series of The Listener.

As spring blossoms and twitters around us, albeit in a somewhat rain washed fashion, it seems fitting to go forth once again into the world. The changing season and the vicissitudes of the last twelve months have set me thinking about continuity and change: more specifically, which aspects of the old series to carry forward; and what might be new. I've always sought in The Listener to leave each of its contributing authors' voices sounding its own clear music. And one of the things readers have welcomed is the bringing together of a rich variety of themes. Having grown from a slender epistle to members of a particular community, into something more substantial for a larger one, this breadth of interest and personal perspective will I know remain important characteristics in the future.

In this edition, for example, we get a glimpse of Hawaii with Jane Lewis in her introduction to the practice of Huna; learn from Terri McNerney about servant-leadership and what this might mean for our clients and indeed for us as coaches, as we express our leadership in the coaching we do; find out what it means to take an existential perspective on coaching with Angela Jopling; and sample the flavour of Clean Language in one of my own supervision sessions. And we open with an invitation from Erik de Haan and Andy Copeland to participate in an ambitious and important research project, as they attempt to pin down a little more closely what makes coaching work.

Regarding what's new: just as in one of those conversations we embark on as coaches, very curious and not really able to anticipate what the right direction will turn out to be, I know we will emerge somewhere different and quite possibly unexpected and even fascinating. I've read in in more than one place that goals are motivating. Sometimes you just have to wonder.....

If you would like to respond to any of the articles in this edition or if you have a suggestion for an article of your own, do please contact me at kensmithcoaching@btinternet.com

*Ken Smith
May 2012*



The Greatest Coaching Outcome Research Ever

2

Andy Copeland & Erik de Haan

As our children teach us, often the most valuable questions in life are both very easy to ask and amazingly hard to answer. “Why did I do that?”, “What did I mean by that?” or “What am I achieving here?” are some examples. In executive coaching, examples of these obvious and essential questions which are, at the same time, profoundly difficult to answer, are:

- Does our coaching work? Does it help clients with their critical objectives?
- What aspects of coaching work? What are the ‘active ingredients’? Under what circumstances do they work best?
- What intervention would work best here and now, with this client at this moment?

Thousands of coaches have asked these questions and all of us are curious about effectiveness or outcome. The questions occur frequently in the coaching literature; however it is rare to encounter serious attempts at answering them with anything more than a coach’s opinion or a few carefully selected case studies. We estimate that there are probably fewer than 20 robust quantitative outcome studies throughout the coaching literature and none that satisfy the ‘double-blind randomized control trial’ standard of medicine and psychotherapy.

One reason for this is the costly and cumbersome requirements of a rigorous outcome study. Another is that rather than studying, with detachment, their own effectiveness, a coach’s priority is usually to satisfy their clients and meet their coaching commitments. However, if we do not address these questions we may find it difficult to justify our fees; difficult to assert unequivocally that coaching conversations are indeed beneficial and difficult to avoid the potential risks of executive coaching, such as misjudging the situation, aggravating the status quo or abusing our influence (Berglas, 2002).

We define executive coaching as a form of leadership development that takes place through a series of contracted one-to-one conversations with a qualified ‘coach’. Executive coaching aspires to be a form of organisation and leadership development that results in a high occurrence of relevant, actionable and timely outcomes for clients. Coaching is tailored to individuals so that they learn and develop through a reflective conversation within an exclusive relationship that is trusting, safe and supportive.

Not only are assignments mostly tailored around the needs of the individual client or ‘coachee’, assignments are also frequently individually commissioned by an organization or as part of a leadership-development or organizational-change programme. Contrary to other helping professions such as counselling and psychotherapy, executive coaching is commissioned and paid for by a wide range of individual contractors, sometimes at board

level, sometimes from within the HR function, and oftentimes also more locally within large corporate organizations.

These features of the industry have clear repercussions for research. Whilst in psychotherapy most of the services are centrally commissioned by very large health insurance companies or national health services, this is entirely different in executive coaching. As executive coaches we are finding ourselves in a situation where there is very little pressure on rigorous outcome research and a dearth of funding for this type of research.

At the same time we know from psychotherapy outcome research (see the historical overview in Wampold, 2001) that we are likely to need very high sample size, possibly well above 10,000, and a rigorous design with randomized control trials, to demonstrate beyond doubt that executive coaching is effective – with even greater statistical power needed to differentially explore active ingredients in effectiveness. For the same reasons as outlined – no pressure from customers and no funding for research – there are as yet no rigorous randomized-control-trial studies available in the coaching literature.

In other words, presently *all* coaching outcome studies are weak by the standards of psychotherapy and general medicine and there are good, understandable reasons for this state of affairs. This is a young profession and there is simply no funding for major research programmes. Moreover, there is no likelihood of funding by large and centrally coordinated bodies in the foreseeable future.

We believe that the way to tackle this situation is through an ‘open source’ approach, inviting experienced coaches with an interest in doing solid research to join forces and gather high-volume data collectively. A collaborative research project between Ashridge Business School (Ashridge Centre for Coaching), VU University Amsterdam (Department of Management and Organisation) and The University of Sydney (Coaching Psychology Unit) aspires to address the dearth in reliable data in precisely this way. The aspiration is to obtain the largest sample of coaching relationships in the coaching literature: many hundreds of completed online questionnaires from coaches and clients and also from their organisational sponsors (whether line manager, director, HR or even a peer sponsor as one might see in professional services).

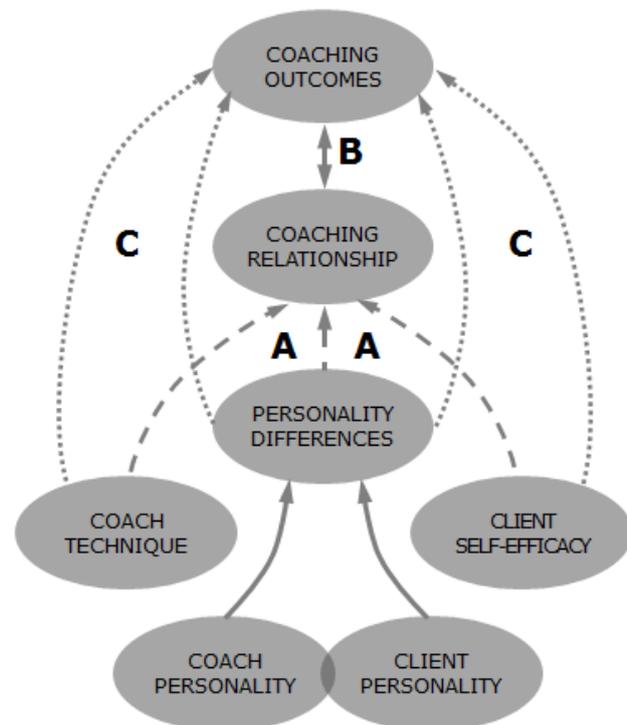
Building on two previously published peer-reviewed research papers (De Haan *et al.*, 2011 and 2012), this new coaching outcome research goes further than ever before. Using an innovative methodology, all key stakeholders in the coaching journey (coaches, coaching clients and coaching sponsors) are engaged by completing short and independently verified online questionnaires. The data from these questionnaires will hopefully provide new insights into the coaching relationship as viewed from three different perspectives.

At the moment, only four months after starting data collection and eight months before closing the ‘open source’, we have a good 850 completed questionnaires from coaching clients, plus more than 400 from their coaches (with some confidence that these will grow to a similar number), and 40 from the organisational sponsors, who are very busy people one has to imagine. This means that the research project is well under way to becoming the

largest ever quantitative coaching outcome study: the largest study to date (Smither *et al.*, 2003) involved 1,202 senior managers in a single large organisation, but not all of these were coached as some made up the control group.

The process for participation is as follows. First the coach invites his or her clients to participate in the research. As there is already an existing relationship, this approach is effective in attaining a high response rate from clients of coaching. Once the coaching client has completed the client questionnaire, this triggers an invitation to the coach and coaching sponsor to complete their own questionnaires.

The questionnaires themselves are not designed to demonstrate effectiveness – as this cannot be done convincingly without a proper control group. Instead, the questionnaires look into factors that may contribute to effectiveness, such as personality differences between coach and client, the client's self-efficacy, initial expectations and the quality of the relationship as experienced by the various parties. Inspired by the very convincing demonstrations of effectiveness in psychotherapy (see, e.g., Wampold, 2001) and some early indications in coaching research as well, we decided to *assume* that coaching is an effective intervention. Along with other researchers in the field, we are now looking into what exactly the 'active ingredients' are, in other words, what are the factors that might make executive coaching more effective?



By engaging with the highest number of coaches, clients and sponsors ever, this new coaching outcome research hopes to break new ground in the coaching profession. If you are interested in becoming a part of this exciting research, please visit the Ashridge Centre for Coaching website (<http://www.ashridge.org.uk/centreforcoaching>) for details on how to participate. The only action that it takes is for you to ask your clients to complete the client questionnaire (www.ashridge.org.uk/client) which will only take them 10 minutes.

As we honestly believe that larger-scale quantitative outcome research will be essential to establish this burgeoning field and to find answers to our fondest questions, we also offer several rewards for participation: feedback on your average effectiveness scores as seen by your clients, a coaching book after 20 completed questionnaires and even co-authorship of the peer-reviewed article that will come out of this research.

So please if you have read this far, have a look at <http://www.ashridge.org.uk/centreforcoaching> and help us to truly make this the greatest

coaching outcome research ever. As you become part of this effort, you will get the statistical results as soon as we have them, and thus be amongst the first to know what this large-scale research programme brings to light about the active ingredients in executive coaching.



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Coaching with Huna: Dealing with Resentment and Other Issues.

6

Jane Lewis

I have been a professional coach since 1998. In a parallel journey, I have been studying Hawaiian Huna – the ancient psychological, energetic, healing and spiritual practices of the Hawaiians since 1999. The more I have learned about both, the more I have been able to integrate the two, although I am sometimes careful about how I describe what I am doing when working in an executive setting!

Huna is a modern description of ancient practices. It means ‘secret, hidden, esoteric’. It was coined by an American called Max Freedom Long, who lived in Hawaii in the early part of the 20th century, and became fascinated by the powerful practices of the ‘kahunas’, such as walking barefoot on molten lava, and in their world-view. With the arrival of the missionaries in the 19th century, many of the old Hawaiian ways had been banned as being anti-Christian, or worse, and many of the teachers went underground – they went ‘huna’, as you might say. This wasn’t simply because their practices were now illegal: it was also to preserve the teachings for future generations.

Nowadays, the ancient practices are legal, and as they emerge back into the light it is clear that they have much in common with spiritual and esoteric practices the world over. A friend of mine, who is Native American, spent a lot of time with her Grandfather while growing up. He taught her about the land, the nature of the universe and our connection with it, the importance of the elements and much else from the Native American tradition. When she arrived at her first Huna training, she spent the first four days grumbling, because it was all the same as she had learned from her Grandfather. The fifth day, she woke up with a blinding flash of realisation: ‘O my God, it’s all the SAME. How amazing!’

In my own study of Huna for my PhD, I found much commonality between the principles of Huna, and those of esoteric Christianity, Daoism, the Hindu Vedas, Qabbalah, Aboriginal traditions and Native American teachings, to name but a few.

So if Huna shares so much with other teachings about human consciousness, what makes it especially relevant for coaching?

For me, there are 3 factors. The first is that there are still people alive today who learned Huna in the old way. Although the teachings have been hidden, they have not died out, and they have been passed on from teacher to student in unbroken lines since 1200 AD, or even earlier. There are probably as many versions of Huna as there are Hawaiian families in the islands. The version or ‘lineage’ I have studied goes back at least 27 generations, and the names of many of the key teachers are still remembered.

The second reason is that Huna is incredibly practical. You can approach it from many different levels. If spirituality is not your thing, you can still get a great deal out of Huna, as I

did when I first started. And if you are on a spiritual path, then Huna has much to teach about how to progress along that path.

If you have come across the work of Joe Vitale (one of the stars of ‘The Secret’), you have probably heard about or read his book, ‘Zero Limits’. It is based on the application of an old Hawaiian practice called ‘Ho’oponopono’. Ho’oponopono literally means ‘to make really right’, and because of the way the technique is used it is often translated as ‘forgiveness’ or ‘to forgive’. Consequently the Ho’oponopono process is often described as ‘the Hawaiian forgiveness process’.

Many teachings talk about the importance of forgiveness, and there is a whole school of modern psychology dedicated to investigating how unforgiveness – the act or state of not forgiving someone – can have profoundly negative consequences for mental and physical health. Intuitively, most of us know this already. What we don’t necessarily know is **how** to forgive: how to let go of feelings of resentment or even a desire for revenge. Ho’oponopono teaches you how to do this.

Another technique, the Keawe process is a quick process for resolving dilemmas, both large and small. Like Ho’oponopono, it is a practical and powerful tool for dissolving blocks, overcoming obstacles and finding resolution and relief.

The third factor is speed. Huna is fast. I have studied NLP to an advanced level, but NLP is slow in comparison to Huna, and while NLP has perspectives which are useful for dealing with resentment, it doesn’t really offer a forgiveness technique as such.

When coaching Civil Servants at all levels I have used both Ho’oponopono and the Keawe process, as well as numerous other Huna approaches – with permission. I am careful to explain what they are about and where they come from. If the client doesn’t want to work in this way, I use other tools from my kitbag, but most people like the idea of getting things done quickly. Many of them also appreciate the fact that, with explanation and a little practice, they can take these techniques away and use them for themselves. That’s empowerment.

Jane Lewis is a qualified coach, and a student and teacher of Hawaiian Huna. As part of her PhD she developed a leadership model based on Huna principles. Jane runs weekend trainings on Huna in UK which are open to all. For further information, please visit her website: <http://www.alohacoaching.com>



Further reading

James M.B. (2010) *The Foundation of Huna – Ancient Wisdom for Modern Times*

James T. (1997) *Lost Secrets of Ancient Hawaiian Huna, Vol 1*

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A Clean Corner of Coaching Supervision

8

Ken Smith

How can I bring out and work with my client's agenda and keep out of the way? An answer in my coaching practice has been to use Clean Language, a way of asking questions that treats the client's answers as the only ones you will ever need and puts aside your own and always speculative ones. Now that I work as a supervisor, I have been discovering the place Clean Language can have in supervision too.

Clean Language provides a set of simple questions. Though they are simple, they do require a degree of artistry in choosing how to use them. Essentially their purpose is to enable the client to build a model of their experience and of what they want to be different, frequently in terms of the metaphors which emerge in the course of answering the questions.

I find Clean Language very productive in working with supervisees whose confidence has taken a dip. It is of course possible to generalise about where this dip comes from; to assume the coach has an "I'm not good enough" pattern running or is falling into the trap of wanting to help too much. Using Clean Language in supervision can aid the supervisor in guarding against making such assumptions.

I recently had a supervision conversation with a coach, J, who said she was feeling stuck with a couple of clients. After quite an extensive period as an internal coach, she started her own freelance coaching practice. Here are some extracts from our conversation.

After the opening pleasantries, I asked J what she wanted to gain from our conversation today.

J: I want reassurance. I feel powerful with unconfident people but not with higher level people.

K: And reassurance. What kind of reassurance is that?

J: I've got to get better at getting to the core.

K: And got to get better at getting to the core. Is there anything else about got to get better at getting to the core?

J: I need to get it right. I know this is all my stuff.

K: And when you need to get it right and this is all my stuff, and you've got to get better at getting to the core, where can that "got to" come from?

As there were now two imperatives operating (“need to”, “got to”) I chose to direct J’s attention towards modelling this aspect of her experience. The effect of my question was to generate a more reflective state from which eventually two metaphors emerged.

J: It’s funny but my anxiety’s come from my own success. I got the client that I’m finding most difficult as a result of really good feedback from someone else. (Pause) It’s like a wall.

K: And a wall. Is there anything else about a wall?

J: Yeah, it’s breaking through a boundary in my coach development. So I can forget this thing I have about authority. (Pause) Yeah, I know, (smiling) it’s a cloak of insecurity.

J clearly enjoyed the emergence of this metaphor. I decided to continue working at the level of her previously stated imperatives, rather than elicit very directly the qualities of the “cloak of insecurity”. Also, in Clean Language it can be very productive to treat a client’s metaphor as an independent part of the client; as a separate perceiver.

K: A cloak of insecurity. And a wall. And you’ve got to get better at getting to the core. And when there’s a cloak of insecurity, what does that cloak of insecurity want to have happen?

J: Well it wants not to be needed. Mmmm ... ? I need to sit back (sitting back). I’m in this cloak of insecurity and taking total responsibility, so I feel I need to get it right. Yeah, I need to sit back. I want to sit back.

K: And taking total responsibility. And you want to sit back. And when you sit back, then what happens?

J: The wall’s not really there, well at least I can get through it. And I don’t take total responsibility. And the cloak ... (J. indicates through her posture that the cloak falls away or is much lighter. This was my inference, which I didn’t explore, deciding to let J enjoy whatever was happening in the evolution of her metaphors).

You will notice that my questions are very simple, are frequently prefaced by and incorporate J’s own words. This sets up repeated feedback loops, from which new information can emerge out of J’s own system rather than from my interpretations.

Having spent the first part of the supervision working broadly with “reassurance”, and sensing that J had experienced something new there, I now felt we could move usefully into looking at more client-specific territory. This was prompted by J’s repeated reference to responsibility, signalling an issue around coach-client contracting. It is also undoubtedly connected to one of the values underpinning my supervision practice regarding the achievement of a practical action-oriented outcome with supervisees. The emphasis in Clean Language on staying with and utilising with precision the client’s information, however, helps me to hold this value more lightly and gives the balance of reflection and action a chance to settle ecologically.

I opened the next part of the session with a deliberately ambiguous question, without referring to any specific element of J's experience.

K: And given all this, is this the same or different with all clients?

J: Not really. There's one client (J goes on to describe her perceptions of the client.....) He is very fast. He has trouble being present for our meetings, his mind's often on what's next.

K: Sorry he has trouble being present.

Just ahead of hearing J's comment about her client not being present for her, I had found my attention, by coincidence, drifting away from J towards thoughts of my next appointment. Whether this momentary replication of the coach-client dynamic between J and me was significant in any way could only be guessed at. I wondered whether feeding this back to J, in as Clean a way as I could muster, might bring something to light. I felt the rapport we had made this feasible.

K: Do you know I just had trouble being present then. I was thinking about what I'm doing next. (Pause – considering what Clean Language question might work here.) And what just happened?

J: Really. I don't know. You were thinking of something else? Maybe it's my voice, maybe it can be a bit hypnotic?

This led to a short, light hearted excursion into the effect of the sound of her voice. This had relevance to her experience of being with the client and also invited her to pay attention to a possible connection between her voice and her own presence.

We next continued our conversation:

K: And when he has trouble being present, what do you want to have happen in this coaching relationship?

J: He just will not set a goal.

K: A goal?

J: Well, he's not long been promoted and needs to up his game.

K: And he needs to up his game and you need to get better at getting at the core? Is there anything else about that?

I had a strong impression during this part of the conversation that when J was with her client there was a lot of effort in the room between them. I fed this back, through using J's own words, without interpreting or labelling this as a parallel process between her and the client. This allowed J's awareness to heighten of how she had been taking responsibility for the client in a way that had been leaving her feeling un-resourceful. It deepened her

learning about “sitting back” and revealed that during her next session with the client, the fourth, part of that sitting back could be to offer a challenge to the client about his reluctance to set a specific goal for upping his game.

K: And reassurance and I need to get it right and given everything we have talked about today, what do you want to have happen for the next session with this client?

J: I’m going to sit back, stop taking responsibility, re-negotiate the coaching contract. It’s going to be lighter and brighter. That’s how I want my coaching to be, lighter and brighter.

By the end of the session, we had worked with J’s desire for “reassurance”, from which “sitting back” had emerged as a metaphor for a more resourceful way of coaching; found a Clean-ish way of using our shared experience of a part of the session; which had led to an awareness of her voice; and examined her experience of being with the client, and the currently effortful nature of the coaching relationship, from which she identified an action of holding the client to account for his not setting goals.

None of my supervision sessions use Clean Language throughout. There would seem to be things which supervision does which are not easily or most productively delivered by a strict adherence to Clean Language methodology. Clean Language, however, does feature prominently in my sessions, as by its nature it closely supports a central aim of supervision, to develop the capacity for reflective practice in the coach.

Further reading

Clean Language was created by David Grove. The following books are based on his work:

Sullivan W. & Rees J. (2008) *Clean Language: Revealing Metaphors and Opening Minds*

Lawley J. & Tompkins P. (2000) *Metaphors in Mind*

There is also a wealth of material on Clean Language and Symbolic Modelling to be found at <mailto:www.cleanlanguage.co.uk>



Servant-Leadership - Leadership for Our Times

12

Terry McNerney

Servant-Leadership, simply put, is about serving your people as well as leading them.

The term has its origins in Robert Greenleaf's essay entitled 'The Servant as Leader'. He was inspired by Herman Hesse's book, 'A Journey to the East'; a story of a band of travellers going into new territory and being supported by their servant Leo. Leo provided them with all the resources they needed along the way: food, entertainment, technical and emotional support. Many years later, one of the travellers continues on his own journey and finds a community that really impresses him. He asks to meet their leader and is amazed to discover that it is Leo, the servant from before.

This story prompted Greenleaf to write about a servant-leader, someone who is both 'of service' and a 'leader' at the same time:

"Becoming a servant-leader begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first... The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served."

Discovering your purpose beyond profit.

James Autry, one of the writers who have built on Greenleaf's ideas, suggests three questions that every leader should ask themselves first, before they ask them of others:

- What is my purpose in being here, in this world, in this life, in this profession, in this job? Why am I here?
- What must I **do** in order to fulfill my purpose?
- How am I to **be**, how am I to behave, how am I to manifest my values towards others within my life as I go about accomplishing my mission in order to fulfill my purpose?

Once you have answered these three questions, you can see a place where an opportunity exists to do something you really believe in, where a combination of your talents and passions can make a positive difference. Then you can choose to lead from this place, leading in service of something greater than self, being a servant-leader.

Current Times

A Servant-Leader fits very well with the findings of the recent Ashridge report 'Leadership in a Rapidly Changing World', in which some forward looking business leaders have begun to

redefine what success means for them, in relation to the impact of their core businesses on some of the world's most pressing societal challenges.

As Peter Senge says, in his Introduction to 'Synchronicity' by Joseph Jaworski:

"The potential of hierarchy to corrupt would be dissolved, according to Greenleaf, if leaders chose to serve those they led: if they saw their job, their fundamental reason for being, as true service. For this idea we owe Greenleaf a great debt. His insights go a long way to explain the 'leaderlessness' of most contemporary institutions, guided as they are by people who have risen to positions of authority because of technical skills, political savvy, or desire for wealth and power."

Five Ways of Being a Servant-Leader.

Being a Servant-Leader is as important as what you **do**. James Autry gives an excellent description of what this means:

be authentic.

Be who you are, the real you and hold to your values in whatever situation you find yourself. This can be challenging in the workplace where so often we are encouraged to not say what we're really thinking or feeling, where we may learn to cover our backs with memos and fudge the budgets. It's about being transparent in what you say and do. 'Being authentic is, first, knowing yourself, then being yourself.' And if you're truly authentic, you'll also ...

be vulnerable.

Being vulnerable means being honest with your feelings in the context of your work, being open about your concerns, about an idea, an employee's performance, or your own performance, and being OK with making mistakes. This can take a great deal of courage, particularly in some cultures where it is not the accepted way. It means letting go of the old notions of control, and realising that power comes from accepting that we can't be in control and that we must depend on others. Vulnerability has an aspect of empathy as well, the ability to put yourself in the other's shoes, to view the world or the situation from the others viewpoint. So ...

be accepting.

Acceptance is more important than approval. The art of acceptance does not imply that you accept everyone's ideas without critical analysis, discussion, and judgment - only that you accept the ideas as valid for discussion and review, and that you focus on the ideas themselves, not on the person who presented them. It also means that you accept and embrace disagreement as a human part of the process of work. Being accepting is possible only if you can ...

be present.

Being present is about being here and now and also about having your whole self available at all times, available to yourself as you try to bring all your values to bear on the work at hand, and available to others as you respond to the problems and issues and challenges of team members, colleagues, managers, employees, vendors and customers. When people see you remaining centred and grounded in the midst of whatever crisis is at hand, they will be more assured and confident in their own actions.

Now if you are authentic, vulnerable, accepting and present, then the final piece is to be useful ...

be useful

Being useful is the fundamental concept of being of service to others. From this perspective, Autry offers six things he believes about leadership:

1. Leadership is not about controlling people; it's about caring for people and being a useful resource for people.
2. Leadership is not about being the boss; it's about being present for people and building a community at work.
3. Leadership is not about holding on to territory; it's about letting go of ego, bringing your spirit to work, being your best and most authentic self.
4. Leadership is less concerned with pep talks and more concerned with creating a place which people can do good work, can find meaning in their work, and can bring their spirits to work. Leadership, like life, is largely a matter of paying attention.
5. Leadership requires love.

True power comes from the people. It comes from gaining the trust and support of the people who then give you power. Power is like love, the more you try to give it to others, the more it just seems to flow to you naturally.

Do Your People Grow?

In looking more at how best to lead in a way that serves, Robert Greenleaf suggested a best test:

"The best test, and the most difficult to administer, is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?"

In his new book, *Great Leaders GROW*, Ken Blanchard says:

'If you grow your capacity to lead, opportunities to lead will follow.' The more you grow as a leader, the more you can support your people's growth and

development and ultimately the growth of the organisation, so creating a virtuous circle of growth.

“I’d say the two primary reasons leaders get off track are ego and fear. For many leaders, ego is fueled by a heightened sense of confidence – you might call it over-confidence or pride. This, combined with the fear of losing control, often prevents leaders from serving people”

Great leaders want to grow and continually do so. They realise that the more self-aware they are about themselves as leaders, the less they are likely to project their 'stuff' onto their people and the more available they are to serve others.

This is where coaching can be such a valuable resource: supporting leaders in clarifying their purpose, mission and vision, and how to ‘be’ a self-aware leader, so they can lead and serve others, to be the best they can be. Anyone can be a servant-leader, no matter what their position, so long as they are able to influence and impact others.

As coaches, we too need to continually grow, to be at our learning edge, to be self-aware, so that we can be fully available for our coachees. We too need to ask ourselves James Autry’s three questions. When we know what we value, what our purpose is and the passion behind it, we can serve our clients at our best.

Conclusion

Many writers on leadership have been influenced by Robert Greenleaf. To conclude, here is a quotation from Margaret Wheatley:

“The only way to lead when you don’t have control is you lead through the power of your relationships. You can deal with the unknown only if you have enormous levels of trust, and if you’re working together and bringing out the best in people. I don’t know of any other model that can truly work in the world right now except servant-leadership.”

Terri McNerney specialises in coaching, consulting and leadership development. She has been on the UK Board for Servant-Leadership for over 10 years. Terri can be contacted at terri@inspirethebest.com or www.inspirethebest.com. For more information on Servant-Leadership in the UK go to www.greenleaf.org.uk



Further reading

Autry, J (2004) *The Servant Leader*

Wackrill J., Baxter G., Gitsham M. & Pegg M. (2012) *Leadership in a Rapidly Changing World* (Ashridge Research Report)

Wheatley M (2002) *The Servant-Leader: From Hero to Host* at <http://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/herotohost.html>



Coaching Leaders from an Existential Perspective

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Angela Jopling

Coaching leaders is a privileged opportunity to positively change the lives of many. In organisations, leaders are so important, so influential, that the people in them are constantly watchful of how the leader is acting, what they are saying, how they might be feeling.

What is often forgotten is that leaders are human beings who, like all of us, have been ‘thrown’ into the world. Often the journey to leadership has been so all consuming that the human being underneath has been subsumed by the focus on the next big achievement, the heavy expectations of others that they will stay on the leadership track. Only if she’s lucky, at some point the leader will create or have created for her an opportunity to pause, reflect, gather insight into who she really is and what’s really important to her; a chance to answer such questions as:

What am I doing this for?

- What am I bringing to this role, my team, this organisation?
- Do I want to do this anymore and if so, then how do I do it in a way that means something to me?
- What am I here for if not to lead?
- What kind of leader do I want to be and what kind of meaning does that hold for me?

Existential coaching is well placed to help leaders find honest answers to these questions and to respond to what the answer tells them.

Existential concerns in Leadership

Authenticity

Stemming from an individual’s experience of a lack of congruence in organisational life, questions of authenticity will often arise. Sartre believed that authenticity was just a momentary state and that we are constantly in and out of authentic being. Supporting leaders to notice when they step in and out and when they choose to go with and go against the herd is a key part of developing a deeper self-awareness.

Often I get a sense of my client’s denying the experience of human existence i.e. that it is a struggle filled with anxiety, guilt, dread. Modern technology has made it even easier to stay busy and avoid having to sit with oneself and allow those anxious feelings to surface. If leaders are allowed to experience some acceptance of these difficult feelings and emotions, they are more likely journeying towards greater authenticity. As existential coaches we can

support leaders to better notice and observe themselves in these feelings and emotions and to be aware of the conscious choice they make toward or away from authenticity.

Meaning and purpose

In the current climate, leaders who are suffering from stress, high workloads and limited resources are more likely to ask themselves about the meaning their work holds for them. In working with leaders we can help them identify the meaning in each task, activity, each conversation at work. And yet meaning is both momentary and indefinite. It constantly changes, as we change in the context of the world around us. Helping leaders to understand and manage the tension of this movement in meaning and yet define their own clarity around some overarching meaning and purpose is a key practice of leadership coaching. As coaches we need to be constantly aware of when questions of meaning pop into our coaching dialogue and help our clients explore and position these in the context of their wider knowledge of self.

Anxiety

Anxiety and meaning are closely entwined. As we attempt to fix or capture meaning, our experience of the uncertainty of the meanings we create, themselves ever changing, is one of insecurity. Meaning is changed every moment by those around us and in trying to fix meaning we create “existential anxiety”. In experiencing the discomfort of this anxiety, we will deny it or do things to reduce or remove it. Coaching can help leaders stay with and even embrace this anxiety and help put them in touch with their creativity and aliveness, encouraging them to stay alert to possibilities and insight which will enhance how they inspire others, manage relationships and make decisions.

Organisational Absurdity and Meaninglessness

Often with my clients we reach a point when nothing in their organisations makes any sense, where confusion reigns, when the simple solution never matches the prevailing complexity. The leader then must come to terms with the idea that organisations are absurd. This absurdity can be perceived in inconsistent decision-making, ruthless self-serving behaviour, the fickleness of consumers or the need to micro-manage. Sometimes leaders are the ones sustaining the absurdity; mostly they are the ones trying to make sense of it.

A delicate balance needs to be struck here to hold meaning and meaninglessness at once in our mind and our heart. Existential coaching can help leaders appreciate this tension and hold it within their grasp without fear of being overwhelmed by it.

Uncertainty

Uncertainty is a given (certainty) of existence. Leaders look to eradicate uncertainty because it is unpleasant both as an experience and as an outcome. In coaching, we can encourage our clients to stay with and explore their felt sense of uncertainty. Existential coaching firstly concerns itself with staying with what is there, what has been; working with

the client's presently lived experience and understanding their worldview. We can help them to develop an appetite for holding onto the duality of both certainty and uncertainty; and help them practice staying alert to and mindful of the possibilities that uncertainty might create e.g. venturing into new businesses, engaging with employees differently, inviting collaboration.

Conflict

We experience conflicts both internally and externally. Internally we are in conflict between our values and how we live up to them. At the same time we are in conflict with external others, i.e. partners, friends, colleagues. I have found that coaches are generally more willing and comfortable to work with the client's internal conflict and the client's other external relationships, than with the external relationship between themselves and client. When coaches chose to bring attention to the relationship with their client in the present moment, it can often create a positive shift in the client's degree of trust and willingness to look at their own self.

The practice of existential coaching

Relationship

The practice of existential coaching is primarily about the exploration of the here and now relationship between the coach and client. This provides a microcosm of the experience that the client may be having in the world outside of the coaching relationship. If brave enough, the coach and leader will agree to share their experience of one another in the here and now. The existential coach needs to be courageous in drawing attention to and staying with this openness and to support the leader in finding ways to express their experience of being-with their coach.

Space

Whilst the coaching relationship is significant, what is also significant (and may, with some clients, be critical) is the 'dwelling place' or 'space' that is created for you both to work in. It is a learning space which calls upon the coach's capacity for openness, reflection, wondering and for allowing uncertainties to play out without searching too soon for explanations. In the existential approach to coaching we explore the client's experience of their own world with a genuine interest. This requires a certain kind of space, with less emphasis on time limitations and less focus on outcomes, a space in which we slow down and can both bring more of ourselves.

Co-creation

By co-creation in existential coaching, I am talking about the transformational experience that is brought about by two people sitting together authentically in an exploratory dialogue with complete positive regard for the other. This can be experienced as being 'in flow', when your talents are being fully deployed and your self is minimised. Often in minimising our 'I' and facilitating the client to do the same, we are able to move experience from

‘subjective’ to ‘objective’. In coaching, we encourage our clients to master the art of moving the subjective to the objective, in order for them paradoxically to be able to have a fuller understanding of their behaviour, thoughts, and relationships in a way that can be transformative.

Phenomenological inquiry

At the heart of the existential approach is phenomenology. This way of staying in tune with the client’s experience can be summarised in three steps:

1. Epoche (Bracketing) – encouraging the coach to set aside all biases, prejudices and assumptions about the client’s world and focus only on what presents itself and the discovery of that;
2. Description – rather than the coach explaining, suggesting, deciding about the client’s dilemma, description is about staying with what the client brings and not leaping ahead or leaping in for the client. The coach then explores as fully as possible ‘the what and how’ of the client’s experience rather than the ‘why’; and
3. Horizontalisation – the coach must avoid placing any subjective hierarchy on the issues and material that the client brings and instead treat everything equally. The coach themselves does not know which of their issues is causing the client most or least difficulty and in fact the client may not be aware until exploring it in this way with their coach.

Once this process is gone through the coach may then use any preferred way of supporting the client to evolve their understanding and develop more awareness of self and others.

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Further reading

- Cooper M. (2003) *Existential Therapies*
 Frankl V. (2004) *Man’s search for meaning*
 Lee G. (2003) *Leadership Coaching*
 Spinelli E & Horner, C. An Existential Approach to Coaching Psychology in Palmer S & Whybrow A eds.(2007) *Handbook of Coaching Psychology*
 Van Deurzen E & Hanway M. eds. (2012) *Existential Perspectives on Coaching*



Book review: Coaching & Mentoring Supervision: Theory & Practice - by Bachkirova, T, Jackson P & Clutterbuck D (2011)

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Ken Smith

The editors open their compendium with a brave introduction to the areas of debate and controversy in the world of coaching supervision: Is it necessary? Is it different in its practice and purpose to coaching; can and should coaching supervision be different to supervision in other helping practices? Their various contributors make engaging attempts to answer and elaborate upon these questions.

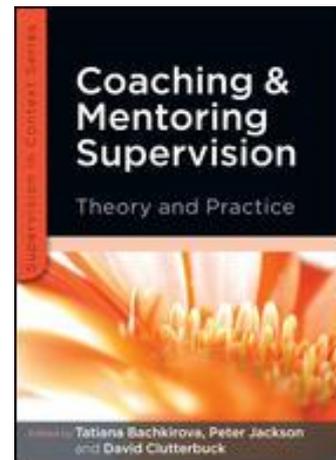
A theme which unites many of them and one which seemingly distinguishes supervision of coaches is the importance attached to systems-thinking and the need to attend to those parts of the system outside the room. Inevitably and rightly, recognition is given to Hawkins and Shohets' seven-eyed model, which receives its own chapter. One of the pleasures of the book is reading the different variations played by others on the systems theme. Mike Munro Turner's 3-worlds model, though having its own complexity, seems certainly at first glance to be an easier model to carry around, while the three interconnected fields described by Sue Congram in her excellent chapter on Gestalt offer a similarly useful though still finely nuanced compression of a systems perspective.

A second important theme is that of supervision's concern to promote reflective practice. David Gray & Peter Jacksons' overview of the history of supervision models relates how the distinguishing bias of coaching supervision is ever more weighted towards social role models of supervision and less towards developmental models, i.e. away from a master (sic) guiding an apprentice, and more towards facilitating processes of meaning making for the coach. This is clearly exemplified in David Clutterbuck's model of seven reflective questions and in Katherine Long's account of using the self in supervision. David Lane closes Part 1 of the book by sending a cat among the pigeons of the assumptions that may underlie these and other models with a chapter looking at whether supervision is a separate profession, at a time when the nature of professionalism is becoming more complex and crosses inter-disciplinary boundaries.

Of the four Parts to the book – respectively: models, psychological approaches, modes of supervision and a final short selection of case studies - Parts 1 and 2 are for me the strongest and most thought-provoking. Limitations on space inevitably constrain the choices for Part 2, for which the editors apologise. Readers may be disappointed to find that the application in supervision of, for example, cognitive-behavioural, positive psychology and symbolic modelling approaches are not covered. Carmelina Lawton-Smith, however, makes a welcome contribution on organisational psychology with her account of how her four organisational frames can be used in supervision to create alternative perspectives to the one that the coach may be unconsciously privileging. Indeed, unconscious processes are given their due space by Catherine Sandler who, while describing the importance of understanding and drawing on transference phenomena, wisely counsels caution in how to use this type of material with supervisees; something which finds an echo

in Julie Hay's chapter on Transactional Analysis and her note on the management of the therapy / supervision boundary.

Alongside what comes before, the chapters in Part 3 feel a little cursory, though this may be a consequence of its ambitious scope, encompassing supervision of consultants, group supervision, e-supervision and supervising internal coaches; for which last Alison Maxwell admirably exposes the complexities and challenges facing coaches who work embedded in their organisational system and what this may mean for their supervision. Similarly, with such a broad sweep in the first half of the book, it is perhaps unsurprising that Part 4's case studies struggle slightly to achieve their illustrative purpose, though they are still relevant and informative for all that. In her final case study of Deloitte, Christine Champion strikes a fitting note on which to conclude, when she asserts that supervision promotes the crucial ability to work holistically, which though itself begging a definition, must be at the heart of what it means when sitting with a coach to take a systemic, supervision.



And finally:

“When we are cut off from our feelings, the most banal of decisions becomes impossible. A brain that cannot feel can’t make up its mind.”

Jonah Lehrer