

What Coaching Is, What It Isn't— With Particular Reference to NLP

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‘Is not the pastness of the past the more profound, the more legendary the more immediately it falls before the present.’

Thomas Mann, The Magic Mountain

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines the verb and noun coach as a) to train or teach (a pupil, sports team etc.) as a coach b) give hints to, prime with facts. A coach of a major sports team is often though not always a practitioner of the sport. If or when a team achieves significant success, the experience (in the subject field) expertise and communication skills of the coach is cited as a major reason for this excellence. (1) Indeed there may be a team of coaches (not necessarily current or past practitioners of the subject (i.e. the sport) who work on different aspects of team performance (e.g. leadership, motivation, focus..) under the direction of the head coach. Coaching today has moved beyond the emphasis of a sports or teaching coach who facilitates or trains a team or individual to success by winning events or passing targeted exams into a mainstream sometimes high profile general activity often termed Life coaching or Corporate coaching. The International Coach Federation mission statement envisions ‘a future in which coaching will be an integral part of society.’ The UK Chartered Institute of Personal Development reported (in 2009) that over 75% of companies are now using coaching as a development approach. The expertise of the coach may not be as in the example of the successful sport or business coach that they were a former leader in their field who now coaches but the expertise *is* coaching.

The practice of coaching has expanded hugely in the 21st century, especially in western Europe and north America (2) although ‘ the concept of coaching as a profession is still

relatively novel.’ (Cox, Bachkirova, Clutterbuck 2010) (3) Lane, Stelter and Rostron (in Cox *et al*) draw a distinction between being a profession and acting professionally. There is not a recognised unitary professional body (and regulatory authority) for coaching, in comparison as an example to the BMA for medical doctors in the UK however leading national and international coaching organisations (and possibly nascent professional bodies) have given definitions of coaching:

‘Coaching is facilitating the client’s learning process by using professional methods and techniques to help the client to improve what is obstructive and nurture what is effective in order to reach the client’s goals.’

European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), Code of Conduct for Coaching [and Mentoring] June 2011. www.emccouncil.org

‘Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential’

International Coach Federation (ICF). www.coachfederation.org 2011

The EMCC recognises that ‘there will be many different types of coaching [/ mentoring] taking place and these will need to be defined when more detailed standards are produced.’ Cox et al (op cit) opine that coaching may include characteristics indistinguishable from other ‘helping professions’ possibly including counselling, mentoring and some elements of psychotherapy. However with significant variations across differing coaching modalities coaching may generally be differentiated from other ‘helping ‘ or ‘service ‘ disciplines across some of the following **factors** listed here with comments:

Pathology -the coachee is whole / OK and doesn’t need fixing

Time Line: the past - greater emphasis is on the now into the future. The work of Eckhart Tolle is noted in this field. [Tolle, E Power of Now. London, Hodder and Stoughton 2001]

Intervention-ask rather than tell

Expertise, subject knowledge- expertise is within the coachee though interventions may occur if the coach judges he/ she can offer knowledge the coachee does not have e.g. of a potentially useful methodology (such as a psychometric test www.tmsdi.com)

Boundaried time-(from beginning to end of coaching relationship) – client and coach contract a programme of sessions with SMART* outcome. If coaching is not producing significant results it may be indicated that a factor is involved such as pathology which may need to be addressed by another discipline, possibly psychotherapy.

Bracketing-(the withholding as far as possible the character of the coach); the coach intends to be non-judgemental and hold the coachee in unconditional positive regard.

Following this *tour d'horizon* of what coaching is and what it isn't we will now consider in more detail a specific coaching modality **Neuro Linguistic Programming**.

The name itself, in particular the word programming, and the apparent technical formulation of some NLP models (Meta, Milton) (4) can initially at least give this coaching modality a complex, opaque feel. We will here consider a definition and immediate applications of some of its techniques, which can in practice be simple and produce forward results quickly. (5) Consider the following example before a definition is given:

A coachee is describing to the coach their work and a possible promotion in a team. They introduce themselves saying 'it's only me' and what they do saying 'I'm useless at meetings, everything always goes wrong for me'. The coach may mirror back these speech patterns: 'why do you say "it's only me"?' 'how does saying "it's only me" make you feel / sound?'. 'Are you useless at all meetings, does everything *always* go wrong for you, how would being successful at meetings look / sound / feel like?' 'Who do you know who is effective at meetings, what do they do ..?'

Even this brief interaction could produce noticeable changes for the coachee and for those around them.

The definition of NLP is in the name:

Neuro= how the mind and body interact

Linguistic= insights into a person's thinking that can be obtained by attention to their use of language.

Programming= study of thinking and behavioural patterns or programmes (rather than programming) which people use in their daily lives.

www.nlp-now.co.uk www.professionalguildofnlp.com 2011

Dilts, Grinder, Bandler and DeLozier write in one of the founding texts (1980) of NLP:

‘NLP is the discipline whose domain is the structure of subjective experience. It makes no commitment to theory but rather has the status of a model – a set of procedures whose usefulness is to be the measure of its worth.’ (6)

In 1933 Korzybski first used one of the key expressions describing a basic tenet of NLP:

‘A map is not the territory it represents but if correct it has a similar structure to the territory which accounts for its usefulness.’ (7)

By listening to and observing the coachee the NLP coach may discover with the coachee how they may channel and process the way they anticipate and order events: Visual Auditory Kinaesthetic.+

This Encoding Specific principle is applied to improve communication or learning by building rapport, matching your communication style (I see what you mean, I hear what you are saying) to a colleague or primarily using visual or auditory channels to effectively make information ‘stick’. (8)

NLP coaching aims to maximise positive outcomes by allowing goals to be stated in positive language (what you are going towards not what you are going away from) and chunking them into measurable and achievable realistic targets permanently anchored and owned by the client.

In conclusion, we have briefly surveyed coaching in general and the NLP approach in particular.

Working from the definitions of what coaching is and isn’t we can note what coaching can achieve.

All forms of coaching and NLP in particular by working with the coachee in *congruence* can result in positive outcomes quickly especially relative to other ‘helping’ professions. These outcomes may be macro ranging from growing in a period of exponential change, (9) discovering and realising new goals (10) or the more apparently micro e.g. using NLP reframing and modelling to move a client from fear to confidence in presentations.

Coaching may be ineffective, inappropriate, counter-productive or even unethical if the coachee has not knowingly or willingly entered into the coaching relationship, there is inter-

cultural interference or if there is a pathological layer. However the capacity of a professional coach to concisely facilitate positive change in the 'now' is likely to mean coaching itself will continue to grow in the personal and corporate worlds.

References

- 1 England coach Andy Flower coaching after 'failure' www.Independent.co.uk 8.1. 2014

- 2 On some inter-cultural aspects of coaching see

Comfort, J and Franklin, P The Mindful International Manager: how to work effectively across cultures.

London: Kogan Page 2014

Hicks, MD and Peterson, D Leaders Coaching Across Borders

Minneapolis, MN: Personnel Decisions International 1999

Rosinski, P Coaching Across Cultures London: Brealey 2003

www.worldwork.biz

Stereotypically coaching may be less immediately effective in corporate and / or regional cultures because of a range of factors including-

Attitudes relating the past to the present

(nb Cottle time circles www.via-web.de/timeconcept/)

Status and hierarchy (coachee who is used to / apparently wishes to be 'told' what to do..)

Status and subject expertise (coachee who is unused to 'unknowing'..)

See for example

Trompenaars, F and Voerman, E Servant – leadership across cultures

Oxford: Infinite 2009

3 Cox, E Bachkirova, T and Clutterbuck, D The Complete Handbook of Coaching
London: Sage 2010

4 On these models see www.nlpcoach.uk.net

5 For a discussion on can NLP coaching make changes stick see

www.tony-robbins-reviews.com

Some audio-visual examples of Tony Robbins using NLP techniques in coaching
are available through:

YouTube

6 Dilts, R Grinder, J Bandler, R and DeLozier, J Neuro-linguistic programming
(vol1) The study of the structure of subjective experience
Capitola CA: Meta Publications 1980

7 Korzybski, A Science and sanity: an introduction to non-Aristotlelian systems
and general semantics Lancaster, PA: International non-Aristotelian Library 1933

8 Cox *et al op cit* p 196 ‘the empirical evidence for the NLP design of eye-
accessing cues seems very mixed.’

9 Gleick, J Faster: The acceleration of just about everything NY: Random House
1999

10 See some Life Coaching examples:

Bays, B The Journey London: Thorsons 1999 (which incorporates some NLP
techniques..)

Fortgang, LB Now What? London: Penguin 2005

Williams, N The Work We Were born to Do Dorset: Element 1999

On the application of NLP especially to coaching in languages/ ELT:

King, J Business English Trainer as Coach, Monaco: BESIG presentation 2005

Norman, S and Revell, J In Your Hands London: Saffire 1997

Abbreviations:

SMART* Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Timed

VAKOG+ Visual Auditory Kinaesthetic Olfactory Gustatory

acknowledgement

University of Oxford Department for Continuing Education 2011

York Associates International 2008