

# Seeking Ethical Maturity Through Curiosity And Continuous Learning

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As professional coaches, our role with clients is to create a safe place in which they can explore and discover what works best for them. We partner with them to create a space for them to reflect and learn. Coaches are all about learning for their clients. Does the learning stop there? I would suggest the answer is no. We also continue our learning journey that includes learning about ourselves. So frequently I hear coaches talk about how much they learn about themselves from every client they work with. What a privileged place to be, continually learning and being more of who we are. I know I learn something new about myself from every conversation I have as a coach. These opportunities help me to become more of who I am, more of who I want to be.

How do we continue to learn from every coaching interaction? Reflecting back on my last coaching conversation (and notes I have taken) helps me prepare for the next call, ensuring I stay present and totally focused on being open and non-judging. Following a call, I always take a few minutes and reflect back on the call, recalling how I did what I did, how the client responded and what I might have done differently to create even greater learning moments for the client.

Reflection occurs when we look back on what has happened in experiences we have had, situations we have been in, words we have said and ways we respond so that we can develop a greater understanding of what happened, how we showed up. It is a tool that helps us learn from our experience so we can better understand how we show up and why. (Lordanou et al 2017)

I believe reflection helps me become a better coach and a better human being, one who is living my values (both personal and professional) more of the time. If we considers our values to be connected to our ethical practice (Lordanou et al 2017) then a definition of ethical maturity could be :

“the reflective, rational, emotional and intuitive capacity to decide actions are right and wrong, or good and better; the resilience and courage to implement those decisions; the willingness to be accountable for ethical decisions made (public or private); and the ability to learn from and live with the experience.” (M. Carroll and E. Shaw, pp. 30)

There are different ways a coach can support their continued learning and development of ethical maturity. Some of these include reflection and reflexivity through solo written work, coach supervision (please see ICF definition below) or in conversation with others, (Lordanou et al 2017). They describe one approach,

which could be used with any of the above approaches, as a continuum that we move along as we begin to reflect on past actions, building understanding through enhanced self awareness. As we become more self aware, we create a deeper understand of and connection to our values system so we are able to begin to challenge our assumptions, attitudes, prejudices and habits/skills. This is the place where we begin to explore shifting from reflection to a deeper place of reflexivity, which creates a deeper level of understanding where we examine what transpired and also the possible underlying factors that contributed to the perceived interaction and outcome. This exploration helps us discover new ways of being where we learn at a deeper level and develop ethical maturity.

I believe the easiest way for us to immerse ourselves in this self discovery is through the use of curiosity, a skill we all have as young children that for many of us disappears as we mature. I propose we re-introduce ourselves to curiosity and use it to further our learning as we develop a reflective practice and that through a more consistent use of curiosity we can deepen our learning and bring reflexivity into our lives so we can thrive and be our best.

Here are 7 strategies that help us bring curiosity into our lives:

1. **Be present:** Most coaches understand the concept of being present and focus on ensuring they are present in all coaching conversations. This also applies to our reflective practice where we stay in the moment with heightened awareness of what has transpired, what we want to reflect upon.
2. **Absorb:** Listen to ourselves with a mind that is focused on what we are saying, tone of voice we use, without letting our mind wander. No multi-tasking allowed!
3. **Be Open:** As thoughts come into our head, be open to them, continuing to explore what could be behind them. As we stay open to what we are thinking, we are able to begin to understand at a deeper level so we can challenge assumptions etc, creating a reflexive practice.
4. **Stay focused:** It can be challenging to stay focused on what comes up for us, instead drifting off in various directions that cause us to avoid the very thoughts that support our learning and deepen our understanding.
5. **Be Non-judging:** It is so easy to judge our thoughts and thereby judge ourselves. This does not serve us or support our learning. Creating awareness around our self talk and judging of ourselves helps us change the conversation. Become curious around this awareness helps us draw attention to our judging, blaming and shaming negative thoughts about ourselves, thereby changing the conversation to one that is more open and curious, filled with possibility and learning. Showing kindness

towards ourselves and forgiveness about things said or actions taken supports our learning and continued growth.

6. Ask open questions: Deepening our learning happens when we ask open questions, those that begin with who, what, where, when, and how. 'Why' can also be used if we are able to stay kind to ourselves and not jump to a place of judging and self criticism. When we ask open questions for which we don't have the answer, we create a place of possibility from which we can continue to learn and develop.
7. Test assumptions: We all make assumptions every day. The one thing I am sure about is 99.9% of the time, I am not correct in the assumptions I make. We need to stay curious and test anything that shows up as an assumption so we can gain clarity and accuracy.

Repeat: Yes, this can be a continuous cycle that helps us deepen our understanding and discovery of who we are. This cycle of curiosity also helps us develop the ethical maturity that will support us to thrive as coaches and human beings.

Every coach wants to be respectful of their clients and themselves. The learning created through reflection and reflexivity will help us become better coaches, ones who have ethical maturity, making better decisions in all aspects of our lives. As we grow our wisdom, we also will grow our skills as a coach and human being.

#### References:

Carroll, Michael and Shaw, Elizabeth. Ethical Maturity in the Helping Professions. Making Difficult Life and Work Decisions. Jessica Kingley Publishers, London England and Philadelphia, USA. 2013. 379pp.

eve.turner.com. July 17, 2017 as viewed Sept. 18, 2017.

Lordanou, Loanna Hawley, Rachel Lordanou, Christina. Values and Ethics in Coaching. Sage Publications, Ltd. London, England. 2017. 241pp.

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ICF defines Coaching Supervision as follows:

Coaching Supervision is the interaction that occurs when a coach periodically brings his or her coaching work experiences to a coaching supervisor in order to engage in reflective dialogue and collaborative learning for the development and benefit of the coach and his or her clients." The purpose of coach supervision is to support the coach's (the "supervisee") professional, personal and coaching practice's health and wellbeing. Indirectly it also ensures that the clients of the

supervised coach are also well supported and receive the best possible coaching experience. The coach supervision process supports the coach's reflective practice and stimulates ongoing learning and development helping to maintain and raise quality standards across the profession. It is a 'peer to peer' relationship that provides a place for continual professional development. Using the coach's own experiences with clients as one method of reflecting on skills, competencies (including the ICF Core Competencies and Code of Ethics) and behaviors and through this to supports the coach to develop their own 'internal supervisor'. Coach supervisors, although peers, are typically more experienced coaches and therefore can provide mentoring and training as part of supervision which is a way of supporting the supervisee to be continually developing themselves professionally. Coach supervision provides a place to review and uncover potential ethical issues and therefore ensure the supervisee's clients are well supported and served. It also provides a safe and confidential space for the supervisee to explore their coaching and to uncover any unconscious behaviors or biases that may get in the way of being the best you can possibly be for your client.



Kathy Taberner is co-founder of the Institute of Curiosity and co-author of "The Power of Curiosity: How to Have Real Conversations That Create Collaboration, Innovation and Understanding", (Morgan James 2015). She has coached executives for over 12 years in all sectors with a focus on leadership development. She is a retired occupational therapist with a MA in leadership and learning and brings a focus of curiosity to her coaching. She believes curiosity is a fundamental skill required in the 21<sup>st</sup> century because when we are curious we begin to understand each other and can change the world, one conversation at a time. She believes coaching is an important profession, one where a solid ethical approach is mandatory, and for this reason is a board member of the International Coaching Federation (ICF) Independent Review Board.