



A Case for Coaching the Who

by Paulette Rao



Many of us became coaches because we wanted to significantly impact the lives of those around us. We noticed that we were gifted at helping others reach their potential and we made the decision to devote our careers to doing so.

In order to create lasting change in a client's life, we must learn to coach the *client* not their current circumstance. We must coach the client not the content. We must learn how to coach the "who" not the "what" if we want to facilitate sustainable change.

The International Coach Federation's PCC coaching markers underline this belief stating how a capable coach explores who the client is being in addition to what the client wants to achieve.

Thus, clearly understanding the difference between "what" and "who" is critical as the change process is never solely a "what" exercise as it is always the "who" that transforms.

Let's look at the goal setting process as an example.

Aside from ensuring that goals are SMART, we also want to look at whether the client's goals are transformational in nature. This will help us test whether the goal is addressing content (surface level matters—the what) or if the goal is pointing at what mindsets may need to be developed to succeed (transformational—the who). If a discussion around goals only addresses what the client wants and what the client must do to have what they want, then we are missing an integral piece of what fuels the change process.

We must ask the client to look at the internal shifts that would need to occur in order to achieve their "what". The bottom line is we want to coach the client not the content. We want to create change that will last beyond attaining their "what" and make keeping their "what" sustainable.

Clients often think that goal achievement is "do-have-be". They need to **do** things to **have** what they want, and when they have it, then they will **be** (fill in the blank). For many, the "**do**" part can become unsustainable. Hence why diets and exercise commitments may collapse after a while. That is because do-have-be thinking targets surface level matters—the doing, the **what**—not the who. The **who** has to change for the actions and results to follow and create lasting change.

Let's take an example of a goal I hear quite often. The client wants to find a soulmate—someone they describe as a good communicator, emotionally available/intelligent, loyal, honest, affectionate and financially sound. The client sets out to "do" what she believes will help her find that person—online dating with a well-written profile and professional headshots, asking friends if they know someone to introduce her to, going to places where like-minded people hang out, etc. She takes these actions as she believes it will lead her toward attaining the relationship that she desires and that finding her soulmate will create happiness (she will "be" happy).

Let's look at this differently for a moment. What if you asked this client to look at "who" she has to be in order to attract a soulmate of this depth and caliber with whom she can nurture a long-term commitment? We must ask the client to look at their beliefs, attitudes and values as these all inform their way of **being**. We must help the client identify the gap between who she is being now versus who she *needs to be* to attract and be part of what she envisages as her ideal relationship. The gap is where the opportunity for transformational change lies. Asking, "**Who** do you have to **be** to **create** that? How does **that person** think and behave?" helps focus the client on the "who."

By "**being**" the person she wants to attract (emotionally sound, communicative, confident, loyal, honest, affectionate and financially sound), the client will begin "**doing**" things differently which will allow her to ultimately "**have**" the things she most desires. And yes, the client simultaneously can perform the actions of online dating, networking, etc.

We want to go beyond helping our client accomplish tasks (something your client most likely already knows how to do) and start challenging our clients to look at how they are showing up. When a client starts living incongruence with who he or she is capable of **being** instead of looking at what tasks she has to tick off to find a soulmate, she starts the process of deep change by thinking and behaving like the person who can achieve this goal.

Zig Ziglar said, "The bottom line is that you've got to 'be' before you can 'do', and 'do' before you can 'have'. It is about being the person you want to be and then doing what that person would do to have what they would have. In order to create the outcome and results you desire, you must perform the actions and exhibit the behaviors that lead to it and hold the mindset and awareness that support it."

If we want to be agents of sustainable change in the lives of our clients, we must focus on who not what. In this way, we can impact the client's life forever.