

COACHING AS A CONDUIT FOR THE GREATER GOOD

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It can be said that the theme of 'coaching for the greater good' is an oxymoron. The basic purpose of coaching is to support the growth and development of an individual human being or a set of human beings (often referred to as a team). The type of growth sought is almost always perceived as a potential source for a positive outcome. Thus, 'coaching for the greater good' is naturally implicit in the basic act of coaching.

Although quantitative results such as finite achievements and measured outcomes are often requested, coaching is mostly qualitative in nature. There are four qualitative experiences for which coaching is a beacon.

- a) *Mindfulness*: For purposes of this article, mindfulness is defined as our capacity to be present and tuned into what is happening in our environment, in a situation, or as an experience and how we are responding to that occurrence in any given moment. When we are mindful, we are able to make more intentional choices, observe our actions and thoughts with spaciousness, tune into our body's response to the way experiences we are having affect us, and be aware of our connection with our self and with others.

Very often, we help our clients to become mindful. They are so busy or intent on achieving something, the lack of mindfulness shows up as a breakdown. We bring a light to where and how they can be mindful and reflective in how he or she approaches and interfaces in situations, relationships, conversations with their self. This is a key aspect of coaching as it often leads to new awareness which opens the window to learning, and thus change.

Regardless of the coaching models we use, there are always queries and in-the-moment exercises that we can introduce that allow clients to observe how they are being in a given moment or the affect an experience or interaction might be having on them.

The one non-discretionary element of mindfulness is silence. Silence, the center of communication, creates the space our brain and body need in order to pause, listen deeply, to center, and to connect with our selves. When we become silent within, chatter stops both from the brain and from our lips. Our body quiets down and create stillness within. Our emotions refrain from being triggered and throwing us into reaction mode. We are able to see a bigger picture, to feel spaciousness inside, and to slow down to the speed of breath.

Our breath is the modality that helps us to move into a state of mindfulness. When we focus on our breath, we can become aware of what our brain is spewing out in the way of thoughts, judgments, and messages. We are also able to think with the fullness of our brain which expands our range of choice. We can fully observe how we are being and acting in our relationships, our day, and in our living. We can feel our body's sensations and movements, especially those that might be in response to fear, discomfort, joy, and love. We can clearly and calmly observe the rise and fall of our emotions and when we are starting to be triggered and react as well as notice the affect that has on our wellbeing and relationships with others.

There are many options for a breathing practice. One such practice is: breathing in on a count of 4, holding for a count of 4, breathing out on a count of 4, holding for a count of 4. Some folks like to extend the breathing out count to 6.

Practices that help us use our breath/breathing to enter a state of mindfulness include:

- Meditation (sitting, walking, visualization, audio, body scan)
- Centering while standing by feeling our feet on the ground and noticing our environment around us, closing our eyes, listening and breathing intentionally
- Centering while sitting by feeling our feet on the ground, our buttocks in a seat, our backs supported by chairs or pillows, closing our eyes and taking long deep intentional breaths
- Centering in the moment by taking 3 long deep breaths and pausing 30 seconds to check in within you
- Stopping and allowing silence to lead

When our coachees are mindful of how they are being, how they are making choices and decisions, and how they are perceiving others and the world, they expand their capacity to develop themselves and to contribute to 'the greater good'. It is in the moments of mindfulness that they connect within in and listen in to hear who they want to be in the world, the impact they'd like to make, and what they need in order to be in integrity with that. When we can bring that to our coachees, we are indeed coaching for 'the greater good'.

- b) *Development*: Coaching is often delivered from the emotional field of care for the sake of our coachee. It is focused on supporting our coachee to mature and develop both personally and professionally. Through this development, coachees learn to build a conscious foundation to take care of their needs, develop both capacity and capability, explore their curiosities, interact within their world and with the bigger world.

In recent years, the work of Jennifer Berger Garvey, Robert Keegan, and Lisa Laskow Lahey (for example) regarding the need to integrate adult development models and

awareness into the coaching process has shifted our capacity to meet our clients where they are and help to create the breakdowns they need in order to breakthrough to a higher level of personal (and therefore, professional) development.

Coaching, as we know, is a consistent practice of having conversations that up-levels the way a person thinks, brings intention to how a person manages emotions and responds to situations that could be triggering, expands consciousness, supports our coachee to change behaviors, and opens up the capacity of the client to take small risks that build self-confidence.

We do this by doing what they cannot do for their selves: listen without judgment, identify inconsistencies, paradoxes and blind spots, suggest a learning practice, and ask the questions that allow them to discover what has been invisible to them.

Each time the client brings a topic to the coaching session, it is a sign that they want to learn something different or grow their self. Each time a client comes away from the coaching with a new insight, perception, and/or practice, it is an indication that they are developing their self.

As we support our coachees to develop their selves, we help them to expand their consciousness. Through coaching we help to shift the energy and vibration of our communities and the world by allowing our clients to feel good about themselves and act in ways that authentically connect to 'the greater good'.

- c) *Transformation*: During the coaching process, an individual usually transforms their self. The transformation can entail how she or he values and perceives their self, how she or he approaches specific situations, or what she or he now holds as the foundational sets of beliefs and values from which they form relationships and take action . When perspectives are transformed, behavior transformation follows. When behavior transforms, so do the outcomes the person experiences and that are offered into their communities, work environments, and the world.

Each of us have sets of beliefs, judgments and things that we 'know'. These beliefs and knowledge influence the way we see the world, interact with it, form relationships, hold our self, and make choices. Not all of our truths, beliefs, and judgments work in our favor. When a coachee seeks a coach and is looking to make a change, it is likely that at least one set of beliefs, judgments, and/or knowledge is no longer serving her or him, and is in fact, keeping her or him stuck in a pattern that is causing discomfort or a breakdown. The coachee is looking to transform into a more satisfying and healthier pattern that will bring greater satisfaction and success.

Transformation occurs when a set of behaviors, beliefs, obsolete truths, and judgments create a breakdown that is no longer tolerable by the coachee. These behaviors, beliefs, former truths, and judgments must be released and then replaced by a new set that serves the coachee in the present and future better. By doing so, the coachee transforms a way of being who she or he is into a new way of being. When that happens, there is more opportunity for what was learned or developed in the coaching session to have a greater impact.

One coachee had a transformational experience while being coached that changed the way he related to his wife and child. He works with juvenile offenders to help them see where they have choice and then helps them to learn the skills that allow them to make the kind of choices that lead to freedom versus incarceration. The coachee asked to be coached on the difficulties he was experiencing at home. His wife and child were not adhering to 'his' rules and the relationship was tense. Through coaching, he discovered, that he was trying to control all family decisions just like the guards in the juvenile detention center did with the inmates. He became aware that he was subconsciously transferring a guard-like thinking pattern to his family and home. This awareness led to an immediate change in thinking, behavior and level of experienced happiness as well as and a transformed family relationship and happier home environment.

By becoming aware of behavior that was unintentionally adopted, the coachee freed himself up to deepen his relationships and expand the way he trusted himself and others. This then flowed over to his work and provided more awareness that he could share with the juveniles.

- d) *Generativity*: As we human beings evolve, our capability and capacity to take action expands. When a person is coached, that evolution accelerates, deepens, and broadens. Therefore, a coachee is able to generate meaningful action that is impactful, purposeful, and has a long reach. By being generative in their action, individuals and teams can impact what it is they care most about in their life and world.

Taking some form of action is something we do much of each day. Our actions are not always generative or intentional. They also can be habitual, spontaneous, or reactive in nature. When action is generative, it is purposeful. Much of our organizational coaching is generative in nature. Coaching for the greater good is generative in nature. We want our clients to take meaningful, intentional, purposeful action that results in satisfying and impactful outcomes. However, some coachees do not understand how to create generative action. They are used to going with the flow or taking action based on the desires or needs of another.

When we coach our clients to be generative, there is an intentional generation of an action or set of actions that end in the achievement of a specific goal or purpose. In the process of being generative, our clients will engage in conversations, will engage in practices of accountability, will perform some actions and request others to do so, will negotiate, and will assess success at being generative.

We are coaching them to be intentional so they are able to create clear agreements, to fulfill commitments, to ensure that commitments made to them are fulfilled, to take action that has purpose that can be measured or observed, and to take action that can be articulated clearly and have the satisfaction received from positive results be declared.

Generative coaching supports our clients to take action towards what they care about, the impact they want to make in the world, and to do so in a way that creates positive energy. By accomplishing something positive, once again we are coaching for 'the greater good'.

When people engage in coaching and are committed to being vulnerable, to not have to be right, to learn and grow, and to engage in practices and other homework, they will expand their conscious awareness, allow their humanness to shine, build healthy relationships, and mature as individuals and professionals. They will also gain clarity on what matters most to them and how to live taking care of that. There is no real downside – communities and friends may change and that might feel uncomfortable for a while – but the coachee will be creating a different tribe from the time she or he starts to think, act, speak, and see the world in their new way.

With these possibilities of growth catalyzed by coaching, it is challenging to ponder that coaching can be anything but for 'the greater good'. It's entire premise is to develop and expand the consciousness and well-being of humans, and therefore, humankind. Each day we coaches are doing 'greater' good in the world – what a great profession!