



COACHING: THE SEARCH FOR COMPETENCY

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It's no longer *news* that coaching has now outlasted any charge of being a fad in business or self-development. Over the past 15 years it has become recognized as truly a new methodology for effective communicating, training, information gathering, delegating, eliciting the untapped potentials in people, managing, and even leading. In 1999 Coaching became the second fastest industry behind IT. In the mid-1990s numerous international organizations began emerging to give form to the field and to provide some of the first fledging attempts to nudge the field to become a profession. Today there are estimated to be more than 100,000 coaches worldwide. There have been public revelations that both Bill and Hiliary Clinton had personal coaches, that numerous other high profile politicians, CEOs, and media people have experienced executive or personal coaching.

Yet with this revolution in business and personal development, there have already been many people hanging "Coach" shingles without any specific coach training or even the skills to competently coach. Many others who are certainly qualified in another profession—as a trainer, consultant, therapist, hypnotist, motivational speaker, etc. have taken on the Coach *persona* to continue doing what they have always done, simply changing the name to "coaching." All of this raises several critical questions for anyone wanting to get a coach to help them mobilize their resources for accessing and unleashing their untapped potentials to take their performance, achievements, and experience to a higher level.

- How is coaching *different* from consulting, training, therapy, mentoring, etc.?
- How can we distinguish a *competent* coach from an *incompetent* one?
- What knowledge and skills does a coach need to effectively facilitate a client's outcomes?
- What questions can we ask in *interviewing* to contract a truly competent coach?

Honing in on the Uniqueness of Coaching

To intelligently answer these questions we first have to define what we mean by coaching, only then can we actually distinguish it from the other similar professions. So, what is coaching?

Coaching is a *conversation* that gets to the heart of things to first mobilize a person's resources (internal and external) so that, secondly, it unleashes the talents, aptitudes, and potentials that have not been fully tapped or exploited.

This makes coaching very different from therapy. Therapy is also a conversation, but it is about diagnosing a problem, hurt, trauma, or pain and bringing healing to it so that a person can feel "okay" about him or herself, develop sufficient ego-strength to face current reality in order to become ready to get on with life. The therapy conversation is primarily about the past and how to move into the present and to be more fully in the moment. It's a conversation about how to cope with life and problematic challenges.

Coaching deals with a different population, the population of those who have already been through therapy or who have not been damaged, hurt, or traumatized, and who already live in the present and already coping very well. Coaching is for those who are already performing and achieving and who want more, who are ready for a challenge. It is for those who want to move beyond coping to mastering and put their ego-strength to the test in shaking things up and taking on new levels of risks. The coaching conversation is about building a well-designed outcome for the future, getting to the heart of issues, and creating new solutions and visions so that a person can become more, feel more, think more, experience more, have more, and contribute more.

If therapy deals with people experiencing various *deficiencies*, the need to cope, and the desire for safety, peace, and equilibrium, then coaching deals with *abundance* and *challenge*, those who want to master something, and willing to risk disequilibrium. This matches what Abraham Maslow distinguished in his *lower* and *higher* needs, between *deficiency* needs and the meta-needs of self-actualization.

This description shows us some other facets of coaching: it is not only communication, it is change, it is measuring progress and raising performance, and it is self-actualization. And if these are four of the key components of coaching, then it is also a process of communicating not only what's "on our mind" but the thoughts "in the back of our mind," the way we reflect upon ourselves, that is, our self-reflexive consciousness. And that means that coaching is about human functioning and developing, about our entire mind-body-emotion system and how we operates systemically to create our reality. This gives us seven facets of coaching.

- 1) Communication
- 2) Self-Communication or reflexivity
- 3) Change and learning
- 4) Implementation / Actualization
- 5) The Systemic nature of mind-body and people in relationships
- 6) Self-Actualization
- 7) Multiple layers of "culture"

Finally there is the distinction that coaching is *facilitation*. This distinguishes *coaching* from

training, consulting, and mentoring. That's because the skill of the coach focuses on facilitating conversation, reflexivity, change, learning, implication, systems awareness, and self-actualization. By way of contrast, trainers, consultants, and mentors present themselves as experts in some particular *content* that the client needs and pays for. The coach's expertise is that in *facilitating a self-actualizing conversation* that mobilizes resources, unleashes potentials, and that actualizes chosen change and transformation in the client's mind-body system.

From Definition to Competency

If these things define what coaching is, then to be competent as a coach, that is, to truly be *competent* in the coaching skills, a professional coach needs to have the following:

- 1) A solid coaching methodology based on the cognitive-behavioral sciences, developmental and self-actualization psychology.
- 2) Skills in facilitating "getting to the heart of things" conversation that invites a client through the stages and levels of change: incremental change, evolutionary change, and revolutionary change.
- 3) Skills in facilitating resource mobilization and the actualization of the client's best ideas, visions, and values, the ability to transfer concepts into muscle memory.
- 4) Skills in handling the self-reflexivity of human thinking-and-feeling, to jump the "logical levels" of reasoning and feeling and to handle the client's matrix of meaning frames.
- 5) Skills in handling the multi-dimensions and systems of the client's life: the client's own mind-body-emotion system within work, career, family, culture, societal systems.

Viewed in this way, *coaching competence* is an extensive and demanding challenge, is it not? While a person does not have to have a degree in psychology (especially traditional psychology), a coach does have to have some expertise in two psychologies: self-actualization and cognitive-behavioral psychology regarding how people function and some understandings of developmental psychology. To that end, a solid methodology for a professional coach needs an extensive and well-structured *framework* within which to work so as to know what to do when, with whom, and why. Without that, a coach will be shooting in the dark or using coaching as a "grab bag of tricks."

In the following diagram, I have identified the six key models we use in *The Meta-Coach Training System*TM.

What to Ask a Prospective Coach

Given this, we can now present a list of questions that you can use when interviewing for a truly competent and professional coach.

Questions for finding a professionally competent coach:

- Do you have and operate from a solid coaching methodology? What is it?
- Is your methodology based in the cognitive-behavioral sciences?
- Do you know how to use it so that you know what to do when with whom and why?
- Is the coaching methodology based in a cognitive-behavioral sciences for healthy and self-actualizing people or does it come from the field of therapy?

- Do you know how coaching differs from the other modalities?
- Are you able to draw a clear line between them and know when and how to refer as well as why?
- How does coaching differ from consulting, mentoring, training, and therapy?
- What training and level of expertise do you have in facilitating a coaching conversation?
- How will you handle clients who need something other than self-actualization facilitation?
- What are the levels, dimensions, and stages of change?
- What change model do you use in coaching?
- How skilled are you as a change agent?
- What skills have you developed for facilitating change?
- What's the difference between a therapy change model of change and a non-therapy change model? Is that important, and if so, why?
- What are the skills you have for detecting where a person is in the change process and for coaching someone through that level?
- Is your coaching grounded in self-actualizing psychology for unleashing the potentials of healthy people?
- If so, how do you think of that and communicate it to clients?
- Do you ever do therapy and calling it "coaching?"
- What's the difference in self-actualization and traditional psychology?
- What are the premises of self-actualization psychology?
- Do you engage in self-coaching practices? When and how?
- Are you part of some larger community of coaches, the ICF, the MCF,¹ etc.?
- Who coaches you? Do you have a coach? Who holds you accountable?
- Do you run an ethical and professional coaching practice?
- What are you working on in terms of unleashing more of your potentials?
- How well do you apply the coaching values and principles in your own life?
- What personal successes do you have in achieving your own outcomes?
- Do you have the competency of the core coaching skills to be effective?
- Have you achieved competency in specific core coaching skills?
- How do you know you are competent in facilitating change?
- Where are you as a coach on the competency scale with any given skill? How do you know?

- Do you know how to benchmark intangible skills so you can give concrete and specific behaviors to the skill?
- How many skills can you demonstrate a benchmarked competency to?

Summary

With the exploding nature of the field of Coaching the search for *competency*, for both the coach and the client, has just begun. To answer the questions about competency in coach and coaching methodology we have to be crystal clear about what we're talking about, how we define it, how it differs from the other modalities, and the skills required. This means that the field of coaching will have to find and develop a coaching framework that's grounded in the self-actualization, cognitive-behavioral, and developmental psychologies and that works as a systemic model.

COACHING AND THE MODELS OF META-COACHING

<i>Coaching</i>	<i>Meta-Coaching Models</i>	<i>Psychologies</i>
<i>Communication:</i>	The NLP Communication Model	Cognitive-Behavioral
<i>Self-Communication and Reflexivity</i>	The Meta-States Model	Cognitive, Meta-Cognitive
<i>Change and Learning</i>	The Axes of Change model	Gestalt
<i>Implementation / Actualization Systems</i>	The Neuro-Semantics Benchmarking Model	Cognitive, Sports Psy. Developmental
<i>Self-Actualization</i>	The Matrix Model	Systems
	The Matrix Self-Actualization Model	Self-Actualization
	The Neuro-Semantic Self-Actualization Quadrants	Existential psych.
Multiple layers of Culture	The Meta-States Model / Matrix Model	Meta-Cognition

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End Notes:

1. Until May of 2004 my home state of Colorado classified coaches as “unlicensed therapists” and put them under the Board of Examiners in Denver, holding them accountable to the code of ethics and practice for therapists.

For more about coaching competency, see the chapters on benchmarking competency in *Coaching Change, Meta-Coaching, Vol. I.*