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—Stephen R. Covey, Author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and *The Leader in Me*

CO-ACTIVE COACHING

CHANGING BUSINESS TRANSFORMING LIVES

The Book That Helped Define the Field of Professional Coaching

THIRD EDITION

HENRY KIMSEY-HOUSE, KAREN KIMSEY-HOUSE,
PHILLIP SANDAHL and LAURA WHITWORTH

Praise for *Co-Active Coaching*, 3rd Edition

“With its third updated edition, *Co-Active Coaching* remains the bible of coaching guides. Written with a powerful, distinctive approach, no other book gives you the tools, the skills, and the fundamentals needed to succeed in these delicate relationships.”

—Stephen R. Covey, Author, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and *The Leader in Me*

“In *Co-Active Coaching*, the dynamic Kimsey-House duo, along with Phillip Sandahl, have elevated coaching from an instructional tool to an art form! Picasso would be proud. Seldom have I seen such a clear road map for how to ‘overcome actions that sabotage desires, plans and dreams.’ Collaboration, cooperation, coalition — all necessary components of a successful working relationship. The Kimsey-Houses and Sandahl prove to us that *Co-Active Coaching* is vital as well. As a gym coach leads his trainee to a higher state of physical health and wellbeing, *Co-Active Coaching* provides business coaches a toolkit for helping their clients achieve professional and personal success. *Co-Active Coaching* should be required reading for every manager or employee who wants to succeed in the workplace.”

—Marshall Goldsmith, Million-Selling Author, *New York Times* Bestsellers *MOJO* and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*

“*Co-Active Coaching* exudes the catalytic power to transform

your organization and your life. Read it, savor it, and practice it to become a purpose-filled leader of life!”

—Kevin Cashman, Best-Selling Author, *Leadership from the Inside Out* and *Awakening the Leader Within*

“I applaud the new edition of this definitive text on transformational coaching. The authors and the visionary network they lead provide an effective methodology to work with change at personal and organizational levels. This is a must-read for professionals who value the process of discovery, awareness, and choice that empowers people to find their own inner wisdom and to act in service to make a better world for all.”

—Lynne Twist, Author, *The Soul of Money*, Founder, Soul of Money Institute, and Co-Founder, The Pachamama Alliance

“When designing our ICF ACTP coach certification program, we never considered any textbook other than *Co-Active Coaching*. This is the best, most comprehensive book for teaching the relevant skills of coaching. It should be required reading for all coach-specific training programs in any environment (profit, non-profit, executive, teams, etc.). With the enhancements made in the third edition, we look forward to incorporating this edition into our required reading list.”

—Donna Billings, PCC and Co-Founder, Professional Coach Certification Program, Duquesne University School of Leadership and Professional Advancement

“*Co-Active Coaching* insightfully reveals how to unlock a person’s potential and enlighten their past, present, and future. It’s a must-read for all self-empowered senior executives.”

—Michael Cheah, Former President, Xian-Janssen
Pharmaceutical, China (A Johnson & Johnson Group of
Companies)

“Transformational change — in ourselves or in the teams, organizations, and companies we lead — is ultimately all about relationships. The third edition of *Co-Active Coaching*, by the eloquent and compassionate founders of The Coaches Training Institute, will give you the tools, skills, strategies, and ethical frameworks to achieve the powerful goals of this work: changing lives and changing the world.”

—Celeste Schenck, President, American University of
Paris

“Coaching basics are an essential skill set for any manager or leader who is interested in developing other people, so I use this material in most of the MBA courses I teach. Without fail, it engages the hearts and minds of people who care about acquiring meaningful and effective skills they can immediately put to use.”

—Heidi Brooks, PhD, Director, Yale School of
Management Mentoring Program, Lecturer, Yale School
of Management, and Clinical Assistant Professor, Yale
School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry

CO-ACTIVE COACHING

Changing Business, Transforming Lives

THIRD EDITION

**Henry Kimsey-House
Karen Kimsey-House
Phillip Sandahl
and
Laura Whitworth**



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A Special Dedication: For Laura Whitworth

Creator of the Co-Active model with Henry Kimsey-House and Karen Kimsey-House, a recognized leader in the development of the coaching profession, and coauthor of the first two editions of this book.

Laura Whitworth died February 28, 2007, after a courageous battle with cancer. You could not find two words in the English language more appropriate for her: courageous battle. What she believed in, she fought for. If you were ever her client, or participated in a program Laura led, you know. She was fighting for you.

She was a visionary and a pioneer; she was a compelling force. Her relentless commitment to life fully lived is a model and an inspiration. That life force named Laura Whitworth created the seeds from which the coaching tree has grown; she didn't do it alone, of course, but her tenacity certainly made sure it grew.

She founded The Coaches Training Institute with Henry and Karen Kimsey-House and created the Co-Active coaching model and training with them. Together they created an enormously powerful leadership program, a transformative life experience for participants. Just ask them. She was instrumental in the development and growth of the coaching profession and was one of the first to call the work she did “coaching.”

We would say we miss her—and naturally we do. But her presence, her spirit, are so alive in the work today that we feel

her with us still.

We dedicate this third edition to Laura and to the courageous battle she stood for: a life fully lived. In every moment we are given. With every breath we breathe.

Preface to the Third Edition

There are two fundamental reasons for this third edition of *Co-Active Coaching*.

Reason one: coaching keeps changing, evolving. The application of coaching skills and competencies has expanded far beyond the profession itself. Today the interest in coaching as a skill set and communication form is everywhere: in business, in schools, in government, in families. At the same time, the profession of coaching continues to evolve and grow as well, expanding in numbers and geography, in a widening array of distinct niches and in its own understanding of what coaching is and how it works.

Reason two: Co-Active coaching as a model and method continues to grow and evolve. We continue to expand our reach as trainers of coaches, and new people around the world reach out to find us. The more we teach, the more we learn about our own way of coaching, and the more our students teach us about the transformative power of this work. We have more clarity today about the nature of Co-Active coaching as a unique contribution to the field, and we have more clarity about what gives this approach the impact we see and results in the positive feedback we receive.

Over the years, this book has served as the learning foundation for thousands of coaches and thousands more who simply wanted to know how to bring a coach-like conversation to important relationships at work or at home. This book is now the standard text for coaching education in many colleges and

universities, business schools, and coaching programs around the world. We are humbled, frankly, by the scale of that picture, and feel a responsibility to keep pace with the growth and change. This third edition is still grounded in the basics: the Co-Active coaching model and the skills and tools for effective coaching that support it. Where we have revised the language and examples, our intent has been to broaden the reach of the content, to be more inclusive, and to provide a wider breadth of applications. Where we provide new insight, we want to share our growing awareness of our stand for transformational change at the heart of Co-Active coaching.

The Evolving, Growing World of Coaching

In the years since the first edition was published, coaching as a field of interest has spread around the world. From its origins in North America and Europe, it is now a familiar subject on every continent, and the numbers continue to grow exponentially. It is as if there were an unmet need in the world, in every corner, and that unmet need is hungry for what coaching offers. The world is pulling coaching. The numbers and the geographic reach are impressive, but it is the underlying pull itself that has our attention. Change is a way of life and it is accelerating. Coaching is a methodology that allows us to work with change, on a personal level, on an organizational level, on a relationship level. As people become more aware of coaching as a way to facilitate purposeful change, the application of coaching fundamentals continues to evolve and expand.

The growth is not just geographic; coaching continues to become more diverse in its reach as coaches specialize in a

wide variety of demographic and interest-related niches. Nearly every age, occupation, and personal passion has a coach waiting to answer the call.

In the corporate world, coaching was once the exclusive perk of key executives and rising stars, but it is now a standard component in the organizational toolkit to help employees, managers, supervisors, and executives in their personal development and their contribution to the organization's success. In recent years, employee engagement and culture change have emerged as core initiatives for organizations, and coaching plays a critical role in that change process.

Organizations have learned that highly motivated and fulfilled employees produce high-performance results. In fact, many organizations now offer in-house coach training to accelerate the introduction of the coaching mindset and coaching skills.

With increasing pressure to do more with less, organizations have dramatically expanded their emphasis on the "team" as the means to improve productivity. More and more, they are also learning the benefits of team coaching: training teams and team leaders in the skills and competencies needed in today's more collaborative world. Coaching is a key resource for optimizing potential for both individual achievement and for high-performing, sustainable team excellence.

Even the definition of "coach" is expanding. Today, a wide variety of professional service providers include coaching or coaching skills in their service offerings. They recognize that essential change takes time and focused attention. It's why coaching is so valuable to any change initiative.

Coaching also has a growing role in the world of leadership development. With a high percentage of senior executives and

top managers set to retire in the next ten years, succession planning and leadership development have become organizational imperatives. With the changing nature of organizations, the emphasis on leadership development focuses more and more on emotional intelligence and the associated people skills of leaders. And that is where coaching and a coaching skill set for leaders becomes invaluable. The best leaders in the next generation are forming today, with coaching as an asset in their development.

In the first edition, we talked about Co-Active coaching as not only a set of professional skills but a unique way of communicating. That awareness is even more apparent today when we see this “coach approach” adapted to so many settings beyond the work of professional coaches. For example, we see teachers using coaching skills and a coaching style when these are called for. We see managers, parents, customer service representatives, and health-care workers using coaching skills and a coach approach. The qualities that make a coaching interaction effective are valuable in many settings.

The Toolkit and Keeping Pace with Change

On the subject of keeping pace with change, one of the most popular sections of the book has been moved to the web. The Coach’s Toolkit took up a large section of the first edition; it was reproduced on a CD for the second edition to make it easier to print examples. For the third edition, we have moved the toolkit to the web so that documents can be easily updated and new documents can be added. To view the Coach’s Toolkit, simply go to <http://www.coactive.com/toolkit>.

Welcome to the Third Edition

Over the years we have seen Co-Active coaching embraced by many different cultures. It is amazing to see the impact of this work in so many different languages and with so many different local expressions. It reminds us that at the deepest level, the work we do is human: helping individuals and teams (micro communities, really) fulfill their dreams, live out their values, and achieve the results that matter. We are reminded over and over again that the Co-Active coaching model crosses all of the usual boundaries: geographic, cultural, and demographic. We live in exciting and changing times, in which coaching can be an incredibly valuable asset. We are delighted to share what we have learned over the last few years by bringing you this third edition.

It is enormously gratifying to see that the Co-Active coaching model continues to be strong, durable, and adaptable to the growing and evolving world of coaching.

Henry and Karen Kimsey-House, Phillip Sandahl, and with the indomitable and ever-present spirit of Laura Whitworth
Spring 2011

Acknowledgments

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to so many people who have supported, encouraged, and championed this work—far too many to name—some we have never met. They represent all of the coaches and clients/coachees who have embarked on a coaching journey; their lives and work are a living acknowledgment and a powerful motivation to keep this material current and meaningful.

Coaching training played an enormous role in spreading the power and possibility of coaching as a profession and became its own learning laboratory for what works in coaching. The faculty and staff of The Coaches Training Institute have been at the forefront of the mission to prepare new coaches, maintain high professional standards, and keep the Co-Active method thriving. Their commitment to the essence and the particulars has helped us continuously refine what we present, and their contribution shows in this third edition.

We have seen coaching spread around the globe in the years since the first edition was published. Clearly there is a hunger in the world that is pulling coaching into organizations, relationships, and individual lives—something that transcends all of the usual boundaries. We want to especially acknowledge those courageous pioneers at the forefront of the global efforts. It would not happen without the vision and initiative of determined people willing to take on the challenge of language and culture for the sake of coaching.

To the thousands of coaching students we have trained, to

our own clients, and, yes, our own coaches, we are thankful beyond words. And finally, to the clients who are and have always been our most important teachers, this acknowledgment is for you. You are the reason we do this work.

Henry and Karen Kimsey-House
Phillip Sandahl

Introduction

In today's world, coaching is both a growing profession worldwide and a growing communication style adopted by business, government, and non-profit leaders, teachers, counselors, parents, and others. This book describes a particular approach to coaching and the coaching relationship that we call "Co-Active coaching" because it involves the active and collaborative participation of both the coach and the coachee or client. The underlying beliefs of Co-Active coaching make it both powerful and adaptable.

The Co-Active coaching model is a proven approach based on many years of experience working with clients and coaches worldwide. This book describes the model in detail, defines the skills and techniques of Co-Active coaching, and offers samples of coaching conversations as well as practical exercises that will enhance your understanding.

The Co-Active coaching model was the starting point and is still at the core of the training we do through The Coaches Training Institute (CTI). CTI was founded in 1992 by Laura Whitworth and Henry and Karen Kimsey-House. Today, CTI is the largest in-person coach training organization in the world, delivering courses in North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. CTI offers a comprehensive training program for coaches that includes a highly regarded certification program; CTI also offers a unique leadership development program, courses in coaching mastery and business development, and a diverse online network through which coaches may engage in

special-interest dialogue. Because of our pioneering work in the field of coaching, we have been instrumental in the development of the core principles and skills associated with coaching and continue to be strong contributors and a visionary force for the profession.

Getting to the Core

This book, however, is not just about skills and a description of the model. It is about the nature of a coaching relationship—specifically, a Co-Active relationship. We look at the nature of a Co-Active conversation and at what makes it so different from other conversations—whether the conversation is between a professional coach and coachee, or between a senior manager and that person’s direct report. The heart of that conversation is the same in the Co-Active model. This book gets to the core of what makes a Co-Active conversation different from other everyday conversations.

What is different about a Co-Active coaching conversation? In our view, coaching is not about solving problems, although problems will be solved. It is not primarily about improving performance, attaining goals, or achieving results, although all of that will certainly happen over time in an effective Co-Active coaching relationship. We believe that coaching is chiefly about discovery, awareness, and choice. It is a way of effectively empowering people to find their own answers, encouraging and supporting them on the path as they continue to make important life-giving and life-changing choices.

Co-Active coaching is a form of conversation with inherent ground rules regarding certain qualities that must be present:

respect, openness, compassion, empathy, and a rigorous commitment to speaking the truth. There are certain assumptions underlying the conversation as well. We assume strength and capability, not weakness, helplessness, or dependence. We assume a deep desire to give the best and achieve potential. A coaching conversation has certain beliefs built into it: that every situation has possibilities and that people really do have the power of choice in their lives.

In our view, Co-Active coaching is a way of being in a relationship and being in a conversation that might be unique in human history. It is a way of communicating that shifts the focal point of the conversation from rank or content to a deeper level of human connection. This way of communicating is finding root not only in formal coaching relationships, but in the workplace as a leadership style, and in teams and families as well. It works partly because it taps into a human need for collaborative, Co-Active communication that is so different from the usual authoritarian, superior–inferior communication experience. This naturally arising expression of peer-to-peer communication—which is more about possibilities created than positions claimed—is part of an evolving human consciousness. We believe Co-Active conversations are both an example of this shift in human consciousness and an instrument to create it.

This unique style of Co-Active communication is visible in a variety of ways. You can see it in the way a coach listens, not only to the words but also to what is behind the words, and even to the spaces between the words. The person who listens as a coach listens is someone who tunes in to the nuances of voice, emotion, and energy—someone who is intent on receiving everything that person communicates. The coach or the person

in the coach role is someone who listens to the very best in others, even when they can't hear it in themselves.

A coach is someone who cares that people create what they say they want and that they follow through when they choose. The coach is there to hold people accountable and keep them moving forward toward their dreams and goals. Ultimately, the coach is there to help people live lives of meaning and purpose.

In our view, one of the most essential qualities of a coach, and something clients can count on in a Co-Active coaching relationship, is truthfulness. A coach is someone who will absolutely tell the truth—the truth about where clients are strong, for example, and where they hold back and give up, deny, or rationalize.

With this book, you will learn new ways to work with others: how to discover and promote your client's mission, purpose, and specific agenda. You'll find effective ways to rigorously hold others to account. You'll learn the Co-Active coaching approach to values, goal-setting, life balance, and self-management.

You'll also learn coaching strategies for addressing the self-limiting behavior that often shows up strongest just when people need the courage to take risks for the sake of change. These proven strategies help clients stay on track and overcome actions that sabotage desires, plans, and dreams.

This book emphasizes information and exercises for professional coaches, yet the skills and insights it offers can be applied in almost any relationship—at work, with family and friends, on teams, in volunteer and community settings—because coaching skills and the nature of the relationship are

not limited to professional coaching sessions. We recognize that the essence of coaching is now an adapted communication style growing beyond the skill set of professional coaches. That's one of the main reasons for this enhanced third edition.

How the Book Is Structured

Part 1 presents an overview of the Co-Active coaching model. The first chapter starts with the four cornerstones. They form the foundation on which the model is built. Together they form an interrelated net in which powerful conversations can occur. We go on to build the model with the introduction of the five contexts of Co-Active coaching: listening, intuition, curiosity, forwarding action and deepening learning, and self-management. The chapter also describes the three principles—fulfillment, balance, and process—that together form the client's focus at the heart of the model. **Part 1** also explains how to design an effective working relationship between coach and coachee/client. What we call the “designed alliance” provides clarity and empowers the coaching relationship.

Part 2 describes each of the five contexts in detail and presents descriptions and examples of the coaching skills in action. Here we provide sample coaching conversations as well as exercises that bring the skills to life.

Part 3 covers the three core principles: how to coach the client's fulfillment, balance, and process. In the last chapter, we describe the integration of these three principles into the artistry of coaching.

In summary, this book offers a comprehensive approach to understanding the nature of an effective Co-Active coaching

relationship and the skills needed to support it. The book provides a systematic structure reinforced with real-life examples and practical exercises for developing your coaching abilities. It is a book for those who want to expand their knowledge and develop their capacities as professional coaches and those who wish simply to add a coaching approach to important conversations using the unique model we call Co-Active coaching.

PART 1

Co-Active Coaching Fundamentals

From day one, coaching focuses on the coachee/client.¹ People participate in or seek out coaching because they want things to be different. They are looking for change or they have important goals to reach. People come to coaching for lots of individual reasons. They are motivated to achieve specific goals: to write a book, to start a business, to have a healthier body. They come to coaching in order to be more effective or more satisfied at work or to develop new skills to help navigate life's changes. Sometimes people want more from life—more peace of mind, more security, more impact in their work. And sometimes they want less—less confusion, less stress, less financial pressure. In general, they come to coaching because they want a better quality of life—more fulfillment, better balance—or a different process for accomplishing their life desires. Whatever the individual reason, it all starts with a stirring of motivation within the coachee.

Part 1 explains what the coach brings to this interaction and shows what the process looks like from a Co-Active coaching perspective. In this part of the book, we outline the elements and convey a sense of how they fit together in a comprehensive model. In later chapters, we expand on these major components to provide more depth and offer examples from coaching conversations.

CHAPTER 1

The Co-Active Coaching Model

The term “Co-Active” refers to the fundamental nature of a coaching relationship in which the coach and coachee are active collaborators. In Co-Active coaching, this is a relationship—in fact an alliance—between two equals for the purpose of meeting the coachee’s needs.

Four Cornerstones

The four cornerstones form a container that holds the Co-Active conversation. In fact, the cornerstones make it possible to have a truly Co-Active conversation. In order for engaged and empowered *relationship* to exist—the “co” in Co-Active—and in order for life-giving *action* on the part of the coachee to manifest, these four form a necessary structure.

People Are Naturally Creative, Resourceful, and Whole

We start with this assertion: people are, by their very nature, creative, resourceful and whole. They are capable: capable of finding answers; capable of choosing; capable of taking action; capable of recovering when things don’t go as planned; and, especially, capable of learning. This capacity is wired into all human beings no matter their circumstances. In the Co-Active model it is more than a belief—it is a stand we take.

The alternative is a belief that people are fragile and dependent. With that belief, the coach’s job would be to guide the coachee to the safest possible outcome. You can feel the difference.

When we take a stand for other people's natural creativity and resourcefulness, we become champions on their behalf, not worried hand-holders. As coaches, when we assume resourcefulness and creativity, we become curious, open to possibilities, discovering with the coachee, not dictating. We expect to be amazed.

The key here is “naturally.” Yes, of course, there are times when the circumstances feel overwhelming, when even the most resilient human being feels the mountain is too high, the road to cross too wide, the effort simply not in his power. Circumstances and that inner sabotaging voice that says, “Why bother?” or “You don't have what it takes,” can leave anyone feeling less than creative, resourceful, and whole. On those days, more than on any others, it is our place as coaches to see the true, natural self who was and is still capable. We remind our coachees of their own inner light and help them find it again—because it is there. Naturally.

Focus on the Whole Person

For most people who want to be helpful, and for most new coaches or people in a coaching role, the question that's often foremost on their minds is this: “What's the problem to solve?” It's a question that comes from the best of intentions: a desire to understand and provide valuable assistance so that a problem can be solved. But when a coach is sitting across from a coachee (even by telephone), the coach is not sitting across from a problem to be solved; the coach is sitting across from a person. This person does have a problem to solve—a change to make, a dream to fulfill, a task to accomplish, a goal to reach. All of that is true. But this person is more than the problem at

hand—or the goal, the dream, the task. This is a whole person: heart, mind, body, and spirit. And the issue, whatever it is, is not neatly isolated. It is inexorably entwined in the coachee’s whole life.

Maybe “focus” is a little misleading in the title of this cornerstone. We are certainly not talking about a hard, tight, concentrated focus on the whole person. It is more of a broad attention, a soft focus that includes the whole person and the whole life, and involves listening on many levels. Too often, in our eagerness to be helpful, we access only the place between our ears. We use the mind to probe and understand and then create logical, pragmatic solutions. Analysis and logic are worthy and useful attributes—but they don’t tell the whole story. Sometimes a “correct” solution can have emotional consequences that are just as important; sometimes what the mind says “yes” to, the spirit feels as a loss. We are not suggesting that a coach focus on coaching heart, mind, body, and spirit independently, but a coach or anyone in a Co-Active conversation ought to be tuned in to the influences that are present in each of these different dimensions.

It was not so many years ago that talking about emotions was taboo, especially in the workplace. Today, courses in mastering emotional intelligence are commonplace, thanks to the groundbreaking work of Daniel Goleman. People have been just as sensitive about conversations that included references to the body. But awareness of body language and the exceptional work of somatic practitioners have paved the way to a much better and more widespread conversation about the role of the body in communication.

Surely the most sensitive of these dimensions is “spirit.” It

is the most elusive to define but it is present within every human being. In coaching, we can say what it is not: it is not limited to a form of spirituality or religion. But there is a spirit dimension that influences human choices. It has many different names and different expressions, but at the core, it is the sense of living according to values or a calling or a power greater than oneself. Sometimes it is intuition, a gut feeling or a conviction that guides our lives. It is a spirit dimension that transcends this one decision; in fact, we know it is spirit because it feels transcendent.

Obviously, focus on the whole person also means that as coaches we are aware of all the ways the issue or topic before us is interwoven in this person's life. There is a vast ecology of people and priorities that are interconnected with the issue at hand. Of course, it is entirely possible for the coach and coachee to limit the conversation to a single, narrow subject: completion of a specific project, for example. The ability to take the conversation into any area that the coachee finds compelling doesn't mean the coach insists on declaring the destination and going there. Again, the key is increased awareness, because no topic exists in isolation. A decision in one area of life inevitably ripples through all areas of life. An exciting career move may be very fulfilling—but it may also affect health, family relationships, free time, geography. A coach can work effectively with a coachee on a very narrow topic; but in the Co-Active way, there is a larger picture also at play that includes the whole person.

Dance in This Moment

A conversation is a powerful and dynamic interchange between

people. It's natural to pay attention to the content of the conversation—the words, the positions, the ideas. The content is often what is most “visible” and easiest to respond to. And yet, as important as the words and content are, there is much more going on in every moment. Every conversation creates tone, mood, and nuance. There is as much information, sometimes more, in *how* the words are said versus the words chosen; sometimes there is more information in what is *not* said than what is said. For the coach, a conversation becomes an exercise in listening intently at many levels and, of course, choosing to respond, to intervene. The information about what to say or ask does not come from a script. It comes in the moment, in *this* moment, and then the next moment. To “dance in this moment” is to be very present to what is happening right now and to respond to that stimulus rather than to a master plan.

To “dance” is to respond from a *Co-Active* core—meaning both “co,” as in collaborative, and “active,” as in moving the dance forward. In a truly Co-Active conversation there are moments when the coach leads the dance, moments when the coachee leads the dance, and moments when it is not clear at all who is leading and who is following. All three states of the dance are natural; the third, the point where movement seems to lose leader/follower clarity, is a rare state of connection. It is a place of being tuned in to each other and a place, frankly, of vulnerability—a willingness, built on extraordinary trust, to go with the flow of the conversation. It does feel like an exquisite dance to the music, with both partners in tune with the tempo, tone, and steps. This agility is all for the sake of the coachee's learning and discovery.

Evoked Transformation

Coach and coachee meet in this Co-Active conversation for a common purpose: the coachee's full life. The topic of the coaching will likely be something quite specific—a fraction of the coachee's life that the coachee is focused on. But if we follow that leaf to the branch and then travel from the branch to the trunk and the roots—there is always a deeper connection possible. The goal of the coaching in one session might be clarity and action around a project. The motivation for the coaching could be a new job or promotion, improved fitness, or the execution of a business plan. In fact, the coachee may only have her attention on the specific goal for that specific topic. The coach, on the other hand, sees the tree and the larger, fully connected life. Coaches in this model hold a vision that sees the topic as an expression of something even more valuable to the coachee. This action at hand is the means to a higher end, life fully lived in whatever area the coachee finds important.

There is a yearning for the very best, the full potential that the coachee can experience. And when that connection ignites between today's goal and life's potential, the effect is transformative. Now the report or the job interview or the 5K race is more than a checked box on a to-do list. It is an expression of inner conviction. The accomplishment is a message about who the coachee can be. There is a shift from the satisfaction of “ahh” to the breakthrough awareness of “aha”—a new strength, a renewed capacity—like finding muscles he didn't know he had or had forgotten he had.

And part of that “aha”—the deeper awareness—is the knowledge that the coachee has an expanded capacity to reach his potential. What he learned from this one experience he

naturally applies to others.

And that is why we boldly take a stand for evoking transformation as a cornerstone of this Co-Active model. We see this as a hunger on the part of coaches for all that is possible, including gaining or recovering the inner strength and resourcefulness to evolve, grow, and expand from this one area of focus into many avenues of life. Coaches play a key role, by holding a vision of what is possible and through their commitment to transformative experience. Coaches still choose the topic, the action, and the results they want. But by taking a stand for the greatest possible impact from even the smallest action, coaches encourage and ultimately evoke transformation.

The Heart of the Model

The ongoing relationship between coach and client exists only to address the goals of the client—and so naturally, the client's life is the focus at the center of the diagram in [Figure 1](#). There are two ways to think about this. One way is to see the action of the day as part of the big picture for the client's life. People make dozens, even hundreds, of decisions every day to do or not do certain things. The choices we make during the day, no matter how trivial they may seem, contribute to creating a life that is more (or less) fulfilling. The decisions we make move us toward or away from better balance in our lives. The choices contribute to a more effective life process or to a process that is less effective. And so at one level, the client's action is always wrapped in these three core principles of fulfillment, balance, and process. They are principles because they are fundamental

to the liveliness of life. In the same way that oxygen, fuel, and heat are necessary for fire, these three principles combine to create an ignited life—perhaps “Life” with a capital “L.”

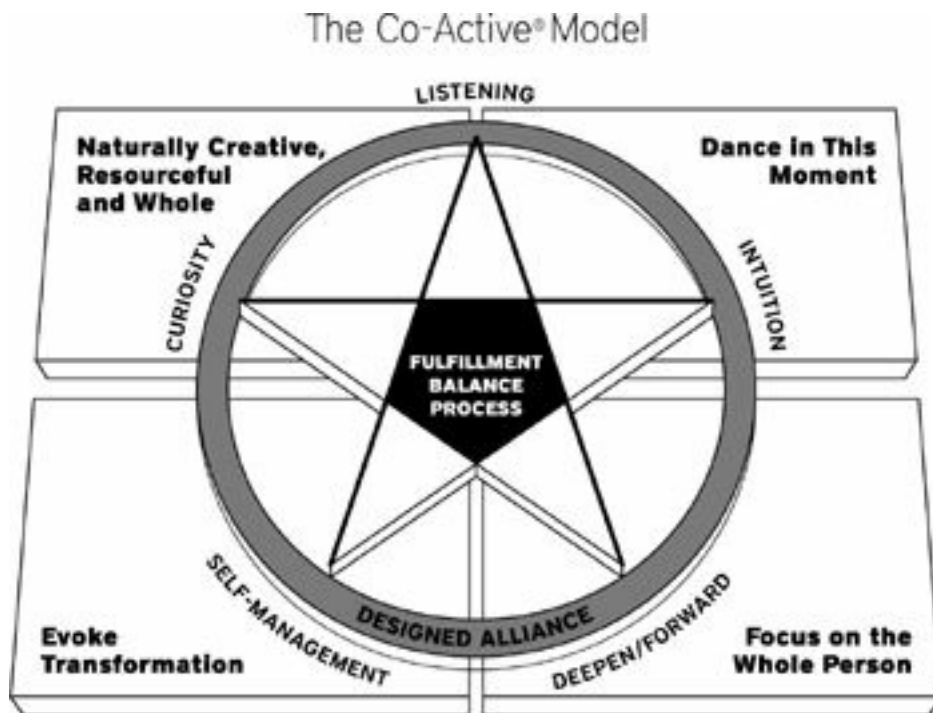


FIGURE 1 The Co-Active Model

The second way is to look at the specific issues the coachee chooses to work with in the coaching sessions. Clients bring all sorts of agenda items to their coaching. This issue of the day or week or month is about life today with an everyday “I” for “life.” Yet, whatever the specific issue, there is a way to link it to the larger, more fulfilling Life, to Life-giving balance, or better process.

Fulfillment

The coachee’s definition of fulfillment is always intensely personal. It may include, especially at first, outward measures of success: a great job or promotion, enough money, a certain lifestyle. Eventually, the coaching will progress to a deeper

definition of fulfillment. It's not about having more. It's not about what fills the client's pockets or closets—it's about what fills the client's heart and soul. A fulfilling life is a valued life, and clients will have their own definitions of what they truly value. If they value risk taking, is there enough adventure in their lives? If they value family, are they shortchanging themselves by caving in to the demands of work? What are the personal values they want present in their work? Sorting out values is a way of sorting out life choices, because when the choices reflect the client's values, life is more satisfying and often feels effortless. Achieving a certain goal can be very fulfilling—especially as a benchmark—but most clients find that fulfillment is not the finish line. At its deepest level, fulfillment is about finding and experiencing a life of purpose and service. It is about reaching one's full potential.

Balance

With so many responsibilities and distractions, and given today's high-speed rate of change, balance may feel like an impossible dream. It's especially elusive for most of the people who come to coaching. They tend to be dissatisfied with functioning at some minimum standard of being alive: they want more from life and want to give more back. They are passionate about the things that matter to them, focused in their commitment, and so intense that sometimes one corner of their lives is a model of excellence while the rest is in ruins. They understand the value of balance and have probably made attempts to achieve it—with good intentions to exercise more, take time off, or reconnect with friends—and found that weeks or months passed without any change. Life is out of balance.

People often seem resigned to being out of balance, as if that's just the way life is. That's the real world, given the circumstances. There's only one way of looking at it, and it looks bad. Coaching for balance, however, focuses on widening the range of perspectives and, therefore, adding more choices. Ultimately, balance is about making choices: saying yes to some things and no to others. This can be challenging. Coachees often want to say yes to more in their lives without making room for it by saying no to something else. This impulse leads to an overwhelmed feeling—and to lives that are out of balance.

Balance is a fluid state because life itself is dynamic. Therefore, it makes more sense to look at whether clients are moving toward balance or away from balance rather than to offer them “balance” as a goal to be achieved. Like the seasons of the year, balance is best viewed over the long haul. It is also a perennial issue, one that coaches will see, in some form or another, many times over in the course of a coaching relationship.

Process

We are always in process. Sometimes it looks frantic; sometimes it looks graceful. Because coaching is effective at achieving results, both coachees and coaches can get drawn into the “results” trap—focusing entirely on the destination and losing sight of the flow of the journey. In fact, process is often compared to a river. As life flows, there will be fast periods of onrushing, white-water progress as well as days of calm, steady currents. But there will also be times of drifting, being stuck in job eddies and relationship whirlpools, and backsliding into

treacherous swamps. There will be flooding and drought. The coach's job is to notice, point out, and be with clients wherever they are in their process. The coach is there to encourage and support, provide companionship around the rocks, and escort clients through the dark waters as well as to celebrate their skill and success at navigating the difficult passages. Coaching allows clients to live more fully in a deeper relationship with all aspects of their lives.

Co-Active coaching therefore embraces this whole picture of the client: fulfillment, balance, and process. These are the core principles at the heart of the coaching model. Together they create the heat and light of a Life that is fully alive.

Designed Alliance for an Empowered Coaching Environment

With the client in the center of the Co-Active coaching model (see [Figure 1, p. 8](#)), we encircle the client and the client's agenda; we name this protective circle the designed alliance. In Co-Active coaching, power is granted to the coaching relationship, not to the coach. Coachee and coach work together to design an effective working relationship that meets the coachee's needs. In fact, clients play an important role in declaring how they want to be coached. They are involved in creating a powerful relationship that fits their working and learning styles. The relationship is tailored to the communication approach that works best for them. The process of designing the alliance is a model of the mutual responsibility of client and coach. Clients learn that they are in control of the relationship and, ultimately, of the changes they make in their

lives.

The Five Contexts

Visually, the coaching model illustrated in [Figure 1](#) represents a five-pointed star. Each point of the star is a context that the coach brings to the coaching. Each is a point of contact with the coachee. The coach consistently draws from these contexts in the practice of coaching. In time, and through training, the coach develops these the way a musician develops musical technique. The five contexts are always in play. We present them in one order here in the book, but they are a constellation, not a sequence—essential elements of a complete coaching approach—like five spotlights that are always shining, illuminating the client’s life.

Listening

Of course, the coach listens to the words that come from the client, tracking the content of the coaching conversation. But the most important listening of coaching takes place on a deeper level. It is the listening for the meaning behind the story, for the underlying process, for the theme that will deepen the learning. The coach is listening for the appearance of the coachee’s vision, values, purpose. The coach is also listening for resistance, fear, backtracking, and the voice of the saboteur, who is there to object to change, point out the client’s shortcomings, and bring up all the reasons why this idea, whatever it is, won’t work.

The coach listens at many levels simultaneously to hear where clients are in their process, to hear where they are out of balance, to hear their progress on the journey of fulfillment.

The coach is listening for the nuance of hesitation, too, for the sour ring of something not quite true. (In [Chapter 3](#), we look in depth at three levels of listening.)

Intuition

By listening below the surface, the coach finds the place where the hard data and soft data merge. Intuition is a kind of knowing that resides in the background and is often unspoken. It remains in the background because, for many people, it's not easy to trust. Our culture doesn't validate intuition as a reliable means of drawing conclusions or making decisions, so we hesitate to say what our intuition tells us. We hold back because we don't want to appear foolish. And yet intuition is one of the most powerful gifts a coach brings to coaching.

As coaches, we receive a great deal of information from the client and then, in the moment of coaching, combine it with previous information as well as experience, not only of coaching, but of operating in the world. Add to this one more factor: information that comes from our intuition. We may not call it "intuition." We may consider it a thought or a hunch or a gut feeling. Regardless of how we define it, the impulse emerges from our intuition. For most coaches, intuition is a skill that needs practice and development. It is enormously valuable because, time and again, it synthesizes more impressions and information than we could ever analyze consciously.

Curiosity

One of the fundamental tenets of Co-Active coaching is that clients are capable and resourceful and have the answers. The

coach's job is to ask the questions, to lead the discovery process. The context of curiosity gives a certain frame to the process of uncovering answers and drawing out insight. Curiosity is open, inviting, spacious, almost playful. And yet it is also enormously powerful. Like scientific curiosity that explores the deepest questions of matter, life, and the universe, curiosity in coaching allows coach and coachee to enter the deepest areas of the coachee's life, side by side, simply looking, curious about what they will find.

Because the coach is not an inquisitor but is on the client's side in this exploration, the coach can ask powerful questions that break through old defenses. When clients learn to be curious about their lives, it reduces some of the pressure and lowers the risk. They become more willing to look in the dark places and try the hard things because they are curious, too.

Forward and Deepen

The outcome of the work that client and coach do together is both action and learning. These two forces, action and learning, combine to create change. Because the notion of action that moves the client forward is so central to the purpose of coaching, we often make "forward" a verb and say that one of the purposes of coaching is to "forward the action" of the client.

The other force at work in the human change process is learning. Learning is not simply a by-product of action; it is an equal and complementary force. Learning generates new resourcefulness, expanded possibilities, and stronger muscles for change.

One of the common misunderstandings about coaching is that it is simply about getting things done—performing at a

higher level. Because of this misunderstanding, coaching has been compared to hiring a nagging parent who will make sure your bed is made and your homework is done. In some organizations, it's the image of a schoolteacher with a ruler, poised to measure your failure and provide the punishment. But coaching is not just about getting things done; it is just as importantly about continuing to learn, especially to learn how the action is or is not contributing to the core principles. This connection between action and learning and the core principles is key. Gandhi is quoted as saying, "There is more to life than increasing its speed." In the same way, there is more to life, at least in the Co-Active model, than increasing action.

Self-Management

In order to truly hold the client's agenda, the coach must get out of the way—not always an easy thing to do. Self-management is the coach's ability to set aside personal opinions, preferences, pride, defensiveness, ego. The coach needs to be "over there" with the coachee, immersed in the coachee's situation and struggle, not "over here," dealing with the coach's own thoughts and judgments. Self-management means giving up the need to look good and be right—the light should be shining on the coachee, not the coach. Self-management is about awareness of impact. In the course of a coaching relationship, coachees also learn about self-management in their own lives. They experience the modeling and develop their own awareness of impact.

The Coach's Role in the Model

The coach is a kind of change agent, entering the equation for

change without knowing what the outcome will be. Goals and plans, new practices, new benchmarks, achievements of every kind are all part of the client's ongoing work, facilitated by the coaching interaction. The coach is a catalyst, an important element in the process of accelerating change.

But this is more than a passive role. We see coaching, especially the form presented here, as a role of service that requires commitment and presence on the part of the coach. Whether the coach is working with individual private clients or has been hired to work with clients inside an organization, a sense of purpose, even a higher purpose, is definitely an underlying element. In the world of Co-Active coaching, we would say that coaching exists to serve the client's higher purpose. When we aim for this higher purpose, we create the means for transformative change in clients and, by extension, in families and organizations. The ripples of change in a client's higher purpose move out into the world.

To be present there, contributing to that change, is enormously gratifying. It fulfills a sense of higher purpose in the coach's life. Making a difference—helping others to achieve their dreams and reach their potential—this is why coaches are drawn to this work.

CHAPTER 2

The Co-Active Coaching Relationship

Coaching is not so much a methodology as it is a relationship—a particular kind of relationship. Yes, there are skills to learn and a wide variety of tools available, but the real art of effective coaching comes from the coach’s ability to work within the context of relationship. Every client is unique, with a unique set of circumstances, unique goals and desire for change, unique abilities, interests, even habits of self-sabotage. We can talk in very general terms about focus areas that clients often pursue—career change, life transition, performance improvement, leadership in the workplace, health and wellness issues—but only in the broadest terms. Add to this picture the fact that goals change over time as clients clarify what is important, as they dig deeper into what motivates them, and as they produce results (action and learning). There is no authorized universal reference manual with standardized diagnoses and coaching solutions neatly defined. Coaching is inherently dynamic; that is one of the fundamental qualities of coaching and a reason for its power as a medium for change. Coaching is personal; coaching creates a unique, empowered relationship for change.

In Co-Active coaching, we also emphasize the peer relationship—that coach and client have equal, though different, roles. They are Co-Active in the relationship, so they are cocreators, collaborators, in a way.

We can picture this relationship as a triangle (see [Figure 2](#)).

The coach grants power to the coaching relationship. The client also grants power to the relationship, not to the coach. Clients are in turn empowered by the relationship—empowered to take charge of their lives and the choices they make. In this figure, all the power of the relationship exists to serve the client.

In fact, the Co-Active coach must make the shift from “I am powerful” to “the coaching relationship is powerful.” Powerful coaching is not about being a powerful coach; it is about the power the client experiences. Imagine that the coaching relationship is a recharging place where clients tap into the source of energy they need to get over the hurdles in their lives. They can’t get the work done if the energy level is low. The power comes not directly from the coach, however, but from the relationship—from the synergy of the energy clients bring in the form of desire and motivation and the energy coaches bring in the form of their commitment, skills, and understanding of human change.

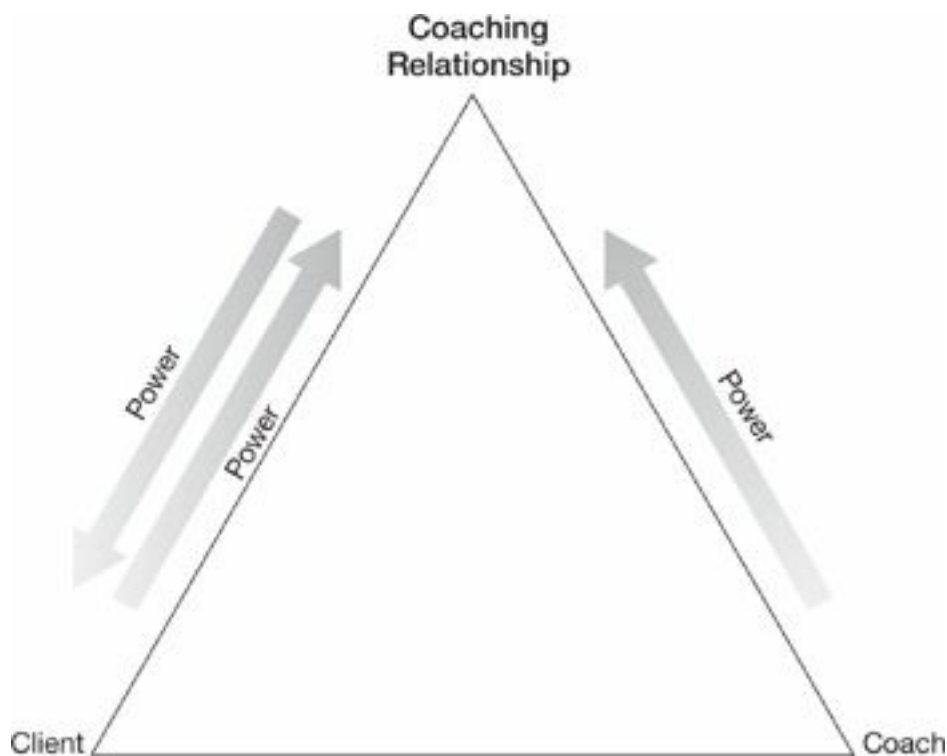


FIGURE 2 The Coaching Power Triangle

The Coaching Environment

At its most fundamental, a coaching session is a conversation between a coach and another person or—in team or relationship coaching—a coach and two or more people. But this is no ordinary, everyday conversation. An effective coaching conversation gets to the heart of what matters. It is a focused, concentrated conversation designed to support the coachee in clarifying choices and making changes. The environment in which the conversation takes place is crucial.

By “environment,” we mean both a physical environment and a relationship environment made up of ground rules, expectations, and agreements. In Co-Active coaching, we talk about two core characteristics of an effective coaching environment: one, it is safe enough for clients to take the risks they need to take, and two, it is a courageous place where clients are able to approach their lives and the choices they make with motivation, curiosity, and creativity. By the way, “safe” does not necessarily mean “comfortable.” Significant change may be highly uncomfortable, and yet there are ways to ensure that the experience is safe. Like rock climbers ascending the cliff face, striving for the summit, clients may find the process exhilarating, exhausting, and scary. But knowing that there is the equivalent of a belay team holding their rope, ensuring their safety, gives them the confidence to keep climbing.

Certain qualities characterize an environment that is safe yet promotes courage in clients. These qualities give shape to what

might be called the “container” for the coaching relationship.

Confidentiality

Making change means disturbing the familiar and well-established order of things. It may be deeply satisfying, maybe exciting, to embark on that change and yet still feel risky. Even if the client and the client’s world are completely committed to and supportive of the change, change by its nature is an unknown. If clients are going to risk making significant change, they must be able to risk talking freely with their coach.

Disclosure is crucial because it leads to the discovery that is necessary for action. Without the safety and reassurance that confidentiality provides, the coaching will be tentative, and there will always be an undercurrent of wonder about what is possibly being withheld.

Coaches who work with clients inside organizations have to deal with a more complex environment. Confidentiality between coach and client is still a key condition for safe and courageous conversation, but because the organization has a vested interest in the result, it usually requires some form of reporting on the coaching. Often, clients are the ones who take responsibility for reporting the nature of the coaching work, which allows them to disclose what is most relevant to the organization while preserving confidentiality between themselves and their coach.

Trust

An agreement to hold the coaching conversation confidential is one key component in building trust. Trust is also built over time as client and coach learn that each can be counted on and

the client learns that the relationship delivers results. Trust is built from small things like being punctual for coaching sessions and from a pattern of reliability. Because trust works both ways, it is as important for the coach as it is for the client. The coach must be trustworthy in her action.

Relationship is also built and trust expanded by coaches simply believing in their clients. We live in a culture that, for the most part, demands that people prove themselves, demonstrate their worthiness by performing to some standard, before they are accepted into the circle. The culture creates relationships in which the emphasis is on proving, explaining, justifying. A coaching relationship built on the premise that clients are naturally creative, resourceful, and whole and are capable of making the best choices is a relationship founded on basic trust in the client's capacity and integrity. Clients see that they have a person in their lives who believes they can do what they say they can do, who believes they can be the people they say they want to be.

It is a paradox that coaches believe completely in their clients and, at the same time, hold them accountable. But by "accountable" we do not mean a context of judgment, as in "prove it to me," but simply accounting for their promise of action and the insight of learning. Clients see that the coach is really on their side, respecting their vision and their action plans but also willing to be honest and direct for their sake.

Speaking the Truth

We could also call this attribute of a coaching environment "getting real." A safe and courageous space for change must be, by definition, a place where the truth can be told. It is a place

where clients can tell the whole truth about what they have done, and not done, without worrying about what the coach will say. This is an environment without judgment, and it is a place where the coach expects the truth from the client because truth carries no consequence other than learning, discovery, and new insight. Clients expect the truth from the coach because that is precisely the perspective for which the coach has been hired. Clients are often so close to their own situations, so wrapped up in their own histories and habitual patterns, that they are sometimes unable to see the truth accurately. This may be one of their reasons for seeking out coaching. They rely on the coach for the acuity that sees through the chaos and fog. This should be one relationship in which clients can count on straightforward and honest interactions.

Truth telling doesn't have to be confrontational, although it may confront. It can be handled with sharpness or softness, but it confronts the usual tacit acceptance of the client's explanations. Truth telling refuses to sidestep or overlook: it boldly points out when the emperor is not wearing clothes. There is no inherent judgment in telling the truth. The coach is merely stating what he or she sees. Withholding the truth serves neither the client nor the coaching relationship. A real relationship is not built on being nice; it's built on being real. When the coach has the courage to tell the truth, the client gets a model for the art of being straight. And in the process, more trust is built between coach and client.

Openness and Spaciousness

One of the qualities that makes the coaching relationship work is spaciousness. This is a place where clients can breathe,

experiment, fantasize, and strategize without limitation. It is another world, a place of wide-eyed dreams. It is a space in which they can vent their anger, troubles, spite, perceptions of injustice. It is a place where failure is acknowledged as a means for learning, where there are no absolutes and few rules.

For the coach, spaciousness also means complete detachment from any particular course of action or any results clients achieve. The coach continues to care about her clients, their agendas, their health and growth, but not the road they take to get there, the speed of travel, or the detours they might make along the way—as long as they continue to move toward the results they want. Ultimately, coaching is not about what the coach delivers but about what clients create. A coach may propose a course of action to get the results a client desires. That is fine. Brainstorming is part of coaching and can make a valuable contribution to the client's process. But in order to preserve openness in the relationship, the coach must not be attached to whether clients take her suggestions. The spaciousness of the relationship requires that clients have many channels open to creative inspiration and not be restricted to the coach's good ideas, no matter how sound or grounded in experience. In this way, clients are able to explore the widest range of possibilities.

The Designed Alliance

So far we've been talking about this relationship between client and coach as if it were conceptual. Actually, we believe it is important for client and coach to consciously and deliberately design their working relationship and continue to redesign it as

necessary up through and including its completion. The designed alliance surrounds the coach and client in the Co-Active coaching model (see [Figure 1, p. 8](#)) and represents the container within which coach and client do their work.

The form of the design will be different for different coaches and unique to each coach–client relationship. The conversation that creates the design focuses on the assumptions and expectations of coach and client. The purpose of this intentional conversation is to clarify the process and expected outcomes and provide a forum for negotiating the design of a relationship that is as powerful as possible for both client and coach.

In simplest terms, the design of the alliance looks at questions such as, *What are the conditions that need to be in place for the two of us to work together effectively? What are the obstacles or potential obstacles? What fundamental questions need to be answered in order to get the most out of this process?* And as the coaching continues, there will be ongoing questions: *What is working and what is not? What do we need to change in order to make the coaching relationship more effective or have more impact?*

This first conversation about consciously creating an effective working relationship is just the beginning. Continuing to be open, to find new or more effective ways of working together is an ongoing part of a Co-Active coaching relationship. In one way, the strength of a client's ability to make changes in his work and life is a measure of the strength in the coach–client relationship. And the strength of that relationship is measured by the commitment to an open, fearless, and continuously evolving design of their alliance over time.

Coaching Format

Over the past decade, coaching as a practice and as a profession has taken root in myriad forms, and the variety of environments in which we find coaching and coaching skills being used continues to expand. Today you will find Co-Active coaches working from home offices and inside institutions and organizations. You will find Co-Active coaches coaching in prison cells and corporate boardrooms. Some coaches work as employees within organizations, often with job duties in addition to coaching. Others combine coaching with consulting work in order to provide ongoing implementation support and follow-up. Many coaches work individually with private clients. Some specialize in working with teams or with people in relationship. Coaching today is global and cross-cultural. Coaches and clients cover dozens of demographic categories: age, income, education, ethnic background, job position. Many coaches specialize in a select interest or career area and focus on working with CEOs, immigrants or expatriates, artists and musicians, or parents and their teenagers.

The environment within which coaching takes place is equally varied. Many coaches work with clients by telephone, with regularly scheduled, often weekly, appointments, although there are many variations. Some coaches and clients prefer in-person coaching, whether at the client's site, at the coach's office, or off-site. Coaches may contract with clients for a fixed period of time, such as three months, six months, or a year. Other coaches establish ongoing, open-ended relationships with clients. Coaching takes place in paneled boardrooms, inner-city homes, and mountain retreats.

Within that framework, coaches bring their coaching training and experience, along with a wide variety of tools and assessments. The permutations of forms and environments continue, inspired by the imagination of coaches and the interests of clients. And yet, no matter what form the coaching takes, we believe that it will be most effective when coach and client create a safe and courageous space for the work and when both parties consciously design their working alliance.

Getting Started

Coaches typically begin a working relationship with an initial process that is part client orientation and part self-discovery work for clients. This foundation-setting process familiarizes clients with the coaching process, provides an opportunity to design the alliance, and begins the work of clarifying client issues and goals. There is no standardized form for this. With some coaches, it is a brief interview or a page or two of basic questions, all handled in the initial coaching session. Other coaches might use several sessions, assessments of various kinds, and interviews with the client's coworkers, direct reports, or family members. Or this discovery process might be done as visioning work at a retreat center.

In this initial work, clients learn what to expect from coaching. It is also a time for them to clarify where they are, where they're headed, the strengths they will use to get there, and the obstacles that often interfere.

The coach typically covers these four areas:

- Logistics

- You are here. Where is here?
- Designing the future
- Orientation to coaching

Logistics

One of the first, obvious elements in getting started is communication and agreement on fundamental ground rules and administrative procedures. Settling such details as appointment schedules, cancellation policy, and payment arrangements (when appropriate) is part of getting underway, but it is also key in creating relationship. Clients will begin to set expectations of their coach and the coaching based on the coach's handling of these administrative procedures. How coaches "handle the details," especially in the area of getting agreement, sets a tone and creates a particular environment.

You Are Here. Where Is Here?

This discovery phase focuses on where clients are today and how they got there. It's a conversation about where they are and the issues at hand, what is at stake, what moves them, what blocks them. The conversation might address such issues as life purpose or mission, values, principles, or personal beliefs. Often, the coach will make an overall assessment of satisfaction in the significant areas of the client's life using a tool like the Wheel of Life (see [Figure 3](#)) or a version of the wheel created specifically for a client's situation. (See the Coach's Toolkit online, at www.coactive.com/toolkit for more information on using this and other tools for discovery.)

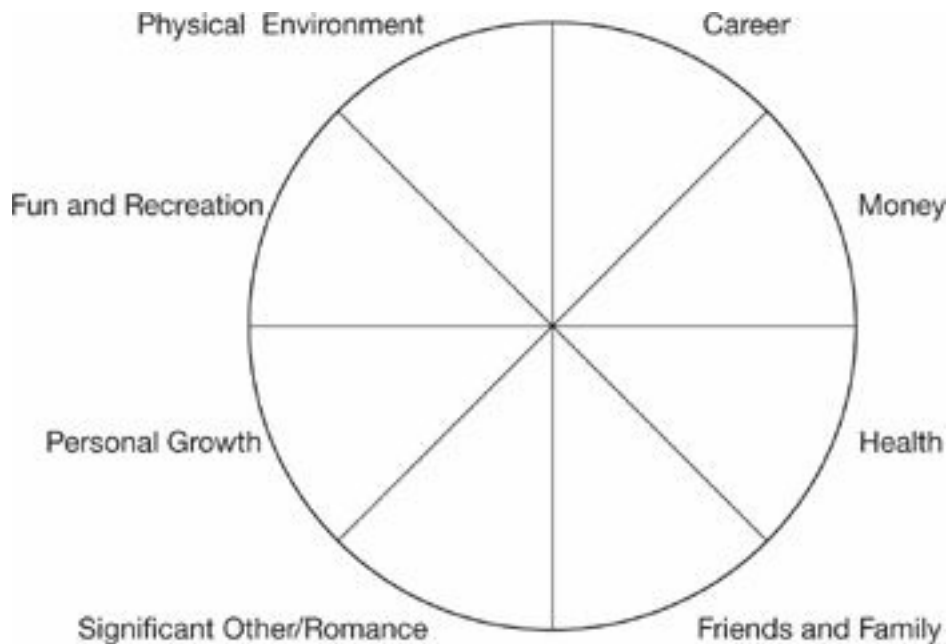


FIGURE 3 The Wheel of Life

Clients and coach might talk about previous disappointments and successes in order to get an idea of what does and doesn't work, where clients are fulfilled, and the strategies they use to handle obstacles and derailment. In this phase, client and coach are beginning the process of really getting to know this person, the client, from the inside out: the bright places, the dark places, the effective places, and the not-so-effective places.

The coach may use assessment tools or exercises, but at the heart of the discovery process are answers to simple, powerful questions: *Where do you want to make a difference in your life? What do you value most in your relationship with others? What works for you when you are successful at making changes? Where do you usually get stuck? What motivates you? How do you deal with disappointment or failure? How are you about doing what you say you'll do?*

The answers also point very clearly to the design of the most effective coaching relationship. For example, the question *Where do you usually get stuck?* leads to a logical next

question, *How would you like me to respond as your coach when you're stuck?* In that exchange, clients experience and contribute to the design of the alliance.

Designing the Future

A third area of this initial work involves the outcomes and desires clients bring to coaching. Here the focus is on having clients describe what they want to change or what they want to achieve. Most clients have one or two primary areas of focus. Chances of success are better when clients concentrate on one or two key points of change, so part of the foundation-setting conversation is designed to clarify those key areas. These future outcomes will be the result of achieving goals, fulfilling commitments, changing habits, and bringing a compelling vision to life. The initial conversation also explores who the client will be in order to create that new future.

Desired Outcome and Goals. Clients bring a desire for change to coaching. The results they have in mind may be vaguely defined or crystal clear, but in either case, clients have not yet been able to achieve the results they want. Desired outcomes may be as specific as a particular goal, or clients may want to move toward a certain state of being, such as “balanced,” “living well with a life-threatening illness,” or “more fulfilled with my work.” Part of the initial process will be devoted to clarifying outcomes and, in many cases, refining broadly stated desires into specific goals: What will happen? In what timeframe? And how will clients know they have achieved the results they want? Coach and client work together to clarify the goals as well as develop strategies for achieving them. Just as

important to achieving results is putting new practices in place. Eliminating life-draining habits while implementing sustaining, life-giving practices is another important focus of the coaching process.

Compelling Vision. We can be pushed down the road by deadlines and expectations and to-do lists. We can be driven by the desire for money or accomplishment or by the promises we make. Or we can be pulled down the road by the gravitational force of a compelling vision, like water running downhill. You can feel the difference between these two forces: pushed or driven on one hand, or pulled irresistibly on the other. Discovering what draws us has the power to overcome the bonds of lethargy and fear. Finding the compelling vision can take any goal, action, or outcome and invest it with new power. An important element in the initial discovery work with clients is uncovering or igniting this vision.

Who You Need to Be. The classic definition of “crazy” is to continue to do things the same way and expect different results. The truth is, if nothing changes, nothing changes. Very often, something new on the outside, like a new outcome, includes the creation of something new on the inside. In order to achieve the results they want, clients very likely will need to change attitudes, paradigms, or underlying beliefs. The beginning of a new coaching relationship is an ideal time to peel back the accumulated layers of identity and old roles to uncover the authentic person within.

Orientation to Coaching

Another outcome of the foundation-setting process is orienting the client to coaching. Even clients who have worked with a coach before could use the opportunity to talk through assumptions and concerns and openly share expectations of coaching and the coach/coachee relationship. In this way both coach and client take a stand on behalf of the coaching relationship. A clear, forthright conversation helps reinforce frank, unrestrained, and hence Co-Active groundwork.

Homeostasis

Part of the orientation to coaching ought to include a few words about homeostasis, a natural, often subconscious resistance to change. “Old habits die hard,” as the saying goes. So do old beliefs and old ways of relating to others. Particularly in the middle of change, when the old way is undone and the new way not yet embedded, there is a strong pull back to the familiar, the known, even if it didn’t get clients the results they wanted. Change requires the expenditure of energy, and continuing the process of change requires sustaining energy. Some change will be easy; other change will not be so easy. There will often be a tendency, or a temptation at least, to backslide. It’s better for clients to be aware and prepared, so that if the temptation appears, it does not feel like they are failing. Homeostasis, the natural tendency to keep things just as they are, is also inherent in the system. Every individual—whether a private client or one coached in an organizational setting—lives within a system, and the system itself often contributes to the resistance to change. Again, an awareness of the system’s power can help clients as they move through changes.

And finally, there is a specific counterreaction to change that appears fairly consistently with clients, which might be called “the dip.” For coaches who work with clients on a weekly basis, it often shows up between weeks three and eight, either because change is not happening fast enough or because the initial euphoria of commitment has worn off. Clients realize that talking about action is one thing and actually taking action is quite another. Many coaches start clients with a three-month commitment to help them get past the dip.

The Bigger Picture

In order for coaching to work, there must be commitment: commitment on the part of the client to exploring, changing, learning, taking risks; commitment to persevering even when it is difficult; commitment to investing the time and energy. Clients must be willing to go beyond their comfort zones and step into the unknown for the sake of change. Without this commitment, coaching drifts and devolves into chitchat or to-do lists that often don’t get done. Fortunately, most clients are energized and willing when they start. This is the perfect time for clients to clarify and declare their commitment.

Coaches, in turn, need to be clear about their commitment to their clients. It is a commitment to dig deeply and courageously, to listen intently to the words spoken and those unspoken. Coaching with this level of commitment can be exciting and inspiring. It will not be trivial. The coach who is committed to clients and their ultimate goals is willing to challenge, incite, motivate, encourage, and sometimes insist that clients take charge. This is the cornerstone “Evoke

Transformation” in action. When coaches bring 100 percent of their effort and expertise, and match the client’s commitment with their own, theirs is a truly Co-Active relationship. And it is this mutual commitment and the designed alliance between client and coach that create the safe and courageous space in which clients can do the important work of their lives.

PART 2

Co-Active Coaching Contexts

One of the easiest ways to see and understand the application of coaching skills is to view them within the five contexts of coaching:

- Listening
- Intuition
- Curiosity
- Forward and Deepen
- Self-management

The following five chapters present detailed explanations of the contexts as well as the definitions of specific coaching skills. Each chapter also contains coaching conversations that illustrate the skills in action together with a number of exercises you can use to develop the skills.

CHAPTER 3

Listening

To be listened to is a striking experience, partly because it is so rare. When another person is totally with you—leaning in, interested in every word, eager to empathize—you feel known and understood. People open up when they know they’re really being listened to; they expand; they have more presence. They feel safer and more secure as well, and trust grows. This is why listening is so important to coaching and why it is the first of the five contexts we discuss.

Listening is a talent each of us is given in some measure. People who become coaches tend to be gifted listeners to begin with. But listening is also a skill that people can learn and develop through training. Masterful coaches have taken their abundant gift and brought it to a high level of proficiency. Indeed, they use it with the same unconscious grace an athlete uses in a sport or a musician in a performance.

Most people do not listen at a very deep level. Their day-to-day occupations and preoccupations don’t require more than a minimum level of listening—just as most of us never acquire more than an average level of physical fitness. We don’t need the muscles because we are not world-class athletes. In everyday listening, we listen mostly to the words. The focus is on what you said and what I said. Think of all the arguments in which the crux of the fight was the precise words that were used: “That’s not what you said.” “It’s what I meant.” “But it’s not what you said.” Or we hear the words and then disconnect

from the conversation while we process the words internally. We start thinking about what we'll say next. We look for a comparable story—or one that's just a little more dramatic: “You think that was scary, let me tell you about the time I ...” We get caught up in our own feelings; we take things personally; we listen at a superficial level as we evaluate and judge what the other person is saying.

The absence of real listening is especially prevalent at work. Under pressure to get the job done, we listen for the minimum of what we need to know so we can move on to the next fire that needs fighting. The consequence: it's no wonder people feel like mere functions in a whirling machine, not human beings. It's no wonder that “employee engagement” is a serious issue in most organizations today. Everybody's talking; nobody's listening.

Most of us would say that our friends are generally good listeners because they are willing to suspend their judgment of us and sometimes will even be quiet and hear our stories. And yet, too often, when we really want just to be listened to, our families, friends, and coworkers, with the best intentions in the world, want to solve the problem or take care of the feelings. Effective coaching—whether you are a trained coach or this employee's manager—requires effective listening, attuned and adept. The best listeners know how to maximize the listening interaction. “Interaction” is the right word, too, because listening is not simply passively hearing. There is action in listening.

Awareness and Impact

There are two aspects of listening in coaching. One is awareness. We receive information in what we hear with our ears, of course, but we also listen with all the senses and with our intuition. We hear, see, and experience sounds, words, images, feelings, energy. We are attentive to all the information we draw in from our senses. We are multifaceted receivers with many receptors of various kinds, all of which are taking in information: we notice the breathing on the other end of the phone, the pace of the delivery, the modulation of the voice. We sense the pressure behind the words—the voice might be soft or hard edged, tentative or enraged. We listen not only to the person but, simultaneously, to everything else that is happening in the environment. When we're together in person, we see body language. Over the phone, we sense emotion and imagine the clenched jaw or the head bowed in sorrow. It's all information. We are aware.

The second aspect is what we do with our listening. This is the impact of our listening on others—specifically, the impact of the coach's listening on the client. As an experienced coach, you need to be conscious not only of what you are listening to but of the impact you have when you act on your awareness. Most of the time, this consciousness occurs just below the surface while your attention is still on the other person.

Think of it this way: Imagine you're in a fencing match. All of your attention is focused on the opponent as you instantaneously make choices and respond, parry, thrust. Your attention is not on the choices you are making—that would break your concentration, with disastrous results. Once the match is over, you can recap the action and review the choices you made. When you listen like this, you are not thinking about

what you take in or what you're going to do with your awareness. Your listening is hyperconscious and unconscious at the same time.

What you do with your awareness, the choices you make, will have an impact. For example, imagine you're in a crowded room and you smell smoke. There might be a fire. Your attention is drawn to the smoke. You notice it. That's the first aspect of the awareness. Then you decide what to do with this information. You might yell "Fire!" or you might mention it casually to the host. You could grab a fire extinguisher and shoulder your way through the crowd to heroically fight the blaze, or you could slip quietly out the side door. Each of these choices will have a different impact. There will be different consequences depending on what you did with your awareness.

Clearly, listening is not passive, especially in the coaching relationship. In our listening model, we describe three levels of listening. These three levels give the coach an enormous range and, ultimately, the ability to listen at a very deep level.

Level I—Internal Listening

At Level I, our awareness is on ourselves. We listen to the words of the other person, but our attention is on what it means to us personally. At Level I, the spotlight is on "me": my thoughts, my judgments, my feelings, my conclusions about myself and others. Whatever is happening with the other person is coming back to us through a diode: a one-way energy trap that lets information in but not out. We're absorbing information by listening but holding it in a trap that recycles it. At Level I, there is only one question: *What does this mean to*

me?

Many times this may be entirely appropriate. When traveling alone to a different city, you are likely to be operating at Level I most of the time. As you arrive at the airport, you're thinking about where to check in, whether you remembered your identification, how much time before the flight, the fact that you hate flying, your opinion of airline food, your awareness that the person in the seat behind you keeps kicking you. All of your attention is on yourself, as it should be. Another indication that you are operating at Level I is a strong desire for more information. You want answers, explanations, details, data. The internal conversation might sound like this: *The flight is delayed? But I'll be late. When will we leave? When will I eat? How can I let people know I might be delayed? Is there another flight? Did I bring enough to read?* The purpose of information gathering at Level I is to meet your own needs.

Another typical setting for Level I is a restaurant. Your awareness is self-directed, and the impact of Level I listening is all about you. The consequences affect your pleasure, your health, your satisfaction, and your wallet: *Do I want a beverage before ordering? What are the specials today? Is the chair comfortable? Is there a draft? Am I too close to the kitchen? How are the prices? Can I afford it?* You are conscious of your thoughts and feelings. The decisions, choices, and judgments you make are all about you. You love certain kinds of fish—but not if they serve the whole fish with those dead blank eyes staring up from the plate. You think about the weight you want to lose, so you decide to order the low-fat dressing on the side. Your internal mind chatter is at maximum here. Even though you are sitting in the restaurant across the table from someone

you are madly in love with, your awareness is entirely at Level I until you have ordered.

Level I informs us about ourselves and what's going on around us. It's where we figure things out and understand. It's very important. Clients need to be at Level I. That's their job: to look at themselves and their lives—to process, think, feel, understand. But it is definitely not appropriate for the coach to be operating at this self-absorbed level for any length of time. Coaches, being human, will naturally have moments of losing focus on the client and being at Level I. The practice for coaches is to return to connection with clients at Levels II and III as quickly as possible.

Level I Dialogue

Client: The new house is a mess. I've got boxes everywhere. I can hardly get from the front door to the bathroom—and I've got the biggest proposal of my career to finish by Friday.

COACH: I went through the same thing last year. The key is to make sure you've got your long-term vision in sight.

Client: That's sort of the dilemma, though. Because I traveled so much last month, my wife's past the point of patience. I'm really not pulling my weight at home.

COACH: That'll work out. The mess is temporary. Don't let it distract you from the real issue—maintaining momentum.

Client: This feels like more than a little distraction.

COACH: I'm sure you can explain why this is so important. In the meantime, let's get back to your proposal.

Client: Okay. If you're sure ...

Clearly, the coach is listening at Level I—paying more attention to his own judgments and opinions and driving his own agenda. The point of this example is not which course of action is correct for this client but where the coach is focusing his attention. In this case, the coach's attention is on a problem and his preferred solution rather than on a client with a dilemma.

Level II—Focused Listening

At Level II, there is a sharp focus on the other person. Sometimes you can see it in each person's posture: both leaning forward, looking intently at each other. There is a great deal of attention on the other person and not much awareness of the outside world.

Let's go back to the restaurant scene and our two lovers. Dinner has been ordered, the menus taken away. Now their eyes are focused on each other and nothing else. Their desire is to be so close that they become one. They are so oblivious to the outside world that this scene of complete romantic isolation has become a caricature used in commercials. It's as if they're living in their own bubble.

When you, as a coach, are listening at Level II, your awareness is totally on your clients. You listen for their words, their expressions, their emotions, everything they bring. You notice what they say, how they say it. You notice what they

don't say. You see their smiles or hear the tears in their voices. You listen for what they value. You listen for their vision, for the unique way they look at the world. You listen for what makes them come alive in the coaching session and what makes them go dead or withdraw.

Energy and information come from the client. These are processed by the coach and reflected back. At Level II, the impact of awareness is on the client. The coach is like a perfect mirror that absorbs none of the light; what comes from the client is returned. At Level II, coaches are constantly aware of the impact their listening is having on their clients—not constantly monitoring the impact, but aware.

Level II listening is the level of empathy, clarification, collaboration. It is as if there is a wired connection between coach and client. At this level, coaches are unattached to self, their agenda, their thoughts, or their opinions. At Level II, coaches are so focused on the client that the mind chatter virtually disappears and coaching becomes almost spontaneous. As a coach, you are no longer trying to figure out the next move. In fact, if your attention is on trying to come up with what to say next—what brilliant question to pose to the client—that should be a clue that you are listening at Level I, inside your own experience.

As a coach listening at Level II, you not only hear the client speak but notice all that is coming to you in the form of information—the tone, the pace, the feelings expressed. You choose what to respond to and how you will respond. Then you notice the impact of your response on the client and receive that information as well. It's as though you listen twice before the client responds again. You listen for the client's initial

conversation, and you listen for the client's reaction to your response. You receive information both times. This is listening at Level II.

In describing Level II listening, we tend to use illustrations of one coach and one client, but Level II listening is about the focus of the awareness. For coaches who work with partners, couples, or even teams, it is entirely possible to listen at Level II to more than one individual.

Level II Dialogue

Client: The new house is a mess. I've got boxes everywhere. I can hardly get from the front door to the bathroom—and I've got the biggest proposal of my career to finish by Friday.

COACH: How important is it to get settled at home? This is the most productive time you've had in your business since you started.

Client: I know, but if I don't help out with moving in, I could be living solo soon, if you know what I mean. My wife did nearly all the packing last month while I was traveling.

COACH: How can you deal with the situation at home—and still maintain your momentum with the new business?

Client: I could clone myself.

COACH: I can see this is a real dilemma. You've got values to honor in more than one important area of your life. Let's look at some options. Would that be

useful?

Client: Yeah. Good. Frankly, I was starting to feel trapped—like there was no way out.

Here the coach is listening at Level II—following the client’s lead, actively listening and checking.

Level III—Global Listening

When you listen at Level III, you listen as though you and the client were at the center of the universe, receiving information from everywhere at once. It’s as though you were surrounded by a force field that contains you, the client, and an environment of information. Level III includes everything you can observe with your senses: what you see, hear, smell, and feel—the tactile as well as the emotional sensations. Level III includes the action, the inaction, and the interaction.

If Level II is hardwired, then Level III is like a radio field. The radio waves are entirely invisible, yet we trust they exist because we hear music coming from the radio. In Level III listening, we are hearing the radio waves. They cross our antennae and become information we can use. But it takes a special receiver to pick up Level III, and most people need practice because they don’t often make use of Level III awareness the way a coach does. For many people, this is a new realm of listening.

One of the benefits of learning to listen at Level III is greater access to your intuition. Through your intuition, you receive information that is not directly observable, and you use that information just as you’d use words coming from the client’s mouth. At Level III, intuition is simply more information. As a

coach, you take in the information and respond. Then you notice the impact. How did your response land? What did you notice about that?

Level III awareness is sometimes described as environmental listening. You notice the temperature, the energy level, the lightness or darkness, both literally and figuratively. Is the client's energy sparking or flat? Is she cool, lightly present, or tightly controlled? You will know by listening at Level III. You'll learn to trust your senses about that, and you can always just ask: "I get the sense that you're in an awkward place. Are you? What's that about?" Performers develop a strong sense of Level III listening. Stand-up comedians, musicians, actors, training presenters—all have the ability to instantly read a room and monitor how it changes in response to what they do. This is a great example of noticing one's impact. Anyone who is successful at influencing people is skilled at listening at Level III. These people have the ability to read their impact and adjust their behavior accordingly.

To listen at Level III, you must be very open and softly focused, sensitive to subtle stimuli, ready to receive information from all the senses—in your own sphere, in the world around you, in the world around your client. The environment itself is giving you information you can use in your coaching even when you can't instantly articulate what it is you are sensing. Sometimes this environment is shouting; sometimes it is whispering.

Level III Dialogue

Client: The new house is a mess. I've got boxes

everywhere. I can hardly get from the front door to the bathroom—and I've got the biggest proposal of my career to finish by Friday.

COACH: How important is it to get settled at home? This is the most productive time you've had in your business since you started.

Client: I know, but if I don't help out with moving in, I could be living solo soon, if you know what I mean. My wife did nearly all the packing last month while I was traveling.

COACH: It sounds like this is a more important issue than just some boxes to unpack. I get the sense that you're packed as tight as some of those boxes.

Client: Is it that obvious?

COACH: You just don't sound like the Steve I'm used to talking to. You sound trapped.

Client: That's what it feels like—and with no way out. Cornered. In my relationship and in my work.

COACH: What do you want to do about that?

Client: What I've been trying to do is step around it, or over it, and that doesn't seem to be working. I guess it's time to sit down and work it out—unpack it all, so to speak.

In this case, the coach is tuned in at Level III: the nuances of the space between coach and client, beyond the words, including all the energy and emotion that were spoken and unspoken. Note that in the dialogue samples, we crafted the

conversation to illustrate the distinctions between the three levels. In real coaching conversations, of course, coaches switch constantly between Levels II and III—and when they slip into that Level I place, they recover as quickly as possible.

The Coach Is Listening

Everything in coaching hinges on listening—especially listening with the client’s plan and purpose in mind: Is the client on track with his vision? Is she living her values? Where is he today? The coach is listening for signs of life, the choices clients are making, and how those choices move them toward balance or away from it. The coach is listening, too, for resistance and turbulence in the process. Listening is the entry point for all of the coaching. In one sense, all the other contexts depend on listening at Levels II and III. Listening, then, is the gateway through which all the coaching passes.

As coaches listen, they make choices that change the direction and focus of coaching. That’s what we mean by the “impact” of listening. One of the ways this impact shows up is in the spontaneous choice of which coaching skill to use next.

COACHING SKILLS

The following coaching skills are generally associated with the context of listening. Of course, effective listening is a prerequisite for the use of all the coaching skills. For this section, we selected the skills that seem particularly appropriate responses to a listening situation.

Articulating

This skill is also known by a longer name: “Articulating what’s

going on.” With your listening skills at Level II and Level III fully engaged, you have a heightened sense of awareness. You have a picture of what is going on with the client at this moment. When you combine that sense of what is happening right now with what you know about this client, you have a tremendous amount of information. Articulation is the ability to succinctly describe what is going on. Clients often can’t see for themselves what they are doing or saying. Or perhaps they can see the details but not the bigger picture. With this skill, you share your observations as clearly as possible, but without judgment. You tell clients what you see them doing. Sometimes, articulation takes the form of the hard truth, and it can confront: “I see you’re continuing to schedule evening and weekend time away from your family. You’ve said in the past that your family is a high priority, and this overtime work seems inconsistent with that commitment. What’s up?” Not sidestepping the mess in the road is one way you live up to your coaching commitment. Articulating—as in pointing out the mess—is part of the coach’s job. Cleaning up the mess is the client’s job.

Articulating is a skill that helps clients connect the dots so they can see the picture they are creating by their action or, sometimes, lack of action. As the coach, you have a responsibility to articulate what you see but at the same time, as with all of the coaching skills, not feel attached to being right about it. This ability to boldly say what you see without needing to be right, allowing plenty of room for counteroffers and different interpretations, is key to the Co-Active nature of the skill. As long as coaches can let go of the pressure or the need to be right, there is tremendous freedom to speak what appears

to be true—and it is a great gift to clients to hear this expressed.

Sample Dialogue

Coachee: ... so that's why I came up with this alternative plan. I think it's a reasonable alternative. I think I can make the deadlines they've set.

COACH: Can I tell you what it sounds like over on this side of the line?

Coachee: Sure. You see a hole in there somewhere?

COACH: Actually, no. I'm sure the plan is sound. What I see, though, is an old pattern of accommodating other people's demands, almost no matter how unreasonable, at personal cost to you. It's one of the things you said you wanted to change. This looks like backpedaling.

Clarifying

Many of us have a tendency to operate from vague or incomplete thoughts and unresolved feelings. We may leap to conclusions or draw conclusions based on sketchy information. Clients may ramble or get caught up in their own stories. They may be drifting in a fog, trying to paddle their way out. They get stuck in fuzzy thinking and outdated ways of looking at their world. They may be reading old maps. Coaches serve as a resource to help clients create greater clarity.

The skill of clarifying is a combination of listening, asking, and reframing. Sometimes it's simply testing different perspectives: "Here's what I'm hearing ..." "Is that right?" "It sounds like you're looking for..." Clarifying brings the image into sharp focus, adds detail, and holds it up for inspection, so

the client can say, “Yes! That’s it!” It’s a way to move past the fog and get back on course.

Sample Dialogue

Client: ...unless he decides to go to New York. In that case, I’ll stay here, at least for a while.

COACH: It sounds like there are two separate decisions for you to make, maybe three, and they’re more dependent on what he does than on what you want. Help me out here.

Client: It sounds like I’m waiting for him to make his move before I make my decision.

COACH: And it sounds like you need to decide (a) whether you want that job at all, (b) whether it’s worth uprooting your life to have it, and then maybe (c) whether the relationship is sustainable. Or something like that.

Client: Sustainable under what conditions, really. Okay. I’ve got some work to do here.

Meta-View

Get in the imaginary helicopter with the client, take it up to about 5,000 feet, and look down on the client’s life. This is the coaching skill of meta-view. It is especially useful when the client is in a rut and can only see six inches of dirt on each side. Meta-view presents the big picture and opens up room for perspective. The coach might ask, “What do you see from up here? What’s the truth you can see from this vantage point that you couldn’t see down there?” The meta-view reconnects

clients to their vision of themselves and a fulfilling life. When they're struggling at the foot of the mountain, looking up at the daunting work to be done, meta-view allows them to float above it and get a fresh perspective.

Another way to look at the meta-view is to see it as an elevated platform—a high place where coaches can stand to survey the client's life with all its circumstances and issues. The coach can see more than the client can from this vantage point. In fact, that is the coach's job: to maintain clarity of perspective and hold the big picture. This platform allows the coach to speak from outside the details of the immediate conversation. If the client is struggling with a coworker, for example, the coach might say, "This story reminds me of the conversation you had with your ex-boss and the situation with your sister. Is there a pattern here?" Another example might be the client who appears to be making a great effort but never gets anywhere. In this case, the coach might say, "There seems to be a lot of struggle. What are you getting out of your suffering?" In this last example, the meta-view is from a higher level that captures the underlying theme. Meta-view presents a panoramic view of the journey.

Meta-view is a useful way to provide context, especially when the situation makes it easy to be drawn into the details of a problem. For example, a coachee comes to the coaching session worried about the reaction she expects over the upcoming firing of a team member. The coach asks her to look at the situation from the meta-view—from the point of view of building a work culture—rather than focusing on hurt feelings or upsets. What are the costs to the organization of not firing that person? How will the firing affect communication and trust

among coworkers in the long run?

Metaphor

The skill of metaphor enables you to draw on imagery and experience to help the client comprehend faster and more easily. The question “Are you drifting in a fog?” creates a picture, an experience, that engages the client at a very different level than “Are you confused?,” which addresses the client’s intellect. Clients can step into a picture of drifting in a fog. They know what it looks like and feels like. It’s a whole experience. Metaphor provides rich imagery for exploration, and if the metaphor doesn’t land in a way that bursts into insight, coaches can always try something else.

Acknowledging

The coaching skill of acknowledgment strengthens the client’s foundation. The client can stand straighter after a true acknowledgment. This skill addresses who the client is. Praise and compliments, in contrast, highlight what people do: “Good job on that report, Janet.” Or they highlight the opinion of the person giving the praise or the impact on the person giving the compliment: “Your presentation was thoughtful and inspiring to me.” Acknowledgment recognizes the inner character of the person to whom it is addressed. More than what that person did, or what it means to the sender, acknowledgment highlights who the sender sees: “Janet, you really showed your commitment to learning.” “You took a big risk.” “I can see your love of beauty in it.” Acknowledgment often highlights a value that clients honored in taking the action. The client values fun: “You made it really fun for yourself. Congratulations. I know you had to

take a risk to do that.” Or the client values honesty: “Great job. You took a stand for honesty and authenticity. It wasn’t easy.”

Acknowledgment is almost a context of coaching. At some level, coaches are always supporting who clients must be in order to make the changes they want. The client had to be courageous or had to be a person willing to stand up to the fear or had to be tenacious for the sake of a relationship.

The skill of acknowledgment helps the coach celebrate the client’s internal strengths. Acknowledgment helps clients see what they sometimes dismiss in themselves out of a distorted sense of humility or simply don’t see at all. By acknowledging that strength, you, as the coach, give clients more access to it. Clients will know when the acknowledgment is honest and true. They will be more resourceful in the future because they recognize the truth you illuminated.

Acknowledgment might take this form: “Look at what you were able to tell your boss. Think about how far you’ve come in the past four months. Your ability to be clear and ask for what you want is so much stronger today. You’ve really shown you can stand up to the fear and speak your own truth.”

Acknowledgment goes right to the heart of where the client is growing and getting stronger (and, often, feeling the need for validation). When you acknowledge this, you empower clients to keep growing.

There are actually two parts to every acknowledgment in Co-Active coaching. The first part we’ve already covered: delivering the acknowledgment. The second part is noticing the impact on the client. This is a way for the coach to make sure that the acknowledgment was truly on target. Notice the client’s reaction. By listening at Level III, you will know if you found

the right description of who the client had to be in that situation. The acknowledgment will definitely land in a way you can hear, sense, and see. It is enormously moving—and rare—for clients to be seen and known in this way. That’s the power of acknowledgment.

Sample Dialogue

Coachee: Maybe I should have kept my mouth shut. It just gets me into trouble.

COACH: What you did was take a stand for treating people right, all people, all the time. And you spoke up even though you knew it would come at a cost. That’s who you are.

Coachee: Thanks. I may never get the Popularity Award on that team, but at least I’ll be able to sleep at night with a clear conscience.

Exercises

1. Listening at Levels I and II

The goal of this exercise is to listen completely at Level I—that is, focused entirely on your own thoughts and opinions. To do this exercise, ask a friend or colleague to take a half hour or so to play the Level I and Level II listening games with you.

LEVEL I

Describe Level I listening to your partner and ask that person to describe a trip he or she took, including stories about things that went well and things that didn't go so well. As your partner tells the story of the trip, your job is to listen to the words and interpret the story entirely in terms of your own experience. Make frequent comments in which you offer your opinion. Think about how you would have done the trip differently or how you might improve on your partner's story. What's going on in you while this other person is talking? What does this story remind you of in your own life?

After fifteen minutes or so (if you last that long), tell each other what it was like to listen at Level I and what it was like to be listened to at Level I.

LEVEL II

Work with the same partner—and the same story—for about fifteen minutes. But this time, without describing Level II, be curious. Ask questions, clarify, and articulate what you see. Be alert for your partner's values as they are expressed in the story. Stay completely focused on your partner by listening and responding at Level II.

Tell each other what it was like to listen at Level II and what it was like to be listened to at

Level II. How was the experience different from the Level I listening?

2. Listening at Level III

Take a field trip or two to venues where the Level III activity is likely to be noticeable, such as a library, a hotel lobby, the waiting area in an emergency room, or an airport bar. Pay attention to your awareness at Level III. Notice how people are feeling: angry, frustrated, joyful, bored, at peace, anxious? What else do you notice about the environment? What is the buzz in the room? Notice where the energy is in the room and how it shifts as people arrive or depart. Write down your impressions. Then try listening at Level III with your eyes closed. How is it different? What do you note that you didn't notice with your eyes open? Compare a church sanctuary to a fast-food restaurant. What are the differences as you listen at Level III?

Variation: Have a friend enter the room clearly annoyed and angry. Notice how the room reacts at Level III. Or have two friends enter the room and start a loud, rude conversation. Notice how the Level III energy changes.

3. Meta-View

A meta-view is the big picture. It is part theme, part positioning statement, and part vision. Here are some examples of metaviews:

- Launching a new life
- Being in transition
- Struggling with change
- Drifting at sea
- High-speed action machine
- Peaceful unfolding

What is the meta-view for your own life today? Write down the names of ten close friends or relatives. What is the meta-view for each of them at this time?

4. Metaphor

Create a metaphor for each of the following client situations:

- Stuck between two appealing choices
- About to enter an exciting new period with a lot of unknowns
- After a long period of inaction, everything happening at once
- Chaotic work environment

- Two new romantic relationships
- Money losses because of mismanagement
- Going from too little exercise to overdoing it
- Making great progress building the business until the interruption
- Success
- Sadness
- Series of windfalls
- Exhaustion
- Denial

5. Acknowledging

List five friends or coworkers. Write an acknowledgment of who they are or who they have been in order to get to where they are today. Write an acknowledgment for yourself.

CHAPTER 4

Intuition

Maybe you've had an experience like this: You're driving in the country on back roads that aren't marked very well. You come to an intersection of two roads and instinctively turn to the right, trusting your sense of direction. Or this may have happened: You're having dinner with a friend. Everything seems normal. The conversation has its usual flow. And then suddenly you ask, "What's wrong? Is there something you need to tell me?" To you, something just seemed out of tune. It may have been a gut feeling. Maybe you've made an unexpected phone call to someone or spontaneously mailed a card to a friend. You weren't sure quite why you did it then—and later you found out that the timing was important for some reason. Some people have great hunches about investments. Others get a feeling about the answer to a question even when it doesn't seem to make much sense. They'd rather trust their instincts about some things because the feeling is so much stronger than the data.

These are all examples of intuition at work, of gathering nonempirical information—usually in response to a question, spoken or unspoken. *Which way to turn? What's going on with her? Which investment to choose? Which job is better suited to me? Why did the coachee just withdraw in our conversation?* Intuition comes up with a response.

Speaking from your intuition is extraordinarily valuable in coaching. It is right up there with the ability to listen deeply

and deftly. Yet, even though we can define it in words, the experience of intuition is sometimes hard to explain—which also makes it difficult for some people to accept. For many people, the trouble with intuition starts with the difficulty of verifying that it’s “real.” Sometimes there’s no observable evidence for the conclusion. In some cases, the conclusions people derive from their intuition are actually contrary to observable evidence. People who operate from their intuition will say things like, “I know because my intuition is usually right about these things.”

Those who have trouble believing in intuition frequently treat it as guessing or being lucky. They just don’t understand, trust, or believe in intuition. Facts that can be measured, recorded, verified—that’s what people frequently say they want when they’re making decisions. It’s certainly the scientific research model and the method advocated by a majority of people. People are sometimes shy about admitting they have used their intuition. Even those with intuition in abundance are often reluctant to use it, or admit they have used it, and so this ability atrophies in all of us. That’s too bad, because it’s a powerful asset in coaching.

The Known versus the Unknown Universe

Most of us have come to believe that the known universe is within hand’s reach. It is within our field of vision, our range of hearing, accessible to our five senses. A thing is known when others corroborate it and come up with the same data. Intuition, however, is not directly observable—although sometimes its effects are. Like the wind in the trees, it may not be visible, but

we can see and hear its effects. That's why it is sometimes called the "sixth sense." It is a sensitivity that goes beyond the physical world.

Suppose someone says, "It's going to rain today." You ask, "How do you know?" The answers might be:

I heard the National Weather Service report on the radio.

There was a red sky this morning.

The barometer on the wall has been dropping fast all morning.

The wind is from the east and clouds are building in the west.

I feel it in my bones.

I just know.

Of course, some people really do feel approaching rain in their bones. The point is that there are many ways of knowing. One of those ways is scientifically verifiable evidence, but there is also "just knowing." When you look at this list of possible answers, you might want to ask, *Which source is right?* A different question would be, *Which one do I trust?* Many people would say there's a direct relationship between what they can observe and their confidence in knowing. For these people, their trust is in the concrete experience. They would also say that intuition is way down on the trust scale—maybe even 0 percent for reliability.

But instead of insisting that there is only one form of knowing, let's suppose there are two. Conventional, observable knowing is one form; intuition is the second. Together these two dimensions give depth and perspective to any issue.

But Is It Right?

Part of the difficulty of describing intuition as a way of knowing starts with the definition of “knowing.” One way of looking at intuition says that it is neither right nor wrong—it’s more like a nudge we receive. For example, answer these questions: *What day of the week is tomorrow? What is tomorrow’s date? What season will it be tomorrow? What will the weather be like during this particular season in this particular year? What’s your theme during this season of your life in this particular year?* Notice that the answer to each question is found in a different place. One of the places is your memory, another place is your logical mind, another place is your history. And perhaps another place is your intuition. What if intuition were a place—not a place we are used to visiting, perhaps, but simply a place that we go to, like memory, that provides us with an answer. We take the nudge and give it expression.

In order to express our intuition in words, we make an interpretation. It’s our interpretation of the intuitive nudge that can be off target. The intuitive impulse itself was neither right nor wrong. Imagine this scenario: Your coachee is in the midst of a report about the action she took last week. It’s a great report, with one success after another. She’s followed through on everything just as she said she would. But your intuition tells you she’s holding something back. So despite the overwhelming evidence of accomplishment, you say, “My intuition tells me there’s something you’re not saying about last week. Is that true?” Your intuition gave you a nudge. Your interpretation is that the client is holding back, so that’s what

you say. It doesn't matter whether you are right or wrong about your interpretation. If the client is holding back—great, you opened a door to talk about that. If the client says she isn't holding anything back—great, you reinforce the success story. The thing about intuition and coaching is that intuition always forwards the action and deepens the learning, even when it lands with a clang instead of a melodious ping.

Intuition often shows up in unexpected ways in the coaching conversation. Sometimes it's a hunch. Or it might appear as a visual image or an unexplained shift in emotion or energy. The important thing to remember in coaching is to be open to intuition—trusting it, aware of it, and completely unattached to the interpretation. In the end, intuition is valuable when it moves the client to action or deeper learning. It is irrelevant, really, whether your intuition was “correct.”

Sample Dialogues

Example A: Something Overlooked

Client: It's like I've run out of options, and I'm worn out.

Doing the same things over and over, talking to the same people, showing the same old résumé. Even when the faces and names change, it's all a repeat performance.

COACH: My intuition tells me there's something else—something that's been overlooked. Like it's right there in front of you but you don't see it. What could that be?

Client: I don't know. I feel like I've been going down this road for so long that I'm in a rut.

COACH: The road's a good image; let's work with that.

Imagine there's a fence running along this road, and there's a gate in the fence. What's the gate?

Client: It's the road not taken.

COACH: And where does that road lead? If you were going to make something up, what would that be?

Client: Actually, it reminds me of my grandparents' home in Connecticut. My grandfather is the only person in our family who worked for himself. I thought he was about the smartest man alive to be able to do that. I really admired his independence.

COACH: What does the gate mean to you in your own life?

Client: That gate's always been there—and I've always walked past, because I thought I wanted security. This could be the time for me to take a serious look at what it would be like to create my own sense of security, working for myself.

Example B: Drawing on Coachee Interest

Coachee/Employee: ... by the end of the third quarter.

Which means I will need to just about double my output—comparing last year to this year. I really want to hit the mark, I really do, but I just don't see how it's possible.

(Internal) COACH: How would the marathon runner do it?

Coachee/Employee: Where did that come from?

(Internal) COACH: Intuition, I guess. You once told me you were a marathon runner. Isn't that right?

Coachee/Employee: Not since I took this job, with these

hours, but yeah, in the past.

(Internal) COACH: So, looking at the task ahead as if it were a long-distance race, what do you know you need to do?

Coachee/Employee: That's easy. Draw up a schedule that builds steadily over time—like a long-distance training plan.

Intuitive Intelligence

Another way to think of intuition is to regard it as a kind of intelligence, like musical intelligence or visual intelligence. All of us who are not blind or color-blind can identify colors. We start in preschool, and many of us add to our color vocabulary over the years, becoming more adept at recognizing colors. Artists learn to identify and name many shades of colors. In their minds, they can picture the subtle differences between hundreds of shades. Intuition is like that. It is an intelligence everyone has been given in some measure, and we can develop it just as artists and musicians develop their talents.

One of the interesting things about intuition is its elusive quality. Looking too intently for it makes it more difficult to find. If you are working too hard to find your intuition, your attention is on you and your efforts. By shifting your attention to the question or the other person and opening the channel, you can more easily find the answer. The key seems to be to take a soft focus, be open. Your intuition is there, giving you messages or clues, just below the surface. This is the paradox of intuition: an open hand will hold it; it will slip through a fist.

Observation and Interpretation

We have said that intuition starts with a nudge, a feeling. It could also be an observation, although it might not be clear that you have observed something specific. Calling it simply an “observation” makes it neutral. You can say “I have a feeling,” or “I have an observation,” or “I have an intuition,” and no one can dispute it. It is your feeling, observation, or intuition. What happens next is often an interpretation of the feeling, intuition, or observation. We need to put some words around this very subjective nudge. It is natural to give the intuition a meaning, and it is this interpretation of the intuition that can be off base.

For example, in listening to your coachee, you sense something that is unsaid. It’s as if you can hear a note that is out of tune. You might say: “Something doesn’t sound quite right here. Help me out if I’m getting this wrong, but it feels like you’re holding something back, something important. What’s your sense of this?”

In this example, you are communicating an observation: the feeling that something doesn’t sound quite right. And you are also communicating an interpretation: something is being held back. If you jump right to your interpretation, it will too often come out as a conclusion, an accusation, or a judgment. The coachee’s job is to take the information you provide from your intuition and apply it to his or her situation. What fits? What doesn’t fit? In the end, it is the coachee who comes up with the conclusion.

The lesson here is that if you’re going to use your intuition effectively, you can’t be attached to your interpretation. In fact, this desire to be right about their interpretations is often the

reason people hold back their intuition. They're afraid of being wrong or appearing foolish.

The best approach is to be prepared. When you express your intuition, clients may disagree. Even so, they will learn as much as if your intuition were somehow "correct." What was correct was the intuition to say something. What was correct was whatever the client learned. What's more, clients count on your intuition. When you hold back, you withhold a crucial source of information and sensing. The key lesson: do not be attached to your intuition, no matter how certain you feel. Being attached to being right is something you do for your sake. Coaching is for the sake of the client.

Finding Your Own Access Point

We develop our access to intuition in the same way we develop talents or muscles. Intuitive fitness is just as possible as physical fitness. Fortunately, coaching is an intuition fitness center. In practical terms, how do we find access to our intuition, especially if we're not accustomed to looking for it? It can be somewhat elusive. Compared to the triceps muscle, which is in pretty much the same place for all of us, intuition is found in a different place for each of us.

Many people find their intuition in the body—in their chest or stomach. It's no wonder people talk of intuition as a "gut response" or a feeling "in my gut." Some feel a burning on the forehead or a tingling in the fingers. For others, intuition is not felt in the body at all. It may be above you, or it might be a bubble that surrounds you. Take some time to find out where you sense your intuition. Stop, pay attention, and listen to your

body or your experience at that point in order to determine where the communication is coming from.

You may “see” your intuition in a visual way or feel it kinesthetically. Some people find that they’re better able to access their intuition by standing up. For others, the connection is definitely verbal. Whatever your access point, eventually you’ll need to verbalize the nudge from your intuition. You make sense out of the sensation by giving words to it. Let’s be absolutely clear about this: your responsibility as a coach is to speak what your intuition gives you. Clients get to decide what is useful about your intuitive nudge.

The Intuitive On/Off Switch

Speaking boldly from your intuition may be somewhat new for you. Until your intuition becomes a familiar and easy tool to use, you may want a way to be reminded of it while you coach. You might post a note over your phone or wear your wristwatch on the opposite wrist. You could try standing up if you usually sit down. Bottom line: intuition is a powerful asset in your coaching, well worth the practice. And the good news is that your intuition is always on tap. You don’t have to generate it any more than you have to generate the electricity to run the lights in your home. You simply have to remember to turn it on.

Blurring It Out

Even after the nudge of intuition, there is often a natural tendency to hold back, to analyze it, to check and see if it is right or if this is the right time to say something. Unfortunately, by the time you’ve performed a set of validation tests on your intuition, the client has moved on to an entirely different phase

of the conversation. Your moment is lost. Intuition is like a small flash of light that is already beginning to fade as soon as it appears. The most powerful moment is the first. Holding back out of fear and timidity, hesitating, will allow it to pass by. That's a shame, because blurting out your intuition can often create a dramatic shortcut in the coaching conversation, boring through many layers.

As coaches, we sometimes think we need to track the logical unfolding of a conversation, hooking together question and response and question and response in a neat sequence. This is an excellent way to build new learning and discovery with clients, but it is not the only way. Being willing to risk a jump with your intuition, taking the chance you'll end up with either a beautiful dive or a horrendous belly flop, gives you another way to go directly to something you can feel in the conversation that you may not be able to fully articulate or logically diagram in the moment. This willingness to fail at it, bow in good humor, and press on gives you license to use your intuition with more freedom.

Getting the Intuitive Hit

Sometimes intuition comes in the form of words, but it could just as easily be in shapes or sounds, as a feeling or a body sensation. Your intuition might communicate to you through a sense of heaviness, an ache, a mood. Sometimes the intuitive hint arises from the conversation itself. Sometimes it is out there in the environment. A scene outside the office window might inspire an intuitive remark. The scene creates an image ... which your intuition signals to you ... and you share with your client ... and then you see where it goes from there. For

example, your coachee is describing her concerns about the impact of an upcoming reorganization in her area of responsibility. She wants to sort out the important issues, and she's wondering what the right course of action is. You look out the window and notice it is a crisp fall day, one of the first. It's a strong impression, and you mention it: "I'm noticing it's a beautiful fall day. The leaves are changing color; the air is cooler today. What does that bring up for you?" It might suggest a sense of the changing seasons in her life and give her the means for sorting out the changes before her. Or it could remind her of chores that need to be done to get ready for winter—action steps in preparation for big changes. The source of the intuition is irrelevant. What is relevant is what happens to the client.

Phrasing It

This is a crib sheet for expressing intuition. You can use any of the following phrases to open your intuitive expression, and, of course, this is not a definitive list. In fact, it's good practice to simply begin with one of these phrases, having no idea of what will come out of your mouth, trusting that your intuition will fill in the blanks as you go along:

I have a sense ...

May I tell you about a gut feeling I have?

I have a hunch that ...

Can I check something out with you?

I wonder if ...

See how this fits for you.

And perhaps the best one of all is also the simplest and most

direct:

My intuition tells me ...

Intuition is not magic, although sometimes it might feel like that, especially when we're delighted with the results. Intuition is like listening. It is a powerful talent that can be used to help clients move into action or deepen their learning.

Coaching Skills

The following coaching skills are associated with intuition, although they are not exclusive to that context. We chose these skills for this section because they naturally come from a place of intuition or help give intuition an opening for expression. We listed metaphor under the listening context, but it could just as easily be included here, since metaphor is often drawn from intuition.

Intruding

Because most coaching sessions are brief, it may be necessary to intrude on the client's report or storytelling in order to get to the heart of the matter. As coach, you use your Level III awareness to decide when it's time to do that. Rather than wait for a socially polite break in the conversation, you interrupt and redirect the conversation or ask a question. Often your intuition urges you to intrude.

Note that it isn't necessary to be rude, although your interruption may be perceived by some as rude, especially in parts of the world where such behavior is considered a faux pas. Remember, too, that clients usually know when they're droning

on and on. If you don't redirect this type of rambling, clients begin to think of the coaching session as a place to tell stories, and before long they're dissatisfied and ready to abandon the coaching relationship. Clients do not want to use up all their time in a coaching session with "and then I ..." or "and she said ..." Some clients will also keep talking until you say something. In their desire to be good clients or to be thorough, they keep pressing on, hoping you will step in and save them or get the conversation back on track.

In general, it's best if you prepare your clients for these types of intrusions at the beginning of your coaching relationship. Explain that you'll sometimes interrupt the conversation in a way that may surprise them. Let them know that a coaching conversation is different from chitchatting with a friend over coffee. You may need to interrupt, and you ask that they not take it personally. Ask them to let you know if they feel offended so that the two of you can talk about it again if necessary. This should be all the permission you need, as a coach, to intrude whenever it seems appropriate.

Maybe you still feel reluctant to intrude, thinking that it's not your style. Here's the real point: You're not intruding on them; you're intruding on the story that gets in the way, that obscures and fogs the picture. Would you really rather be perceived as polite, or nice, than intrude to help your clients get to the heart of the matter? Remember that coaching is about the client, not the coach. Coaching is therefore not for the faint of heart.

Your job as coach is to work with whatever comes up and to leave your agenda and ego out of the conversation. However, there are times when you will need to take charge. Your

experience and training in coaching give you the authority you need to serve the client. Holding back, being nice at this point, does not serve the client's best interests. There will be times when you'll have to jump in to clarify, make a strong request, pose a powerful challenge, or tell the hard truth. Because there is no hard-and-fast rule, this is a good place for trusting your intuition on when to intrude.

Coaches also sometimes fail to intrude because they believe they need more information, more background or context, before they can begin intervening with a coaching question. It's true that it is sometimes important to hear the story for its context. It may also be necessary so that clients feel heard, listened to; in this case, it is important for the sake of the relationship. But we assume you are already skilled at listening well to the story. What many coaches need is more practice intruding. The skill of intruding helps cut off unnecessary reporting—which can be a smoke screen put up by the client to avoid getting to the more challenging issues. Intruding accelerates the process of getting to the core: the action and the learning.

Sample Dialogues

The following dialogues are between a manager and the manager's direct report.

Example A: Poor Use of the Skill

Coachee: It's Mary again. She is so unbelievably contrary. If I say I think we should go east, she says no, we should head west. If I say the only way to meet the deadline is to hire outside help, she says no, it's up to us, it just means

we need better teamwork. Teamwork! What could be more hypocritical? Over and over I've asked her to be a more involved member of the team. And it's always, "I don't have the time" or "This is your team to run." You know, just excuse after excuse. She's the one who's constantly undermining the team.

COACH: It's got to be frustrating trying to work with someone like that.

Coachee: Well, yeah. Did I tell you her latest?

COACH: More of the same, I'm sure.

Coachee: Of course. It doesn't end ... blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Example B: Good Use of the Skill

Coachee: It's Mary again. She is so unbelievably contrary. If I say I think we should go east, she says no, we should head west. If I say the only way to meet the deadline is to hire outside help, she says no, it's up to us ...

COACH: Sounds like an endless battle of wills.

Coachee: I'll say.

COACH: What will change the game?

Coachee: Excuse me? I'm not sure what you mean.

COACH: What will it take to break the cycle? What are the strengths you bring to this situation?

Coachee: Well, that's interesting ... Compassion comes to mind. It's a huge value of mine.

COACH: How will being compassionate help break up this

battle?

Blurting

We've touched on the importance of blurting. Odd as it may sound, blurting is actually a skill worth developing. Most of us spend so much time trying to analyze and figure things out that we miss the opportunity to jump into action.

In coaching, it actually serves the client to go right into the messiness without sorting it out first. It's better to dive in and be willing to look a little clumsy. This often builds more trust than if you are always the polished, professional authority, always in control. Being clumsy or messy, and therefore more human, is also more authentic. And if you don't have to look good, your clients don't have to look good either. For example, as coach, you might say, "I'm not sure what the right words are here, but it's something like ..." or "Let me just talk out loud for a minute. I'm not sure exactly what I want to say here."

Clients and Their Intuition

It's worth noting that watching the coach work with intuition allows clients to experiment and take risks with their own intuition. In fact, learning the coaching principles, contexts, and skills can be a great benefit to clients. Clients who become proficient at listening at Levels II and III, for example, have a chance to be much more effective in their relationships at work and at home. Learning to clarify or to keep the meta-view in their personal lives will be a tremendous advantage, too.

In teaching clients to work with intuition, begin by asking them to simply spend some time noticing their intuition and

playing with it. For clients who are not accustomed to accessing their intuition, you might ask them to just experiment, play with intuition, and urge them to free themselves from any attachment to doing it “right.” Prepare them for the appearance of their internal skeptic—in addition to the external skeptics they are likely to encounter.

Exercises

1. Intuition

Intuition is the sixth sense that helps us respond to a question. Sometimes the question is explicit and posed; sometimes it's part of the background of the conversation. In coaching, there is always a question in the air about the client's life.

To practice your intuition, meet with a friend or a colleague in a quiet place where the two of you can be undisturbed for a while. Have the person write down a series of open-ended questions about his or her life. Ask the other person to choose one question from the list and repeat the question out loud, reading it more than once, with a brief space of quiet between each repetition of the question. The two of you will then concentrate on the question for three to five minutes, with no conversation. Your goal is to increase your concentration on the question

and open yourself to whatever your intuition offers. At the end of the time period, tell the person everything that occurred: the random thoughts, the feelings, anything you noticed in terms of visual images, sounds, smells, and touch, along with whatever else you may have noticed or anything that distracted you. Some of what you report from your intuition is sure to connect for the other person. As soon as that intuitive hit happens, ask what the connection is and explore that area for greater awareness.

You can double the intrigue in this exercise by having the person write the questions on slips of paper and then fold the slips so the questions can't be read. Pick a piece of paper from the pile, keeping the question hidden. Then you both spend three to five minutes concentrating on the question you picked even though you haven't read it. Again, report whatever comes up from your intuition. Then read the question and ask the person for comments. Where were the connections? Where does this lead?

2. Intruding

Sit down with a friend and let that person know that in order to practice the skill of intruding, you are going to interrupt as he or she talks. Have your friend tell a story from a significant period of his or her life. It could be a learning experience from school. It could be a story about

meeting his or her best friend. Ask your friend to pick a story that can be stretched, since it's important that the story go on and on. As your friend is telling you the story, your job is to interrupt and change the course of the storytelling by using a coaching skill:

- Ask your friend to summarize, “What did that mean to you?”
- Interrupt with a provocative question (not a question for more information), such as, “What did you learn from that?”
- Interrupt by articulating what is going on in the story at that moment.
- Interrupt with a request.
- Intrude by announcing your intention to interrupt: “I’m going to interrupt here.”
- Language for interrupting might include: “Excuse me, you just ...” or “Let me ask...”

CHAPTER 5

Curiosity

As a context for coaching, curiosity may be the quality that starts the process and the energy that keeps it going. The most effective coaches seem to be naturally curious and to have developed their curiosity in a way that opens doors and windows for clients. Being genuinely curious and eager to play with whatever shows up is at the heart of a Co-Active coaching relationship.

A Different Way of Asking

Curiosity starts with a question. The interesting thing about a question is that it automatically causes us to start looking. For example, when you read the question, “Is it cold or hot outside today?” chances are that you instantly started thinking about the weather in your town. We have this Pavlovian response to a question. It nearly always throws us in the direction of the question, looking for an answer. Simply posing the question shifts the focus of the conversation. Being curious has the same effect. Coaches naturally draw their clients’ attention to those things they both become curious about—like what clients are most enthusiastic about or what gets in the way of having that every day. And yet, being curious about these aspects of a client’s life is not the same as gathering information. Curiosity is a different way of discovering.

Our experience in school trained us to gather information by asking specific questions that enable us to deduce answers. In

that environment, we learned that questions have specific answers—in fact, right answers. Even essay questions have correct answers that are specific, concrete, and measurable. We learned that questions are used to narrow the possibilities. This is the deductive method. We learned to fill in the blanks, and we learned about being scored on our ability to get the right answers.

There is a big difference between conventional questions that elicit information and curious questions that evoke personal exploration. The following examples illustrate the differences between the two types of questions:

<i>Information Gathering</i>	<i>Curious</i>
What topics will you include in the report?	What will finishing the report give you?
How much exercise do you need each week?	What would “being fit” look like for you?
What training options are available?	What do you want to know that you don’t know today?

And the deadliest questions of all in this style of information gathering are the questions that ask for a yes or a no answer. These simply erect a huge stop sign in the middle of the conversation. The road ends abruptly, and the coach has to start all over again. Curious questions, however, are open-ended. They take the client on a journey and are easily phrased to avoid sudden stops. Notice the differences in responses that could be elicited by the following types of questions:

Closed

Is this an effective strategy for you?

Is there more to be learned here?

It sounds like you're stuck between those two choices—is that true?

Open

What makes this an effective strategy for you?

How can you double the learning in this experience?

What's another choice you could make besides the two in front of you?

Another form of the closed question is the leading question. The leading question implies that there is a right answer, and this conclusion is built into the question itself. The leading question leaves little true choice. It pretty much forces the learner to come up with the answer the teacher is looking for.

The Value of Curiosity

In coaching, the ideal is to ask truly curious questions with a curious frame of mind. The curious coach doesn't have all the answers. When you are curious, you are no longer in the role of expert. Instead, you are joining clients in a quest to find out what's there. You are exploring their world with them, not superimposing your world on theirs. It is like looking at their world through the wondering eyes of a child.

As a consultant, you gather information so that you can come up with appropriate recommendations. You have the expertise, and you are casting for information to determine where to go. You're like a general contractor who has been hired to come in and build something with the materials you bring to the site. In Co-Active coaching, in contrast, you are curious. You come in as a collaborator with building experience

and expertise, and build with the materials that are there. The information is inside the client. Your curiosity allows the client to explore and discover. It opens a wider range of possibility because it is more flexible. Curiosity invites the client to look for solutions. Co-Active coaches assume the client knows the appropriate solutions and has the resources to address them.

By finding the solutions in themselves—rather than in you (the coach)—clients become even more resourceful. The effect of finding the answers is also very energizing because important learning takes place. Curiosity generates the search, defines and directs it, but it is the exploring that creates learning. And it is the kind of learning that lasts, because it comes from within. With questions that imply a correct or a purely factual answer, we search our inner files for the response that fits: the right answer. With curiosity, we have the experience of exploring, uncovering, digging around, considering, reflecting. This is the learning that leads to sustainable change and growth.

Building the Relationship

Authentic curiosity is also a powerful builder of relationships—an aspect of curiosity that is very valuable in coaching. Imagine yourself at a dinner party seated next to a stranger who seems infinitely curious about you: your life, your work, your interests, what makes you tick, what ticks you off. This kind of curiosity is not only flattering but encouraging. It allows you to reveal a lot about yourself in an unchallenged way, and so you build a connection effortlessly. Now imagine the same dinner party and the same stranger asking questions, but this time the person is not simply curious. Instead, it's your prospective

mother-in-law, and the questions seem to be part of an inquisition. The questions themselves might be exactly the same, but the context is vastly different. Curiosity builds relationships; interrogation builds defenses. In the coaching relationship, curiosity invites the client to search and reveal while permitting safe exploration.

Steering Through Curiosity

The coach's question proposes a direction for looking, and the client's attention is naturally drawn in that direction. With each new question, the coach encourages additional looking along a path—or shifts the path, allowing the curiosity to steer the looking. Intuition and curiosity both guide the coaching conversation. Being curious in coaching is two things: not being attached to a particular path or destination and yet always being intentional about seeking out meaning, uncovering important insight, discovering learning for the client. It is not aimless meandering.

This would be a good time to emphasize that we are talking about curiosity for the sake of the client's discovery and decision making, not the coach's discovery and problem solving. This is an important distinction and is sometimes marked by a very fine line. Yes, of course, it is important for coaches to gather information and background in order to understand the issue under discussion and the client's desires. But in practice, coaches usually need much less information than they think they do. This is especially true of background information. Coaches rarely need to know how things came to be, and they don't need detailed information in order to solve the problem. Clients need to know, and coaches can be most

helpful by guiding the client's discovery and learning.

Developing the Talent

Like listening and intuition, curiosity is a talent. Some people are endowed with a stronger sense of curiosity than others. As with listening and intuition, curiosity can be developed through practice.

The first step is awareness—simply paying attention to being curious. We are so accustomed to feeling we have to know the answer before we ask the question that we sometimes find it nearly impossible to ask without knowing. In coaching, however, you have to learn to stop asking questions as the expert—with the intention of sorting, analyzing, and categorizing the information for later use—and simply ask out of curiosity.

Clients know when the coach is asking a question with a “correct” answer in mind. They sense that they have two choices: either resist answering that question or try to discern the answer the coach is looking for. When the question is asked out of curiosity, they will sense this, too. They will know they are being asked to find their own answers from within.

One technique for developing your curiosity is to use the phrase “I’m curious...” before asking a question. Notice how it changes the nature of the looking. Notice how it shifts the process of looking to the client but at the same time lowers the risk that usually accompanies coming up with the answer. Clients seem more willing to say, “I don’t know,” and then answer anyway. With curiosity, there is both playfulness and an unconditional sense that the answer that emerges is always the right answer because it’s the client’s. This doesn’t mean it can’t

be challenged, however. It's a right answer because it's the client's, not the coach's, but it is also open to further coaching. When you ask the client, "How are you doing with making sales calls?" and the client says, "I'm satisfied with making four calls a day," you can still ask, "Your initial plan was for eight calls a day. What changed?"

Another application of curiosity is to notice the energy shifts in the client's responses using your Level III listening awareness. If your sensing radar picks up hesitation, be curious about that. If you pick up anger or resistance, ask about that. Be curious about a change in pace in the client's conversation—or a more energetic spirit, more jokes, more laughter. Use these clues as signals to pursue your curiosity and turn on your intuition.

How Curiosity Fits in Coaching

At some level, curiosity is one of those tools that is common to all helping professions. Curiosity is especially important in coaching because it taps into deeper sources of information. Asking questions for data will yield analysis, reasons, rationale, explanation. Asking questions out of curiosity will yield deeper—often more authentic—information about feelings and motivation. The information revealed through curiosity is likely to be less censored, less carefully crafted, messier. It will be more real.

The coach demonstrates curiosity in the very first meeting. Almost nothing is more engaging for prospective clients than a coach's genuine curiosity about them, their values, what they find important, what does and doesn't work for them. Curiosity is always present in the ongoing coaching sessions, too, of

course. It is the means of uncovering new answers and new areas to explore, knowing that clients know the answers. Coaches don't need to know. Their job is to be curious.

Sample Dialogue

COACH: I know you keep saying you want to exercise and lose weight—you just brought it up again—but week after week I notice you don't do anything about it. I'm curious. What's stopping you?

Client: Clearly, time is a big issue. You know what my schedule's been the last few months.

COACH: I know you're busy, but let's take a step back and really look at this. Maybe it's not that important?

Client: You mean I could just decide today that I don't care and I'd never have to go to the gym again?

COACH: That possibility certainly lit you up. What's that about?

Client: I hate going to the gym. I hate the smell. I hate all the comparison...

COACH: What is important to you?

Client: My health is important. My dad was overweight and out of shape. He was only sixty-eight when he died.

COACH: Imagine you are healthy and fit. What does that feel like?

Client: It feels great.

COACH: And what works for you?

Client: What would really work for me—at least it did once

before—is having a workout buddy, somebody to exercise with.

COACH: How can you make that happen?

Client: I’ll bet I could find somebody at work who would be interested in exercising during the lunch hour. I could put a notice on the bulletin board.

Coaching Skills

The two skills in this section are ideal examples of the context created by curiosity. Both skills involve provocative, open-ended questions that send clients in search of discovery. The skills reinforce the core of curiosity. This is not about gathering more information; it is about inviting clients to look—not only with their minds, but with their hearts, souls, and intuition—into places that are familiar but that they may see with new eyes. and into places they may not have looked before.

Powerful Questions

A particular kind of curiosity takes the form of what we call “powerful questions.” Asking rather than telling is at the foundation of Co-Active coaching, and the powerful question is a cornerstone. You can see why when you understand what makes questions powerful to begin with. When a person asks you a question, especially a personal question, it sends you in a particular direction to find an answer.

Let’s say a coach asks, “When you work on an important project, what do you consistently do that can jeopardize its successful completion?” The question invites the client to look in a particular direction. Or let’s say someone asks, “What is a

rationale for protecting the rain forests of the world?” Some people might recall seeing a map of rain forest locations. Others may think of images of rain forests or remember the experience of visiting one. Some people may consider the question from an environmental viewpoint or recall articles they have read about the issue. It’s likely that this simple question will take everyone somewhere.

Think of questions as points of a compass. Asking a powerful question is like sending the client not to a specific destination but in a direction filled with possible discoveries and mysteries. Powerful questions invite introspection, present additional solutions, and lead to greater creativity and insight. They invite clients to look inside (*What do you really want?*) or into the future (*Look ahead six months. Standing there, what decisions would you make today?*). A powerful question is expansive and opens up further vistas for the client.

Powerful questions tend to stop people in their tracks, so there is often a sudden hush. Be sure to allow time for the client to reflect and then respond. There is a temptation to fill the momentary silence as if it were a void, or to assume that the client didn’t understand the question. In fact, that silent moment may be full of thoughtful discovery. Just listen and wait. Clients are accustomed to reporting what they know, what they have thought about already; they are not as accustomed to having people ask them really strong, provocative questions that send them into uncharted territory. One way to tell that you are asking powerful questions is the thoughtful consideration clients give to answering. It is possible, in fact, to conduct an entire coaching session with powerful questions. (The Coach’s Toolkit online, <http://www.coactive.com/toolkit>, contains an

extensive sample of powerful questions that will give you a sense of the form.)

Sample Dialogue

Client: I'm just not very happy at work.

COACH: What does that mean—"not very happy"?

Client: I'm bored and I don't feel like the work I do makes much of a difference.

COACH: Let's start with "bored." That's what you don't want. What is it you do want?

Client: I want to wake up in the morning excited about the day. I want to be more creative. I miss that energy and the collaboration.

COACH: What else?

Client: I want to feel like my talents are being used and that my work means something—that I'm making a contribution.

COACH: How can you create that in your work now?

Client: I'm not sure. I guess I never thought of it as possible.

COACH: Give it a go. What's possible?

Using Powerful Questions. Powerful questions fit anywhere and everywhere in coaching—from the original discovery session to the last completion session between coach and client. To use powerful questions powerfully, the coach must be willing to intrude, a skill we discussed earlier. In some

situations, you can't wait for an opening and need to wedge your way in. For example: Your client is just getting into the groove of complaining—once again—about how impossible her work situation is and how helpless she is to change anything. You instantly recognize this groove as a rut, so when she pauses to take a breath, you ask, “What are you tolerating?” or “What is the payoff for you in all of this?” or “What’s another way this could be?” To ask powerful questions, the coach must be very curious and very courageous on the client’s behalf. The coach needs to assume the client has the wherewithal to handle even tough, direct questions.

Powerful Questions versus Dumb Questions. Sometimes the most powerful questions are the ones that sound the dumbest, or, if you prefer, simple and profound. They slide in under the radar. Clients are well trained to handle the complex attack—they are practiced at offering explanations and rationalizations. The dumb question lands like a bomb in all of that. Imagine this situation: Your client has a tightly constructed set of reasons that explain why the situation is so complex, with lots of stories about the factors that limit his success and the difficulty of getting cooperation from this person and that person, and ... In the middle of this, you ask, “What do you really want?” Boom. You could have tested the rationale or looked for ways of expanding perspectives or chipped away at the surface in some other way. But the simplest question, the dumb question, gets to the core.

Here are some other “dumb” questions:

- What does what you want look (or feel) like?

- What's next?
- What about that is important to you?
- What else?
- What did you learn?
- What will you do and when will you do it?
- Who do you need to be?

There are times when you may think the question is too dumb to ask. Go ahead and ask it and surprise yourself. Even if you get the answer you expect, remember that the reason for asking is not so you can hear the answer but so the client can hear the answer and learn from it. The reason for asking the dumb question is to let clients hear the answer: the truth, the new discovery, or the lie they keep telling themselves. It's like underlining. Asking the questions reinforces the learning before clients move on.

Not-So-Powerful Questions and Exceptions. The simpler and more direct, the better, when it comes to making questions powerful. A compound or complex question forces clients to sort out the essence of the question before they can respond, and they may get lost trying to figure it out. The powerful question is powerful because it cuts through to the heart of the issue. Short is good.

The closed-ended question creates a narrow tunnel that usually dead-ends abruptly with a yes or a no or with data. There's not enough depth for further exploration, which is why we recommend avoiding closed-ended questions.

Consider this question: “Is adventure important to you?” The answer could be “yes,” “no,” “very,” or “sometimes.” Compare it to this question: “Where do you want more adventure in your life?” This example also illustrates the exception with yes/no questions. Sometimes the coach is asking for clarification. In the first question, the coach is asking if adventure is a value. Sometimes there is a need to make sure the coach and the client are on the same page.

The “why” question is another example of a question that is often not particularly powerful because it invites the client to look for explanations or analyses. For example: “Why did you decide to move to Delaware?” “Why” questions often unintentionally put clients on the defensive. They feel a need to explain or justify a decision or point of view. A more powerful question based on the same situation might be “What are you moving toward?” or “What values motivated this move to Delaware?”

We point out these tendencies not so you will make it a rule to never ask a “yes/no” or “why” question but so you will pay attention to the impact of the questions you ask. For example, the following “yes/no” and “why” questions could be powerful: “It’s time to stop analyzing and act, isn’t it?” and “Why would you say yes to him and break your promise to yourself?” Given the right context and a tone that matches that context, a “yes/no” or “why” question can have a dramatic effect on clients, calling them to their own commitment.

Homework Inquiry

A homework inquiry is another special kind of question. In its phrasing, it can be identical to a powerful question. The

difference is that the homework inquiry is often posed at the end of the coaching session and is meant to give clients time for continued reflection and exploration. For example: Your client is struggling with money issues—and with working more and consequently having less family time—but she is hounded by a lifelong determination to be rich someday. So you present this question as the homework inquiry for the week: “What is it to be rich?”

A homework inquiry may also be completely unrelated to that session’s material or issues in the client’s life at the moment. Because it appears to be coming out of the blue, this kind of inquiry can produce unexpected and profound results. For example, at the end of the session, you ask the client, “What is your prevalent mood?” The following week, after discussing what the client describes as her prevalent mood, you pose the inquiry, “How is this mood habitual and how does it serve you?”

The homework inquiry is a question asked for the purpose of provoking introspection and reflection. As with any powerful question, there is no right answer. It is not a question that has a resolution. The homework inquiry is set apart by its quality of investigation from many angles and the length of time the client takes to ponder it. Because there is a natural tendency to think that all questions should have their own right answers, you may need to remind the client that the goal of the inquiry is to be curious. In time, the inquiry leads to deeper understanding, new ways of looking at the issue, and more possibilities for action.

Here are some examples of homework inquiries:

- What is the underlying yearning?
- What are you here to do? To create?
- What are you resisting?
- What is it to be inspired?

To help clients stick with the question, coaches may attach action to the inquiry. For example, you might ask clients to post the homework question in strategic places so they continue to notice it throughout the week. It's there in the daily calendar, stuck to the dashboard, posted above the computer, taped to the bathroom mirror, or printed on a card carried in a wallet. The key is to look at the homework inquiry in a new way each time and to keep engaging it at different times every day for fresh perspectives. Other action steps might be to process the question by writing in a journal, drawing pictures, talking to a friend, or going for a walk. You can build accountability into the inquiry by asking clients to phone, e-mail, or text their responses to you before the next session. The homework inquiry is a potent tool in coaching because it takes the coaching out of the session and integrates it into the client's life.

(For more examples, see the Coach's Toolkit online, at <http://www.coactive.com/toolkit>.)

Sample Dialogue

At the end of last week's coaching session, the coach left the client with an inquiry to ponder—a question that could have many different answers at different levels. The homework inquiry was, “Where do you abandon yourself?”

Client: Well, at first I didn't see anything. And then I started realizing my helplessness around my calendar—how I never seem to have enough time because other people are filling up my calendar with appointments.

COACH: “Abandon yourself” in the sense of giving away your time to other people. What's it like when you give away your time?

Client: I noticed I had this habit of saying, “I can't do anything because my calendar is full”—until I finally realized that it's *my* calendar. I get to choose what I put in my calendar.

COACH: Where else do you abandon yourself?

Client: I also noticed it in my relationship. When my partner gets upset with me, I withdraw, disappear, or cave in. I'm getting better at taking a stand, but it's an old pattern.

COACH: What else did you discover with the question?

Client: Well, I just kept looking at it. I also noticed where other people give away their power.

COACH: Where was that?

Client: At a meeting last week. We had the divisional VP in to review forecasts, and some of the people were acting like nervous school-kids in front of the principal. They just completely lost their self-confidence and authority. It was fascinating.

COACH: Was that true for you, too?

Client: More than I'd like to admit. I thought I was more

beyond that than I guess I am.

COACH: Is there more?

Client: No, I think that covers it. Thanks.

COACH: So here's your homework inquiry for next week: where do you take an uncompromising stand?

Client: Okay. I'll chew on that one.

The Power of Being Curious

As a coach, your curiosity leads you to know your clients from the inside out. You learn, you are curious about what you learn, and so you keep asking. Clients in turn keep responding to your curiosity by going inside, too—looking for their own answers, trying to understand their world and the way they operate, what stirs them and what stops them. In time, you get to know their interior workings until, ultimately, you become their voice, asking the questions they themselves would ask. You, as the coach, are in a better position to ask these questions because you are not distracted by self-sabotaging talk, or history, or the opinions of colleagues and the feelings of loved ones, or anything else. The inquiries become more intriguing; the powerful questions become more potent. And in the process, clients adopt some of the strengths of the coaching—as if they're building internal capabilities. Clients learn what it's like to be curious and less judgmental about themselves.

Exercises

1. Curiosity

Spend half an hour in a coffee shop being curious about everyone in the place. Without actually talking to anyone at first, release your curiosity and pose the following questions to yourself: *I wonder where they are out of balance in their lives. I wonder what they value. I wonder what they are missing in their lives, what makes them laugh, where they have constructed self-imposed limits. What do they like about the day? What are their life dreams? What empowers them? What do they like about the people they're sitting with?*

At the end of the half hour, find someone you can spend a little more time with and actually ask that person the curious questions. As you ask the questions, be aware of what is happening with the other person. How does this person respond to you when you are curious? Then look at your own role in the conversation. What do you notice at Level I? At Level II? At Level III? Afterward, be curious about your own curiosity. What did you learn about being curious? What was easy? What was hard? What made it easy or hard? How could you be more curious? What would that give you?

2. Powerful Questions

One of the simplest ways to experience the power of powerful questions is also one of the

most challenging. In this exercise, the goal is to have a ten-minute conversation with another person in which you are allowed to ask only powerful questions: no making statements, no summarizing, no offering advice or telling stories of your own, no drawing conclusions. Your role is to ask powerful questions and nothing more. (You may want to review the list of powerful questions in the Coach's Toolkit online, at <http://www.coactive.com/toolkit>.) Afterward, ask the person for feedback. What was it like when all you did was ask questions? Then tell the person what it was like for you to be confined to questions. What worked for you about that? What made it difficult?

3. Homework Inquiry

A homework inquiry is an open-ended, powerful question that helps clients explore an important area of their lives for a period of time, usually a week or more. To do this exercise, start by reviewing the homework inquiries in the Coach's Toolkit online. Then go back to the list of ten friends or acquaintances for whom you wrote meta-view statements. Using the meta-view and what you know about the person, write a homework inquiry for each one.

CHAPTER 6

Forward and Deepen

The most visible outcome of coaching is also the primary reason clients want coaching in the first place: action. Clients want change; they want to see results. They want to move *forward*. It's also true that "action" will look very different for different clients. For some clients, it will mean achieving specific goals or performing at a higher level. For others, action will mean integrating new practices or firmly establishing habits. For still others, it will be paying attention to the more subjective quality of their lives. In whatever way clients define "action," it will be a focus in their coaching.

In Co-Active coaching, we would say that a second, complementary, and just as important outcome is learning. What clients learn along the way helps them make continually better choices and, ultimately, makes them more competent and more resourceful in the areas they concentrate on in their coaching. In fact, it's this cycle of action and learning over time that leads to sustained and effective change. Clients take action and learn, which leads to more action based on what they learned, and the cycle continues. Coaching is ideal for this process because the relationship is ongoing and is designed to focus on this interrelated pair. All of the coaching skills are used to forward the action and deepen the client's learning.

From the client's perspective, the emphasis in the previous sentence would be on the words "action" and "learning." The coach, however, would focus on "forward" and "deepen."

Action and learning are what the client experiences. To forward and deepen is the job of the coach.

Within the container of the coaching relationship, coach and client work together on the client's behalf. Clients bring an agenda for change. They bring desire and a host of qualities that include willingness to dive in, commitment to their lives, and dedication to their own purpose. They bring the courage to take risks for the sake of change. In the best coaching relationships, clients bring 100 percent of themselves and these qualities. In the same way that coaches are curious for the sake of their clients, coaches also bring an ability and a commitment to forward action and deepen learning, for their clients' sake. We would say that in the best coaching relationships, coaches bring their own 100 percent in four areas: authenticity, connection, aliveness, and courage.

Authenticity

In rock climbing, the device that secures a rope is called an anchor. These ingenious devices are wedged into cracks and openings in the rock wall and can be removed later. They are temporary fixtures, but they are designed to hold a climber's weight, even if the climber falls. A coach is like that anchor. This anchor-coach makes it possible for clients to take the risks they need to take in order to climb on in their lives. It's important that clients be able to depend on that anchor, know that it is real and solid, that it is reliable and will hold.

In human terms, that means you, as the coach, must be yourself, authentically, so that clients can feel the honesty and integrity of who you are. You will be their model of what risk

taking looks like, what it means to be real and honest. When you are authentically yourself, and not playing the role of “professional coach,” you create more relationship and more trust, and clients will swing out more in their own lives. There are times when clients really need to lean into the coaching relationship; at that point, they want to lean into a solid wall, one that is true all the way through, not a flimsy facade.

Authenticity shows up in lots of ways. Personal style is one in particular. Personal style is simply your natural way of being with people, and if humor or eccentricity is an authentic part of your personal style, you need to bring that into your coaching. Coaches sometimes think they have to be serious all the time. This is serious business, after all, they think. Obviously, it is important to take serious situations seriously and to behave professionally, but even so, there is plenty of room for lively engagement. Humor can lighten a situation at just the right time, making it possible for clients to move forward.

Connection

Imagine there is an instrument that can measure the strength of the connection between coach and coachee. This invisible connection exists, like the radio waves used by mobile phones, and there are times when the emissions are strong and the communication is remarkably close, and times when the display on the phone would read “no signal” even though both people are talking.

Part of the coach’s job is to establish, monitor, and maintain the strongest possible connection signal with coachees. This signal strength is especially important when coachees are

moving into new or uncharted territory in their work or their lives. In our model, we call this a Level II awareness, or connection, and coaches monitor by listening at Level III and adjusting as necessary to maintain the connection.

There will be times in the coaching when the coach takes a risk with the coachee: to challenge or to tell the hard truth. If the connection is strong, there will be trust and relationship and a greater opportunity for success.

Aliveness

The doing of coaching is made up of all the skills and methodology. And then there is the being of coaching: the environment in which the coaching takes place. By “environment,” we do not mean the physical environment, although that can play an important part in coaching. We are referring instead to a feeling in the atmosphere between coach and client: it feels very alive.

As a coach, your senses are alert, and you can feel that the client is alert as well. The emotional atmosphere might be almost anything: sad, serene, excited, angry. Alive does not necessarily mean enthusiastic, although that is one of the possible qualities. If you put the environment on a continuum, you might have words like “dead,” “dull,” “remote,” “indifferent” on one end and “alive” on the other. Note that there are times when “alive” will be very dramatic and times when it will be very quiet. Like a really great piece of music, the quiet can sometimes be incredibly alive because it is in contrast with the dramatic movement. Coaches sometimes think that a coaching conversation should be smooth and polished,

even smart. Of course it can be, but not at the expense of being alive. We have all been in conversations that were very alive even when the subject was uncomfortable. In order for clients to leave their comfort zones, there will be times when the coaching will be alive and darned uncomfortable.

Courage

Speaking of uncomfortable, how far are you willing to go for the sake of your client's bold plans and purpose? How courageous are you willing to be on his or her behalf? Your willingness to be courageous will be a model, a mirror for your clients. When you are courageous on their behalf, you demonstrate that you are as committed to their success as they are, on some days even more committed. At those times when clients want to give in, you may need to courageously call them out of their fear or sense of defeat. This does not mean nagging, judging, or shaming them. It means speaking fiercely to the courageous part of your clients while ignoring the part that is self-sabotaging. You do this not for the sake of your ego but for the sake of the client's life and possibility. This is a commitment to be fearless—to care more about the client's agenda than about being liked or winning approval. It may mean taking big risks: risking the client's disapproval or anger, maybe even risking being fired. Fierce courage is a commitment to go to the edge with clients.

Taking Charge

Your job as coach is to forward and deepen. You do that by the choices you make as a coach: you choose to use this skill or that

one; you choose a direction to take, toward the client's fulfillment or balance or process. Clients choose the agenda for their focus, but you choose the tools and manage the time and structure of the coaching session.

Clients are responsible for their action and learning, and almost all of that action and learning takes place between, not during, coaching sessions. In the best coaching interactions, there is a dance between coach and client that has pace, range, ups and downs, ins and outs, and an overall flow that might look smooth or might look disconnected. But the coach takes the initiative in choosing the session's direction.

In the Co-Active coaching model, we emphasize that clients have the answers and coaches are unattached; we emphasize that clients are in charge of the agenda. We do want to be crystal clear, however, that the coach is primarily responsible for forwarding and deepening. That's what it means to take charge of the coaching. Clients expect and depend on the coach to do this. You will still dance with the answers that clients give and be willing to take the coaching in new directions that will move them forward and deeper. Taking charge is not about being stubborn. Ultimately, the coach takes charge for the sake of the client's movement.

That movement has purpose in it, purpose that matters to the client. The coach brings expertise in coaching as a way to help clients stay in motion along their chosen path. If the coach does *not* take charge of the coaching, the coaching drifts or the coach simply reacts to the flavor du jour. Clients come to coaching for a reason—for support or change in some important area of their life. Coaches have a responsibility to take charge of the coaching to optimize this unique opportunity in the client's life.

Accountability

One of the defining qualities of coaching is that it creates accountability: a measuring tool for action and a means for reporting on learning. It is important to be clear here, at the outset, that “accountability” is simply this: clients give an account of their action and learning. There is no judgment, blame, or scolding. Clients give an account of what they committed to: What were the results? What worked, and what didn’t work? What would they do differently next time?

Accountability helps keep clients on track as they plan and commit to action and as they learn from the action they take, or don’t take, in some cases. Accountability gives structure to the ongoing coaching. As coaches, we hold clients accountable—not to see them perform or even to measure how well they perform, but to empower them in making the changes they want to make. Along the way, we celebrate their achievements and dig into the obstacles they encounter. Accountability is the fundamental structure that keeps the conversation going.

It is very important that coach and client have a mutual understanding of what the client will be accountable for, regardless of whether the action plan is very specific or very subjective. The basic questions to ask for clarifying commitments are simple and clear:

- What will you do?
- When will you do it? (*Or on what schedule, if it is a practice or an ongoing action.*)
- How will I know? (*Will there be a specific report? Or ask how the client will track his or her progress and report*

back to you.)

Even when accountability focuses on qualitative goals, there can still be specific accountability. For example: imagine one of your clients wants to focus on his value of creativity and another wants to be a more decisive manager. The accountability might take the form of a homework inquiry for daily journaling: “What does creativity add to my life?” or “What are the qualities of a decisive manager?” The accountability might be in the form of an end-of-the-day report to self: “Today I was creative when ...” or “Today I was more decisive when ...” or “Today I failed to be decisive when ...” These same end-of-the-day reports might be sent to the coach by e-mail along with notes about what the clients are discovering.

Celebrating Failure

That may seem like an odd pairing of words, “celebrating” and “failure” side by side. And yet it may be one of the most important concepts in coaching. Fear of failing is the number one killer of grand plans and good ideas. More than a lack of knowledge or skill, more than the lack of a clear strategy or action plan, the biggest obstacle in the way of progress for clients is the paralysis caused by the fear of failing.

Most of us learn early in life that failure is bad, even shameful. We learn to hide our failures, make excuses for them, or ignore them. Worse than that, we begin to stop taking risks; we become more cautious in order to avoid even the possibility of failing. We start to limit our choices to only those actions that have a high probability of success. And so our choices

become limited, and our field of play becomes smaller. It doesn't have to be that way.

Failure is one of the fastest ways of learning—ask any toddler. Small children do not stay up late at night reading the “how to walk” manual, learning the mechanics. They flop, fall, crawl, stand up, and flop and crawl some more. There are bumps along with steps and statistically more failure than success, but it never seems to dampen their enthusiasm. In order to take the risks that will enable them to walk and run in their lives, clients must be willing to flop, fall, and get back up and learn from the experience. Learning is the key here. Failing at any action, even failing to take action, is a rich learning opportunity. It is this learning opportunity that we celebrate and explore with clients.

Action will lead to learning, but along the way, clients may need to go through the land of failure. Here is an essential distinction that will help you pave the road through that territory: there is a difference between failing at something and being a failure. People are naturally creative, resourceful, and whole. They are not failures, even if they fail sometimes.

In fact, in order to make significant changes in their lives, clients often have to go to the edge of their ability or capacity. Sometimes they go too far and fail; sometimes they don't go far enough and fail by missing the opportunity. Whether a person fails or succeeds, one of the underlying goals is always to look at the learning that results from the experience. That's why we believe that failing is valuable. It is something to honor in clients because it requires courage and commitment to take the risk and to fail. Clients will often learn more from what doesn't work than from what does work. And that is why we can

enthusiastically put the words “celebrating” and “failure” side by side.

At the same time, we recognize that celebrating failure doesn't mean ignoring the disappointment that often accompanies it. Clients may need a little time to absorb the bump before they can dig into the learning that is available there. Celebrating in this sense means having a reverence for, an appreciation of, the client's experience. We have a high regard for failing because so few people are willing to put themselves in that position. It's worth celebrating when it happens.

Calling Forth

Coaches, by their very nature, want to be helpful. They also want to be effective and successful and maybe even respected for their work, but at the core, they have a deep desire to help others. This is just as true for those in an informal coaching role. It's no wonder, then, that coaches jump at the chance to help clients solve problems. That's the obvious way to be helpful: find the problem and solve it, make it disappear. Executives and managers learning to adopt a “coaching approach” with employees often confuse coaching with a softer, milder form of problem-solving, but still problem-solving that they are responsible for—it's just more indirect. The misconception is understandable; it arises from old habits and expectations.

Unfortunately, with this orientation, coaches (or managers as coaches) may become so focused on understanding the problem or the issue that they shift their attention from the client to the

problem. In the long run, it is more helpful for coaches to help clients (or their employees) find their own way and make their own choices. This puts the emphasis back on the person instead of the issue. As coaches, or as managers acting as coaches, we need to remember that we are not merely here to solve problems; we are here to help clients or employees become more resourceful and more capable in their work and in their lives. Our job is to look for and call forth this inner strength and capacity from our clients. We work with clients to forward their action and deepen their learning in these everyday issues so that they can experience the satisfaction and reward of a bigger, more gratifying life. That's what it really means to be helpful.

If we are to call forth our clients, we will need to call ourselves forth, too. There will be times when it is easier or more comfortable to hold back, to play it safe, to coast, to settle for less from our clients. When we do that, we betray an unspoken trust. Those are the times when we as coaches need to find the courage to speak up, to insist or challenge or even demand, on behalf of our clients, that they live up to the capabilities they possess and that we see in them. We need to be ready to call forth the best in people, and sometimes that means we start with ourselves.

Coaching Skills

Each of the following skills is designed to forward the action and deepen the learning. The skills range in effect from tame and collaborative to powerful and assertive; all are designed to help clients address the issues they face. The skillful coach will know when it is time to encourage the creative breadth of

brainstorming and when it is time to light the dynamite of challenging.

Goal Setting

Without a specific goal, there can be endless drifting, a floating on the winds of this good idea and then that one. Goal setting gives clients a specific direction and an action plan for making something real. Naturally, the goals may shift over time as clients make progress, but movement in the first place starts with setting their sights on a goal or outcome.

Goal setting falls into two main categories: first, goals to reach at a specific time in the future and, second, ongoing goals. A goal for a specific time in the future might be “six completed projects by December 31” or “one completed project each month for the next six months.” An example of an ongoing goal would be “working on new projects three hours a day, Monday through Thursday.”

Part of your role as coach will be to help clients create goals from their plans and intentions. Splitting the goal into manageable pieces is the first breakthrough for some clients. Whereas once all they could see was the continent they had to cross, afterward they see many short excursions.

Helping clients with the basics of goal setting can make a big difference in their success. The best goals are specific. They are measurable, or there is some way to track or monitor results. They are action oriented, even if the intention behind the action is qualitative. For example, the goal “think about moving to Alaska” will be strengthened by action. The client could buy a book about Alaska or find a poster that features Alaska. She might write in her journal about her memories of

visiting Alaska or talk to someone who lives there. And when there is a schedule involved, clients are much more likely to take action.

Goal setting may seem so fundamental and obvious to you as a coach that you take it for granted. But even though it is fundamental, its importance and value should not be underestimated. As a coach, you need to have a clear understanding with clients about how you and they will handle goal setting, looking for the ways that work best for each.

Sample Dialogue

Coaching provides a powerful structure for helping clients get into action, stay in action, and learn from their action. Sometimes the action they crave is inaction.

COACH: I got your e-mail. You took Wednesday afternoon off, just like you planned. That's great.

Coachee: It was weird.

COACH: The whole afternoon?

Coachee: Yeah. I almost called in for my messages, but I didn't.

COACH: What did you learn?

Coachee: That the world doesn't collapse if I'm gone for four hours.

COACH: Useful to know. What else?

Coachee: That I hired competent people—people I can trust.

COACH: Anything else?

Coachee: Micromanaging good people annoys them. And it takes up time I could be using to move the company into new areas. I've got to let go of control in some areas. I also learned I need downtime to recuperate. I'll burn out like a flash fire if I keep this up.

COACH: So what's the next step?

Coachee: Raise the bar?

COACH: Right. Now that you've had a taste, what's the stretch?

Coachee: I actually know what it is. I want to start planning a vacation for July. Maybe even for two weeks.

COACH: Sort of takes your breath away, doesn't it? In order to make that happen, what will you do by next week?

Client: I'm planning to visit a travel agent in our building this afternoon to pick up brochures on Bali and British Columbia.

Brainstorming

There are times when even good intentions and strong desire can be stalled by a simple shortage of ideas for action. Yes, of course, clients have the answers, as we have said, but sometimes it may be necessary to prime the pump. That's where the skill of brainstorming comes in. Brainstorming is a creative collaboration between client and coach with the sole purpose of generating ideas, possibilities, and options. The client will sort through the pile of ideas that are generated and pick the ones that have the most appeal.

There are a couple of ground rules that will make brainstorming work effectively. The first is that there are no bad ideas. Don't worry too much about practicality at the brainstorming stage. In fact, as coach, part of your role is to suggest out-of-the-box ideas and outrageous possibilities. Clients tend to propose ideas they have already thought about or minor variations on those ideas. You make the process more creative and fun by stretching the net of possibilities. The second ground rule is that coaches should not be attached to their own good ideas and, above all, should not use brainstorming as camouflage for pitching their own solutions.

Brainstorming is generative, so look for ways to build on ideas, not just take turns adding one more idea to the pile. This can often make a commonplace suggestion into a more creative or personal one for clients. For example, if your client suggests a half-day strategy meeting with key players, you might volley back with the idea of an off-site retreat and strategy meeting.

Sample Dialogue

Client: I'm a little stuck here. I haven't been on an actual date in fifteen years. I'd like to find a way to meet people, but I don't even know where to start. What do people do?

COACH: What would you like to do?

Client: I don't know. Have you got any ideas?

COACH: Want to do a little brainstorming?

Client: Sure. I'm desperate.

COACH: Okay. You go first.

Client: I used to go to bars when I was in college. I don't think I want to do that anymore.

COACH: So maybe you won't choose it—but it is an option. At this point, there are no bad ideas, just possibilities. Okay, the theme is social situations. What do you like to do for recreation? Skiing? Rollerblading?

Client: Hiking. Day hikes. Almost anything in nature.

COACH: Great. You could join a hiking club, or you could start one for singles. What's another option?

Client: One of those computer dating services, I suppose.

COACH: How about volunteer work? You place a high value on community service. What would be an area where you might volunteer your time?

Client: The school where my kids go. I would like to be more involved with them.

COACH: What other values would you like to tap into as you create opportunities to meet people? You mentioned nature ... and we talked about community service ...

Client: When you said "nature," it made me think of gardening. I'm sure there are possibilities there.

Requesting

Over and over, we've emphasized that this is the client's agenda, that the client is resourceful, that the client knows the answers or knows where to find them. Still, it will be appropriate at times for you, the coach, to request certain actions. Based on your training, your experience, and your knowledge of your clients, you'll have a sense—usually based

on actions clients are already considering—of what direction they might take for maximum learning. You simply put the action into the form of a request so that the action is clear and the client accountable.

For example: You and your client are working on family finances and ways of creating order. You might say to your client, “This week, my request is that you create a detailed monthly budget for personal and household expenses. Will you do that?” Note that the language of a request takes a somewhat specific form: there is the request itself stated in a way that is specific and measurable (the client can actually be accountable for something), and there is the question at the end that asks for commitment. This is more powerful than simply asking a client to work on finances this week. The language draws a line in the sand and puts the client on notice that this is important business. In time, using this format, clients learn that taking on a request is an act of personal commitment, not just acceptance of an assignment from their coach.

The key to making a successful request is to not be attached to it. The moment you become attached to the brilliance of your own idea and start thinking it’s the right way for the client to get results, it’s your agenda, not the client’s. With a request, there are always three viable responses: yes, no, or a counteroffer. The client can agree to your request, turn down your request, or negotiate for something else. If your idea is turned down, feel free to defend it a little. You might explain why you think it works and the value it would have. Maybe the client didn’t understand completely the first time. You might even probe to make sure that the “no” was not simply a fear reaction.

If the client turns down your request, look for the counteroffer. You might ask, “What will you do?” As far as you, the coach, are concerned, the whole point is some form of action or learning—and as long as that happens, it doesn’t matter who comes up with the action plan.

Sample Dialogue

Client: I suppose I’m like everyone else with a ten-year reunion. I’d love to lose about ten pounds.

COACH: How’s your workout program going?

Client: I get to the club about once a week. I know it’s not enough.

COACH: We’ve talked about this. Swimming is what you love, right?

Client: Right. I was on the swim team one year.

COACH: OK. My request is that you swim a minimum of thirty minutes four times a week. Will you do that?

Client: You know what? I’d rather do forty minutes three times a week. That saves me one trip to the club, and it’s the same amount of time.

COACH: How do you want to be accountable?

Client: I’ll make it a weekly check-in statistic—right when we start.

COACH: Anything else you want to add?

Client: Go for a walk or bike ride with my wife or son on Sundays.

Challenging

A challenge asks clients to extend themselves beyond their self-imposed limits—way out to the edge of improbability. If the challenge is powerful enough, it should cause clients to sit up straight and exclaim, “No way.” If that’s the response, you know you’re in the right territory. Your idea of their potential is much bigger than the picture they hold of themselves. Clients often respond with a dual reaction: exasperation when confronted with the enormity of your challenge but also a sense of being emboldened because someone believes in them that much. Most clients will flatly turn down your challenge but then make a counteroffer—at a level higher than anything they would have considered on their own initiative.

As coach, you say to your client, “I challenge you to say ‘no’ twenty times a day this week—make it thirty.” Your client says, “No way. That’s impossible. I’d be fired and divorced in a week. I’ll do ten a day, but that’s my limit.” So instead of not being able to say “no” at work or at home, your client will be practicing this essential skill ten times a day. Such is the power of the challenge.

Sample Dialogue

Client: It’s like a dark cloud that’s been hanging over me for the last six months!

COACH: The way you’ve talked about it, it feels like much more than a cloud. You’ve been in this dark mood for weeks. You said you felt listless and you’re not eating well ... all because of this manuscript you have to finish.

Client: Research paper. Actually, the research is done. All I

need to do is write it up.

COACH: When will you get it done?

Client: At this rate, I don't know.

COACH: How many hours will it take? What's your best estimate?

Client: Hard to say. Maybe thirty hours—a little more, a little less.

COACH: I have a challenge for you. My challenge is that you finish the paper before we talk next week.

Client: Next week? That's crazy!

COACH: Could you do it in a week?

Client: Well, yeah. If that's all I did.

COACH: What will you do?

Client: I'll work on a rough draft.

COACH: Excellent. What would it be like to be able to say, "I'm finished" in a week's time?

Client: I don't even have the words for it.

Putting Structures to Work

We know that accountability in the coaching relationship is a structure. It's a means by which we create focus and discipline. In fact, a structure is any device that reminds clients to be in action in the areas they have committed to. Structures intervene in everyday life, they stand out, they require attention, they are devices to keep clients on track. Structures come in myriad forms. Setting an alarm to wake up is a simple example of a

structure—it reminds you what time it is: time to get up! There are an endless variety of creative ways to sharpen focus and get into action. Different structures appeal to different senses. Some are tactile: wearing that power suit to the board meeting. Some are visual: a picture on the office desk of a dream home or vacation destination. Structures can be auditory: a special piece of music as a personal soundtrack to help complete a project or enjoy a workout.

Clients make commitments to be in action, and often everyday life gets in the way. The familiar routine of life, the demands of family and job, even the client's own resistance to change can derail good intentions and personal promises. The power of the structure is that it reminds clients and recalls them to their commitment.

Here are some other examples of structures:

- Create a special screen saver with a theme line or visual image
- Post notes around the office or home with affirmations or reminders
- Track daily or weekly progress toward major goals on a wall chart
- Listen to a meditation tape or audio book or create an audio file of your own personal motivation
- Choose a particular piece of clothing—magic armor—when making sales calls
- Light a candle or burn incense
- Put a special reminder in your pocket, something like a

small stone or toy

- Change the lighting in the room by making it brighter or dimmer, or change the color of the light
- Create deadlines, such as inviting people to your house for a party so that you will finish painting a room or do some housecleaning
- Establish creative consequences or rewards

Structures are a way of sustaining the action and learning in the time between coaching sessions. Each client will be somewhat more responsive in different sense areas. Experiment with structures to find out what works, and keep playing with them. The key word here is “play.” The reason for the structure is to provide discipline and focus in an area where it may be difficult for clients to stay on track. By making structures playful, you increase the chances that clients will follow through.

Exercises

1. Requesting

Complaints are often uncommunicated requests. In a restaurant, if you’ve got a complaint about the draft blowing down on you from the overhead air conditioner, you can sit with your complaint or you can make a request. When an appropriate request is made, action often happens, and that takes care of the complaint.

So here's the exercise: Make a list of twenty-five complaints in your life—things that just aren't going your way. They don't have to be reasonable. If you have a complaint about the weather, write it down. Acts of God are not off limits for complaints or requests.

When you have your list of twenty-five complaints, compose a request that addresses each complaint. Target your request to a specific person whenever possible, someone who has the power and the ability to do something about your request. Then, for as many as possible on your list, actually follow through and make the request. And remember, there are always three legitimate responses to your request: yes, no, or a counteroffer.

2. Challenging

Go back once again to the meta-view list of ten friends or colleagues you made in [Chapter 3](#). Your goal in this exercise is to write a challenge for each person, addressing each one's meta-view in a way that dramatically raises the bar. You are trying for action steps that will move these people forward and provide extraordinary learning. Make sure you come up with true challenges that ask them to go further than you know they will go, so that they end up making significant counteroffers.

3. Structures

Here is a simple and somewhat typical situation: Your client is much too busy to keep his office clean, yet the chaos that results is seriously distracting him. It has reached the point of no return. Something must be done. Your job is to come up with fifteen structures that will help this person stay in action to get his office orderly and organized.

CHAPTER 7

Self-Management

This is the picture we continue to hold as the ideal: you and your coachee, 100 percent connected. You, as coach, listening intently at Level II, following, tracking. And listening at Level III, aware, sensing, open to your intuition as you let the conversation flow through you and around you. It's as if you and the coachee are in a bubble, a safe chamber that isolates the two of you from the distractions of the outside world. That's the ideal. But sometimes, in the midst of this intense, engaged conversation, the phone rings. Or a metaphorical bell goes off in your mind: a thought, a feeling. Suddenly, that protective zone evaporates. You disengage, detoured to that other thought or feeling. You are disconnected from your client.

It happens. In any given conversation with a client, it may happen many times. Something in what your client says triggers a distracting thought or reaction in you or reminds you of an experience in your own life, a strong memory. These are very human reactions that will cause you to go away in your mind and feelings, even if it is only temporary.

It could be a completely unrelated thought: You suddenly remember you have forgotten to make dinner reservations at the restaurant after promising you would handle it. The coaching itself might create a distraction, such as a moment of special brilliance or a feeling that you're handling the coaching badly and the judgment that goes with it. Or you may be distracted by

something that happens in the environment: dogs barking, sirens sounding, a storm outside. It might be something only you notice—the window is open and the rain is coming in, soaking a pile of important papers.

Naturally, you want to create an environment and conditions that minimize the chances of these sorts of distractions, but they will happen from time to time. The context of self-management is a combination of self-awareness and the skill of recovery. It is an awareness of yourself, an ability to notice where you are or where you have gone in relationship with your client, and it is about the ability to get back, to reconnect.

Ultimately, self-management is an expression of your total commitment to your client. One hundred percent connected is the ideal. Self-management is what we do as coaches to recover when conditions create less than a 100-percent connection.

Bumped Off Course

Clients are human—which is another way of saying they are somewhat unpredictable. One of the most common situations involving self-management is when a coaching session takes surprising twists and turns or the client's coaching focus changes direction from session to session. This ability to engage with clients wherever they are when they show up for coaching is so essential to being an effective Co-Active coach that we have made it one of the four cornerstones: the ability to dance in this moment.

The context of self-management also involves knowing the difference between simply wandering along wherever the client leads and holding a particular focus with the client. Asking

yourself, “Are we still on track here with the bigger agenda?” may take you away from the conversation momentarily, as if an observer in you is watching the conversation unfold. And yet there are times when that momentary pause—a little objective distance—is important in order to keep the coaching on track.

It gets trickier when you, as the coach, are distracted by the content of the coaching or even the agenda itself. You may find yourself suddenly up to your ears in technical details or the client’s work jargon, or the agenda may create a distraction. You may even have reservations about a plan of action your client wants to take. In fact, you may not always agree with your clients’ plans, and yet the self-management course is to honor their action as theirs: theirs to work with, to change as necessary, to fail at completely or succeed at gloriously, and to learn from, always. For the sake of your own integrity, you may decide to share your reservations, with the caveat that you are offering your own experience and opinion, not advice or judgment.

Thoughtful awareness regarding the content and direction of the coaching is one aspect of self-management, but self-management includes a whole range of reactions. After all, coaches are human, too, and sometimes the conversation, a subject or just a word, sparks a reaction on the coach’s part. Your clients may say something disparaging about welfare mothers or divorced men or an ethnic group, or they may use language you find unacceptable. It’s bound to happen that, out of all the material clients bring to you, something will trigger your own pet peeves, or your personal standards will bump up against a client’s comments. You could become judgmental, ungrounded, even opinionated. This is known as being

“hooked,” as if a very large hook had been inserted in you and yanked. There you are, lost in your own thoughts and opinions, at Level I, and no longer focused on your client.

It can happen when you least expect it. For example, you have a client who has been practicing the skill of saying no: no to working long overtime hours without being compensated, no to unhealthful snacks that deplete his energy, no to coworkers who take up valuable time with chitchat, no to a particularly toxic relationship. Progress on this commitment has been inconsistent, but lately he seems to be moving forward. In today’s coaching session, it all comes apart: he has agreed to work overtime this weekend, he has binged every afternoon on snacks, and he’s decided to give that relationship one more chance. You would like to be calm, compassionate, and patient, but you have seen this backsliding one time too many—you can also clearly see this client’s ability and the price he pays for caving in. It makes you crazy that he can’t see it for himself. You can feel the steam building under your collar, your heart beating faster. You’ve really had it with this crap!

Whoa! Even if this anger comes from the best possible intentions and your caring for this client, in this minute, the steam, the frustration, the temper are in danger of taking you away, breaking the connection between coach and client.

The opposite can also happen. Say you’ve been working with a client for three months and nothing of consequence has happened. She is no closer to her goals today than on the day you two started your coaching relationship. She keeps droning on, repeating the same reasons why she can’t take action. You’ve tried every technique and trick you can think of, but it is like pushing water up a straw. Today your own self-judgment

is having a field day with your inadequate coaching. You have failed; you are in over your head; you don't have the skills; you have done nothing in three months to help this deserving soul who is counting on you. Now you don't even have the courage to admit it and assist her in getting the help she needs and deserves from another coach or a therapist. Meanwhile, as you are having this self-flagellating internal conversation, your client is floundering, maybe wondering where you have gone.

The signals are there to see. When you find yourself trapped in self-analysis—defending, judging, feeling annoyed—the alarm bells should be going off. When you find that you are hooked or caught up in a personal emotional reaction, you are no longer with your client; you are with your own Level I reactions, thoughts, and feelings. You are trapped in a cage, racing inside that little exercise wheel, going nowhere. You need to find your way back to your client and reconnect.

Forbidden Territory

Self-management is also about where you stop or hold back in your coaching. It would be wonderful if all great coaching could happen within the coach's comfort zone. But there are places coaches don't want to go, where they are unsure of themselves or are afraid of the consequences.

Maybe, in coaching, you sometimes avoid telling the hard truth because you don't want to make waves or upset clients—especially if they become unhappy with you. Maybe you hold back because you don't want to lose a client or you're afraid of repercussions in the organization. Coaches may hold back because they don't want to risk offending, but what they risk

instead is a less resourceful life for their clients. Is it possible that a client will get upset and leave? Yes, it's possible. That's a price the coach must be ready to pay in every session. Repeat: in every session. The risks we sometimes don't want to take are the same risks clients don't want to take. They're the very things that keep clients from reaching important goals and living full lives. These are often among the reasons that clients come to coaching.

Take a hard look at the areas in your own life where you are uncomfortable and have held back in the past. Chances are that these are the same areas you are unwilling to probe in the coaching sessions, regardless of whether or not they are risky areas for your clients. For you, they are blind spots, created out of defensive habit. They are probably invisible to you most of the time. Maybe one day you'll work through what holds you back in your life, but you can't wait for that to happen before you explore those places with your clients. Maybe loneliness is unbearable for you, so when a client raises the issue of loneliness, you quickly shift the coaching in a different direction and find something else to talk about. Because of the emotional charge the issue has for you, you don't do the kind of exploration that would benefit your client. Or maybe the issue is telling the truth even when you know it will disappoint someone, or awkwardness around money or intimacy. Delving into these areas may be crucial to your clients' action and learning. Self-management is about recognizing that these are uncomfortable issues for you but then exploring them anyway for the sake of your clients. You must be willing to coach outside your comfort zone.

Self-Judgment and Good Judgment

It is probably safe to say that, as a group, coaches place a high value on learning and growth, their own as well as those of their clients and the other people in their lives. Consequently, coaches often have a highly developed habit of self-analysis, which can sometimes manifest as crippling, unwarranted self-judgment.

Self-management is about recognizing the self-judgment going on inside your brain and knowing the difference between constructive analysis and self-destructive chatter. The key for you as a coach is the same key you give your clients. First, notice. Make sure you record it well in your mind. What was the criticism or observation, precisely? Be clear, be descriptive, be attentive to the experience. Then ask yourself a couple of questions: *What is the truth in that for me? What's in that for me to learn?* Something happened in there that hooked you or caused a reaction, and it's worth paying attention to.

Before you take on the worst possible interpretation of the experience, allow yourself some room to reflect. Obviously, this reflection is something you will undertake outside the coaching session, on your own, with a colleague, or with your own coach. It's important to recognize that these disruptive experiences are part of learning and growing stronger as a coach and a person. The more adept you become at recognizing and working with your own self-judgment, the more you'll be able to help clients work with theirs.

Self-management is also about knowing when you really are in over your head. When that realization strikes, be gentle with yourself. In such a situation, the most constructive thing you

can do for the client—and for yourself, by the way—is to refer him or her to another coach or another resource for help. People don't want to feel that they've failed. But in some cases, the best course of action—and the most professional—is to end the relationship for the client's sake. This client may be better off with a career counselor or a therapist or a more detached coach. If the alliance won't work, you can't hold it together on your own. So if you truly feel you cannot work with a client, the two of you are best served by moving on.

Practices

Let's be honest. Despite your best intentions to always be present, you will disconnect from your client sometimes. It can happen for lots of reasons, some significant, some trivial. You happen to glance at your desk and notice a bill that's overdue ... somebody is knocking on the door ... something your client just said reminded you of a very annoying conversation with a coworker. One of the most powerful things you can do at that moment is to admit it: "I'm sorry; I just went blank for a moment. Would you repeat what you just said? I missed that."

Admitting that you disappeared actually creates trust and reaffirms your commitment to your client. You may think you hide your vanishing act from clients, but they often sense your disappearance even if they don't articulate it. More than that, you model the veracity that builds a strong relationship between you and your clients. Clients respect your honesty about what happened—that you didn't try to cover it up—and see your admission as a way of saying that you are really committed to them, not to pretending.

In order to be present and ready, many coaches have a ritual they use before the start of the day or before each appointment. It is a structure for orienting themselves to the coaching—preparing for clients in physical, emotional, mental, even spiritual ways. This kind of preparation is especially important when your personal life is getting the best of you. You are a human being as well as a coach. Periodically, things will happen that can cause you to focus your attention on yourself rather than on the client. On the day you get stuck in traffic on your way back to the office and are rushing, harried, and anxious about being on time, you need to clear your feelings before speaking with your coachee so that you can concentrate fully on the coachee and not on your troubles.

Apart from the everyday annoyances that may knock you off balance before a coaching call, there is also the punch in the solar plexus. Maybe you just received bad news about a friend: the biopsy is back, and the lump is cancer. Or you just walked out on a devastating argument with your partner over an issue that won't go away. Clearing and grounding allow you to be fully present in coaching without burying your own feelings. It's not easy. Sometimes it's not even possible, and you need to tell clients that you have to reschedule their appointments. Yes, you need to be strong for your clients. Gritting your teeth and persevering when the going is tough is admirable—but only up to a point. Self-management is about knowing where that point is.

Opinions and Advice

The urge to give good advice in service of being helpful is so

strong that it is sometimes nearly unmanageable. This is another case in which self-management is a judgment call, not a rule to follow.

We emphasize that clients are naturally creative, resourceful, and whole and that they do have the answers or know how to find them. Still, at times it may seem pointless to withhold your knowledge or experience when it is clearly relevant and could spare clients time, money, and effort. As long as you are conscientious about framing the conversation as your experience and encouraging clients to find their own best way while exploring a number of alternative pathways, your experience will be seen as one more potential course of action and not the “expert’s” way. In short, don’t make it a rule that you will never share an opinion or a bit of advice. Self-management is a context of discretion, always in the client’s best interests.

This discretion also extends to sharing your personal story. Most of the time, it’s best to keep your personal story to yourself. As a coach, you have a different relationship with your clients than you would have if you were their friend. Your relationship in a coaching session is different even from those that clients have with coworkers, colleagues, or managers. The attention in the coaching session and the coach’s attention are both directed to clients and their lives and agendas. In almost all cases, it is inappropriate and a waste of the client’s time for you to share your personal story. We say “in almost all cases” quite intentionally, because there may be times when a little of your story will be important in building trust and relationship with a client. The fact that you are human, not just an anonymous, impersonal resource, will contribute toward

building a strong, Co-Active relationship.

The key word there is “relationship.” We believe that a strong relationship creates trust, safety, and openness, and it is this deeper relationship that allows clients to take the bigger risks they need to take in order to make the boldest, life-giving choices. But as you can see, it leaves room for interpretation and discretion. Ultimately, in the Co-Active model, the decision hangs on what will be best for the client in the long run.

We have described the context of self-management here primarily from the point of view of the impact on the coach, but a coach’s developed sense of self-management benefits clients, too. As the coach models the attributes of self-management, clients see the impact; they learn to become more aware of what is happening in the moment, noticing when they have disconnected. They learn to speak up about what is true even if it might be awkward, and they learn to recover, to reconnect to the relationship. This benefit ripples out beyond their coaching sessions and into their lives, creating a stronger relationship.

In fact, just as clients develop better listening skills or learn to trust their intuition more, they learn, too—as a result of their immersion in coaching—about self-management in their lives. Clients learn to be more aware of their own inner experience, especially situations where they habitually get hooked or derailed. Training clients in this context of self-management can help them be aware and quicker to recognize these situations, and they learn to be more resourceful.

Coaching Skills

A number of coaching skills are generally associated with self-

management. These skills underscore the dynamics in the relationship and help coach and client maintain their individual strengths.

Recovery

Clearly, the most obvious skill for this context is the skill of recovery: the ability to notice the disruption or disconnection and to reconnect. For the coach, the disconnect could simply be a case of confusion—losing the thread of the client’s conversation—or it could be a much stronger emotional reaction to the subject at hand or something the client said. There are three parts to the skill: noticing, naming, and reconnecting.

Notice It. This awareness step is crucial. It is not necessary to know exactly what happened and is completely unnecessary to know why or what caused it—at least in the moment. It is important to simply notice the gap, the shift, the disconnect.

Name It. Describe what just happened: “I got lost” or “I was distracted for a minute.” This is optional but encouraged, especially as you begin practicing the skill. In most cases, it is best to name it out loud so that your client is clued in to where you are. It is amazing how quickly the coaching can get back on track simply by realigning with the client.

Reconnect. Each person will have a different tactic for connecting, and each situation may require a different process. Fundamentally, it is the process of turning your attention back over to your client. Find the part of your client you believe in,

want more of, can easily celebrate. Connect with the part of your client you admire and want to see excel.

Asking Permission

One of the most important techniques the coach uses to remind clients that they are in charge of the coaching direction is to ask permission: “May we work with this issue?” “Can I tell you what I see?” “Would you like some feedback on that?” When the coach asks permission, it demonstrates that clients have power in the relationship. It demonstrates, too, that the coach knows the limits of his or her power in the relationship. Asking permission is a sign of self-management on the coach’s part and allows clients to take responsibility for managing the relationship and their work. Clients are honored when you ask permission; their boundaries are respected. This is especially important when the issue you’d like to work on is unusually intimate or may make clients uncomfortable: “May I tell you what I see about the way you’ve been handling this?”

Sample Dialogue

Client: I guess I realized that the plan we worked out just wasn’t going to work. I had to improvise on the spot ... tap dance my way through it. It was like old times, making it up as I went along.

COACH: First of all, there’s nothing sacred about the plans we work out. You still get to choose the best course of action for you. I trust that you know what’s right and that you’ll move forward and learn from whatever you decide to do. So what did you decide?

Client: That's basically what I did. I took action. Just a different course of action.

COACH: But before we move on, I'd like your permission to give you some feedback on the way you handled the situation—based on what you've said in the past. Would that be okay?

Client: I have a feeling I may not like all of what I hear. But yes, of course. If there's a chance to learn something valuable, I'm all ears.

Bottom-Lining

There are times when a client's telling of his story begins to expand and take over the coaching session. Or times when the client starts wandering tangentially through story after story. Sometimes it's the client's style of conversing; many times it's a way of unconsciously avoiding difficult or direct conversation. Bottom-lining is the skill of getting to the point and asking the client to get to the point, too.

It is helpful if you cover this skill during your early work with clients so they are not caught unawares the first time you ask them to get to the bottom line. It's not that the particular story isn't interesting; in fact, it may be fascinating. But the story is the background, and in the coaching relationship, the background is secondary. With the limited time available for most coaching sessions, there simply isn't time for long-winded, detailed stories. You need to coach the essence, and asking clients to get to the bottom line helps them discover the heart of the matter.

Bottom-lining is also an important skill for the coach. As

coach, you should not be talking much. Your conversation should be bottom-lined. Clients do the talking.

Sample Dialogue

Client: I know I'm starting to sound like a broken record on this, but there just wasn't time this week. Really, I'm not spinning a story here. I'm out of town one or two days a week... I'm still carrying the one evening class... I need to spend some time with my family...

COACH: So what's the bottom line here, Tom?

Client: I'm committed to helping my dad take care of Mom. God knows at his age—and with his own health issues—he could use the extra support. I just can't seem to live up to the time commitment to make it happen.

COACH: What *will* you commit to—really commit to?

Client: I don't control the travel—and being out of town just throws everything off... I don't see how...

COACH: Bottom line, Tom. What will you commit to?

Client: OK. One evening a week—somehow. And I can usually call him even when I'm out of town, so, more phone calls. I know he appreciates it...

Championing

We discussed acknowledgment earlier. Acknowledgment means recognizing who clients had to be in order to do what they have done. To champion clients is somewhat similar, but here the focus is on supporting clients rather than identifying traits. You champion clients by standing up for them when they question

their abilities or their capacity to take on the task of challenge. It is not empty cheerleading. As the coach, you champion what you know is true; clients will know if you aren't sincere. When you're not sincere, you not only destroy the effect of the championing but put your own credibility at risk. But when you point out your clients' abilities, their strengths, their resourcefulness, and let them know you believe in them, you give them access to a little more of themselves.

Perhaps it is a capacity they didn't realize they had or strengths they don't give themselves credit for. You champion when the road is steep and the client is weary. That's when you recharge the client's enthusiasm: "You are so committed to this. I know you can do it." Or, "You've shown over and over how you can be caring and firm. You can do it again." Or, "You have the creative gifts—in abundance. You can do this." Championing is an affirmation. It is your capacity to see their capacity. It is a form of future looking. You see them at the finish line, on top of the hill, goals accomplished.

Sample Dialogue

Client: It's a great opportunity, a position I really want, but it's also a huge risk. Going for it, I could end up the world's biggest goat.

COACH: To mess with the Olympic slogan, I say, "Go for the goat!" I'm kidding. Let's go for the gold. What will it take to be the gold medal winner?

Client: To be absolutely honest, I don't think I see gold here—or silver or bronze, for that matter. I'm not sure I belong in this race—now that I've seen some of the other

candidates.

COACH: Now I'm not kidding. Mary, I know you can do this. It's a perfect match with your heart's desire and the path you laid out for yourself. You've got the skills to do it—and the panache to pull it off. Of course it's risky. That's where the adrenaline comes from, and that's why it feels like you're on the edge. I just know how you've worked to prepare for this opportunity. I know you can do this.

Client: I know you do. And it gives me confidence when I don't have much of my own.

Clearing

Clearing is that valuable skill of venting in order to become present and open to the coaching. We already mentioned clearing for the coach, which prepares the coach to be present for clients. Clearing is valuable for clients, too, and for the same reasons we discussed for coaches. Clients call when they've just been fired, when a best friend has gotten into a serious traffic accident, when they just got off the phone about a bank overdraft, when they lost the big account to the hated competition. Or alternatively, they call when they have just gotten back from vacation and their minds are still fogged with piña coladas or the euphoria of newfound love.

When clients are preoccupied, it interferes with their ability to have useful, in-depth coaching conversations. Often, the need for clearing is obvious. The client is clearly disturbed, annoyed, upset, agitated about something, and the something is big and present. However, the signals that tell the coach clearing is

called for may also be muted—you don't always hear huge alarms going off. The client may seem slightly miffed, or perhaps you sense a minor disturbance in the energy field. Initially, clients may not even want to discuss it. But when you notice that their normal creative expression is blocked or constrained, you may need to push for clearing.

In this example, your client is annoyed about some injustice; there's a mood about her that just hangs in the air like an unpleasant odor. You might say: "You seem really blocked. Let's take a couple of minutes to get this out. Really complain, whine, feel sorry for yourself. Exaggerate." The best thing you can do at this point is to help the client clear. In fact, it is important that the coach recognize the volume of clearing necessary. Clients often feel awkward about just venting and want to quit before they're completely clear. So you must really push until the last gasp of bad air is out. Make it a game and keep pressing for more: "Turn up the volume. What else happened? And then what? How did that feel? What a jerk! Tell me more."

Sample Dialogue

COACH: You seem distracted—it's like we're having to work too hard to stay on track this morning.

Client: I am distracted. I lost \$2,500 yesterday in a stupid stock deal. I feel like an idiot.

COACH: It sounds like you need to clear that before we can move on.

Client: I think you're right.

COACH: Take a minute. Ventilate.

Client: I feel like a chump. Worse than that, I convinced two of my friends that this was the sweetest deal in a century, and they both lost money, too.

COACH: Ouch. What else? Let's turn up the volume.

Client: OK. I'm mad at myself for getting sucked into an "easy money" scheme. I'm ashamed about looking like an easy mark...

COACH: Go for it. What else?

Client: I'm afraid my wife's going to shoot me. I let her and the kids down. How am I going to come up with another \$2,500 for vacation this summer?

COACH: You feel like you let your family down ... What else?

Client: I should have seen this one coming.

COACH: So you've got a judgment—"should have seen this coming." What else?

Client: It's a pretty empty feeling.

COACH: There you are in emptiness. What's next?

Client: I think I need to get past the sour feeling.

COACH: How will you do that?

Client: This clearing is a good start. I think a long walk with my wife will help. The sooner we deal with this, the better, and we do love a long walk.

COACH: Is there more? Is this the issue you want to be working on today?

Client: No, actually, thanks for asking. I'll do the walk tonight if I can. In the meantime, I've got something more pressing for today.

Reframing

Clients frequently get stuck with a certain way of looking at a situation or an experience. Their perspective, moreover, has a message that is in some way disabling. Your ability to reframe the experience provides a fresh perspective and a sense of renewed possibility. Let's say your client had his hopes set on landing a major consulting contract and just found out it has been put on hold for at least six months. Naturally, he is focused on the disappointment. As his coach, you point out that it gives him the time he has been seeking to write a series of articles that can help him land new business. Thus, you are able to recast this experience in terms of his ultimate goals. Using much of the same data, you interpret the experience in a way that includes more of the client's life: the big picture.

Reframing is looking on the bright side of things, true enough, but it is more than just being perky for the client. Reframing offers more than cliché comfort—as in “There are plenty of fish in the sea” or “Tomorrow's another day.” Reframing takes real pieces of the client's life and shifts the perspective to show an opportunity or a pathway that wasn't apparent minutes before. For example, your client is struggling with credit card debt and tells you that it's hard to make progress, especially when major appliances break down and need repair. You point out that she has managed to change her buying habits and has regularly paid her outstanding balance for several months. The reframing doesn't change the fact that it is

a struggle. But it does show the client that she is resourceful and committed—and making progress. Reframing changes the theme from “credit cards have control of my life” to “I have control of my life.”

Sample Dialogue

In this case, the client starts with a certain perspective: He has wasted six weeks developing a business plan that dead-ended. Still, he learned a lot that will help with new business plans and made several good contacts. In short, there is plenty that is positive in this experience. And that’s where the coach is headed: to reinforce the action and learning that accompanied this effort.

Client: Absolutely a dead end. Now nothing. Six weeks shot to hell.

COACH: You followed a path that looked very promising six weeks ago. I remember you were pretty excited.

Client: I was excited.

COACH: What did you learn in those six weeks?

Client: I learned how to write a business plan. Not that it did me much good.

COACH: What else did you learn?

Client: I learned how to present my business to people outside my field.

COACH: Nontechnical people?

Client: Yeah. Bankers and venture capitalists.

COACH: What else did you learn?

Client: I guess I learned that this is something I can do—even though I don't enjoy it as much as I enjoy the engineering.

COACH: In that case, what's your assessment of the last six weeks?

Client: I wish I could have had the same learning in half the time. And now that I've got the presentation formatted, and practiced, I might as well keep giving it to investors until somebody sees the opportunity and backs my plan.

COACH: Great. What do you want to do about that this week?

Making Distinctions

Reframing is one way of helping clients see a situation from a fresh perspective. Another way is to help them pull apart collapsed beliefs by making clear distinctions for special cases in which two facts have been tangled into one limiting, often disempowering, belief. The belief appears to be a fact of life, and it's not.

For example, let's say a client believes—because she's the mom and the wife—that she needs to be the one who manages the housecleaning. She's stuck and frustrated because she believes she is responsible and she can't seem to manage it all. The separate facts are that she is the wife and that there is housework to do. As her coach, you have the objectivity to see the distinction. Here's another example: A manager believes that because she wants to treat employees fairly, she must treat everyone the same. She has equated fairness with treating

everyone the same, and the high performers in the department are not happy. They believe they've earned recognition and reward. It's time to help this manager make the distinction. You might ask a question like, "How can you maintain fairness and still reward the high achievers?" These are classic examples of collapsed beliefs that need to be separated so that clients can become more resourceful about selecting options.

Sample Dialogue

Coachee: I plan every week. I use a planner. I take the time on Sunday night to plan my week. None of it helps. By Tuesday, my week is in a shambles.

COACH: What happens when you try to stick to your plan?

Coachee: People make requests. They've got urgent things they need from me—things I didn't necessarily have in my plan—so wham, it's all out of kilter.

COACH: What happens if you say no?

Coachee: Not in this organization. It doesn't work that way. If you're going to succeed around here, you have to move fast, be flexible, respond to the fire that's burning. That's what they mean by "teamwork" in this company.

COACH: Sounds like you end up paying a pretty high price for that. It also sounds like you've got a couple of things tangled together. What if we try to separate them?

Coachee: Like what? I'm not following you.

COACH: You seem to be saying, "When people make requests of me, I need to abandon my plan."

Coachee: I'd say that's true in this organization.

COACH: So... would you be willing to play along with me here? I'd like to find an alternative point of view, just to give you some additional perspective.

Coachee: Sure.

COACH: Here are the two facts: people make requests, and you have a plan. In the past, you've said yes to the requests automatically. What would be another way to deal with requests?

Coachee: I could postpone saying yes by telling people I have to check my calendar first.

COACH: Good. What would be another way?

Coachee: I suppose I could learn to say no sometimes.

Exercises

1. Self-Management

Where are you likely to get hooked in the midst of a coaching conversation? Where are you most likely to need self-management? List ten things your client might say that would pull you to Level I. For example: "I don't think you're listening to me." Next, list ten things you can do to return to the coaching conversation and stay detached.

Get to know your coaching self-judgments. Where do you automatically find fault with your

coaching? The more aware you are of these judgments, the less likely you are to be hooked by them in the middle of a coaching call.

What topics are most uncomfortable for you? Which topics make you feel inadequate, inexperienced, or simply uncomfortable?

2. Championing

Pull out that list of ten friends or colleagues one more time. Call, write, or e-mail them as their champion. Here's the key. Yes, you believe they can do "it"—whatever "it" is for them. The question for you as coach is this: how do you know? That's where the essence of championing lives. There is reason, there is evidence—you know they can because: _____. Fill in that blank. Then let them know they can do the things they need to do. Without the clear sense of how you know, championing sounds like mere flattery, empty. When you ground it in what you already know, the belief in them can stand tall.

3. Clearing

Train a friend or a colleague in the skill of clearing so that he or she can clear you. Your partner's job is to encourage you to go deeper, to turn up the volume until you reach the bottom of whatever it is you are trying to clear. This person doesn't need to understand what's going

on with you; the point is to prompt you to vent, like cheering an athlete to the finish line.

Then select an area of your life where you need clearing and process the clearing exercise with your partner. When it is over, talk with that person or make notes about what happened as you became clear. What happened to the “charge” when you allowed yourself to express it completely?

PART 3

Co-Active Coaching Principles and Practices

In the Co-Active coaching model, we would say that the deeper motivation behind all coaching is the client's desire for fulfillment, balance, and process—what we call the three core principles. The coachee's current coaching issue—whatever it is—is a way to expand the experience of these core principles.

In this section of the book we describe each core principle, describe the practices associated with coaching those principles, and provide exercises and examples for coaches. [Part 3](#) concludes with an integrated overview of coaching practices and a vision of the impact coaching can make in the lives of the people it touches.

CHAPTER 8

Fulfillment

Think about your own life for a moment. What is your vision of a really fulfilling life? What would that be like? Whatever answer comes to mind, notice that the question takes you deeper than simply asking, “What do you want?” This greater depth is the reason that fulfillment is one of the three core principles in Co-Active coaching.

Let’s be honest. Most people don’t come to coaching saying, “What I want is a more fulfilling life”—at least not in those exact words. Usually, they have something much more specific and urgent at the forefront of their minds. And yet, underneath that immediate agenda is a yearning for something even deeper. A fulfilling life is a life of meaning, purpose, satisfaction. We believe that this yearning is like the keel of a boat in the lives of your clients; it is the shape of their lives beneath the surface that keeps them on course. Without that keel, a boat will drift and shift directions on the vagaries of the wind. One of the most valuable things we do for clients is to help them get clear about that very personal shape of fulfillment. With that in place, they can take their lives in any direction they choose. And the tools of fulfillment coaching help clients find that shape.

It sounds simple enough. But in our experience, it takes tremendous courage and commitment on the part of the client to really choose and keep choosing a course of fulfillment. The world we live in is designed to squeeze people into boxes—often very comfortable boxes, but boxes nonetheless. Choosing

to create a truly fulfilling life is almost certain to upset the status quo and create ripples in the pond. That's the nature of setting fulfilling goals and getting into action. It's important for coaches to understand the scale and impact of fulfillment as they begin their work with clients.

The Hunger for Fulfillment

Part of the difficulty in creating a fulfilling life starts with where clients have their attention. As they look for ways to have a more fulfilling life, they look at what they have... and what they don't have... and see a gap... and then look for something to fill the gap—something that will make their lives more fulfilling. That “something” can be the obvious: a higher-paying job, a vacation home, a successful business. The search can also focus on getting things that are less tangible: a romantic dating relationship or a promotion. Unfortunately, having things is momentary, and the satisfaction is fleeting. You know that from your own life. Think of something you really wanted to have. Think about the moment of ecstasy when you acquired it and how quickly the glow began to fade: six months after the new car or the new promotion or the new relationship. As long as we continue to look for ways to have a fulfilling life, we are likely to be temporarily filled and constantly hungry.

To Be Fulfilled

Co-Active coaching creates a different frame for fulfillment. It asks clients to look at what it would take to be fulfilled. And not just “some day in the future” when the goal is reached, but today, because fulfillment is available every day of our lives.

That is the stand we take with Co-Active coaching. Of course, envisioning a future that is even more fulfilling is by itself a fulfilling exercise. Working toward goals that make the vision real is also fulfilling. The point is that fulfillment is an exercise of choice and not something that will happen someday.

Part of the confusion about fulfillment is in the language. We know what it means to be “full” and we think fulfillment is a state we will eventually reach: filled, capped off, finished. Instead, fulfillment is a paradox in that we can be filled today and filled again tomorrow, maybe even in a different way, and then be filled again the next day and the day after that. It is disillusioning to try to capture fulfillment. “Having” fulfillment is like trying to bottle daylight.

This doesn't mean that your clients will stop wanting to have things in their lives. Clients will still want to have things: a successful business, more money, romantic relationships. But these things are the expressions of their fulfillment. They are not fulfillment itself.

Feeling Good Is Not a Sign

This is an important distinction. We often confuse being fulfilled with feeling good. The two conditions may coexist, but that is not necessary. In a state of fulfillment, there's often a sense of effortlessness—of harmony and congruence with the great laws of the universe. But fulfillment can also exist when life is difficult, challenging, or uncomfortable. Some people will say that the times when they felt most fulfilled were times when they had the least, when life was a struggle. They were doing what was important to them—things that claimed their passion and commitment. There, in the midst of scarcity, life

was abundant. Perhaps the simplicity of the time gave them a clearer picture of what was truly valuable and fulfilling for them, but their sense of fulfillment was not about feeling good or being happy all the time. Living a life of purpose, mission, or service can be intense, sometimes heartbreaking and exhausting, and at the same time enormously fulfilling. The paradox of fulfillment is that it is possible both to have a sense of inner peace and to experience an outer struggle at the same time.

To Be Alive

In fact, describing fulfillment may be as simple as this: Fulfillment is about being fully alive. Fulfillment is the state of fully expressing who we are and doing what is right for us. Clients have a sense of that feeling. They describe it as wholeness, satisfaction, a sense of rightness and harmony. A word we use for this feeling is “resonance.” Life is vibrating at a frequency at which everything we most value is in alignment. We feel it in the choices we make. The vibration in the moment may be very dramatic, thunderous, exciting, edgy. Or it may be still, serene, pastel, intimate. It might be a unique combination of all of those qualities—defying physics and our metaphors. But the client will feel the resonance. The pieces of their lives or careers come together in a very personal sense of wholeness and of feeling very alive. It may be experienced through doing meaningful work, feeling well used, contributing, giving and receiving, playing to win, being in the flow, creative, expressed. It is an experience of being complete.

Big “A,” Little “a”

The big and little “a’s” refer to the first letter in the word “agenda.” In Co-Active coaching, we see an agenda that is always on the table even if it is not always articulated. This is the big-“A” agenda, and it is at the heart of the coaching: it is the client’s full, resonant life. This is a life that is lived from the client’s values. It is in dynamic action, balancing the client’s priorities in life, and it is lived fully in each moment. Clients are completely in the process of living. There is an underlying question that coach and client are always tuned to, even if it is not always stated: *What do you want your life to be?* In this question, the emphasis is on the “being” state.

There is also an ongoing conversation about action and the doing of life; otherwise, coaching would be nothing more than very interesting conversation. Action is where clients make that fulfilling life real. This is the little-“a” agenda. Not little by comparison or in importance, and certainly not to be minimized. This is simply a convenient way to talk about both aspects of fulfillment. Both are essential. The little-“a” agenda consists of goals, action, and accountability. With each coaching session, there is an issue to work on, plans to make, goals to define, and accountability to create action and learning. In fulfillment coaching, we look for the client’s big-“A” agenda with questions such as, *What is your vision? Who are you becoming? What is present when life is most alive for you?*

In this model, the little-“a” agenda leads to fulfilling the big-“A” agenda. That is crucial. Part of the coach’s job is to hold this meta-view for clients, probing to make sure that the action being contemplated is aligned with the client’s resonant, fully alive life—and not motivated by circumstances, fear, or a corrupted sense of duty.

Fulfillment and Values

Imagine you could do what brings you the greatest joy or deepest satisfaction: be with the people you love, use your natural talents, exploit your gifts to their fullest. That would indeed be fulfilling. It is a picture of a person living according to what she values most.

The link between values and fulfillment is so obvious that it may be overlooked. Helping clients discover and clarify their values is a way to create a map that will guide them along the decision paths of their lives. When you clarify values with your clients, you learn more about what makes them tick: what's important and what's not. Clients discover what is truly essential to them in their lives. This helps them take a stand and make choices based on what is fulfilling to them.

Honoring our values is inherently fulfilling even when it is hard. If authenticity is a very high value for your clients, they may find there are times when they must suffer discomfort in order to live according to that value. The discomfort will pass, and a sense of integrity or congruency with their values will remain. When that value is not honored, however, the client feels internal tension or dissonance. Because human beings are flexible and resilient, it is possible to absorb a tremendous amount of discord and keep going, but there is a very high price to pay—a sense of selling out on oneself—and the result is a life of toleration or betrayal rather than fulfillment.

Values, Not Morals or Principles

Values are not morals. There is no sense of morally right or wrong behavior here. Values are not about moral character or

ethical behavior, though living in a highly ethical way may be a value. Values are not principles either, like self-government or standards of behavior. Values are the qualities of a life lived fully from the inside out. There is nothing inherently virtuous in your client's values. What is to be admired is not the value itself but your client's ability to live that value fully in his life. When we honor our values and the choices we make in our lives, we feel an internal "rightness." It's as if each value produces its own special tone. When we live our values, the various tones create a unique harmony. When we are not living our values, there is dissonance. The discord can get so extreme, so jarring, that it can become literally unhealthy.

Because our language is imprecise, it's often easier to cluster values than to try to invest all the meaning in a single word. Thus, we might separate a series of value attributes with slash marks to indicate a grouping of value words that communicates a composite sense. For example, freedom/risk taking/adventure is different from freedom/independence/choice.

In practice, the words are not as important as the client's ability to feel the impact of that value. All of these values or value clusters will be unique to each person. Just as our physical features give us our unique appearance, the articulation, prioritization, and clarity of our values determine our individual identity. It's not even important that you, as coach, understand exactly what clients mean by the words they choose. It is enough that clients are clear about what the words represent, so when they find they're off track, the wording of their values can help set them back on course. In fact, the client's own unique metaphor or expression very often is better

than the common vocabulary at capturing the sense of the value. Clients may have values like these:

- Coyote/wild dancer/mischief maker
- Luminous/chenille/lavender
- Standing ovation/going for it/buzzer beater

Values are intangible. They are not something we do or have. Money, for example, is not a value, although money as a resource could lead to honoring values such as fun, creativity, achievement, peace of mind, service to others. Travel is not a value. Gardening is not a value. But both are examples of cherished activities that honor certain values, including adventure, learning, nature, spirituality. And yet, although values are intangible, they are not invisible to others. You can walk into a room of strangers and get a sense of what people value by what they wear, how they stand in the room, how and with whom they interact, and the topics of their conversations. You can sense the values in the room: power, friendship, intimacy, connection, independence, fun, and more.

As coach, you will be able to help clients clarify their values as you hear about their lives, their actions, the things they choose and don't choose. You will see them when they honor their values and when they don't, and you and your client will learn something either way. This is one of the reasons you will return to the values clarification process from time to time.

The Value of Values Clarification

The most effective way to clarify values is to extract them from the client's life experience. Ask clients to describe the values

they see in their own lives, perhaps clustered together, using their own words. Almost any life situation can be used to mine for values, but those that have a strong impact, either positive or negative, are especially productive. This way, values rise naturally out of the client's life instead of being selected off a checklist. When clients are presented with a list, they are often tempted to go shopping for values: "This would be nice to have... people would admire this." Because people tend to judge their values, they often list values they think they should have, like spirituality or integrity, and exclude the ones that society says are not so admirable, such as personal power and recognition.

Values are either present in or absent from the choices clients make every day, which means that any given daily activity can be linked to a value honored or a value betrayed. As coach, you might ask, "Where is this value showing up?" "What values do you sometimes neglect?" "Which are the values you will not compromise?" Once you have worked with a client to develop a personal list of values, another fruitful exercise asks the client to prioritize the values, ranking the top ten from the most important on down. The outcome of the exercise, a prioritized list, is not as important as the process itself. Clearly, the client is free to change the order of items on that list anytime. The prioritizing exercise forces clients to feel the unique qualities of each value and, by sorting the values in a particular order, to feel the special importance of each one. Some coaches set the stage by making it a kind of game: "If you can take only ten values with you into a strange and possibly dangerous territory, which are the ones you absolutely must have?" By further raising the stakes, clients raise their

own awareness about the values that most matter in their lives.

The next step is to ask clients how they are honoring these values on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning the value is not at all present in their lives, and 10 meaning it is honored completely all the time. There are almost certain to be values that are ranked at 4, 5, or 6 in some important aspect of the client's life—most likely a place where there is upset, anger, or resentment because the important value is getting squashed. It's a great opportunity for coaching: "What's that about?" "What would it take to live that value in those circumstances?" "What is the price you pay for not honoring that value?" "What's stopping you?"

Coaching Fulfillment

As you can see, fulfillment is intensely personal; it is also constantly evolving. What was fulfilling at age twenty-five may have lost its fascination by thirty-five; the empire-building passion of thirty-five may give way to a search for inner peace by forty-five. It is important to help the client develop a clear picture of a fulfilling life as it is today. To that end, there are a number of practical ways to help people clarify their personal definitions of fulfillment, and you can continue to use these tools in an ongoing relationship to refine that vision. (For more information about specific tools, see the Coach's Toolkit online at <http://www.coactive.com/toolkit>.)

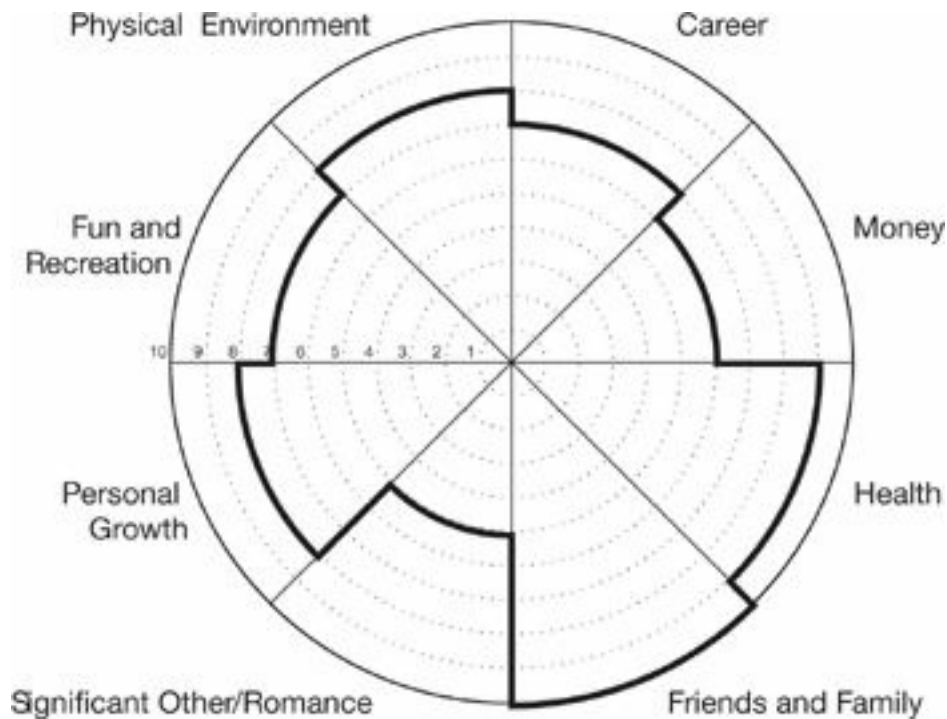


FIGURE 4 Wheel of Life: Fulfillment

Level of Satisfaction

For a big-picture snapshot of where the client is in terms of fulfillment on any given day, the Wheel of Life (see [Figure 4](#)) is a very effective device. As you and the client look at each area in the wheel, discuss the state of the client's fulfillment, on a scale of 1 to 10. Ask how fulfilled she is in the area of money or relationships or health and wellness, for example. Or what a fulfilled life would be like in the area of career. Notice that you are not asking what the client needs to have in order to be fulfilled in her career. The question is, *What would it take to be fulfilled?* Then keep probing in that direction. Whatever comes up, follow it with, *What else?* or *Tell me more.* The idea is to uncover deeper and deeper levels of meaning and, from time to time, to clarify what you hear and play it back to your clients so they can hear what they're saying. For example: *I heard you say you'd like a sense of security when it comes to money—a sense*

that there will be enough in an emergency. It sounds like security might be a value. Is that right?

Using the Wheel of Life, clients will see for themselves the parts of their lives where they are unfulfilled. With your help, clients will go through a process that allows them to define what fulfillment means to them. For example: *In health and wellness, you say your sense of fulfillment is 6. What would it take to raise that 6 to 10? What will you do to make it fulfilling?*

Values and Decision Making

In coaching, values help determine the “rightness” of choices. They also illuminate unfortunate choices. Clients can look back over decisions they’ve made and see where their values were honored or were ignored. For you as coach, knowing the client’s values is a tremendous advantage. You can quickly see how certain courses of action will be blessed with a sense of flow and ease because the activities are congruent with the client’s values. By knowing when the client’s values are not being honored, you can also see the potential iceberg in front of the *Titanic*.

A values conversation can be very useful at any decision point. As clients choose various action steps, their values become a litmus test for action: *Will this action move you closer to living your values or further away? If you make this decision, what values will be present?* When the client is considering an important life decision, ask how this course of action will honor the top ten values and to what extent. A decision based on the client’s top values will always be a more fulfilling decision. It may not be the easiest or the most

enjoyable. It may require sacrifice and even have uncomfortable consequences. But on balance, over time, it will be the most fulfilling.

We have seen the opposite too often. Again and again, clients have made decisions based on their bank balance or their fear of creating discomfort or their worry about others' displeasure. They decide based on what is easiest at the moment or will make the fewest waves. Such decisions never work out for the clients' fulfillment because they have sold out on themselves and their values. (See the Coach's Toolkit at <http://www.coactive.com/toolkit> for more on values clarification.)

Fulfillment and Life Purpose

A life purpose statement is another way of capturing the essence of what it means to be fully alive—living life intentionally, making choices that increase the value of life to one's self and to others. Creating a life purpose statement is like standing on the top of a tall hill: clients see their life in a larger context. They ask, *What is my unique contribution to my family, my work, my community? What difference do I make with my life?* Living a life that includes following a purpose-directed path is deeply fulfilling. In this way, fulfillment reaches out beyond the one, and yet loops back to enrich that one life.

There are many ways to elicit the client's life purpose, and there is more than one way to describe this definition of what our lives are about. Some call it a "mission statement" or a "vision statement." It gets to the heart of what a person's true life legacy will be—the difference this life will make for the

planet.

The life purpose is a path, not a destination. And along the way, clients will encounter plenty of voices, internal and external, telling them to go in other directions. Sometimes they will listen, especially when they are unsure of their purpose. Finding and claiming a life purpose gives clients a powerful sense of direction for their lives. The truth they find in the life purpose statement can make them virtually unstoppable.

Defining one's life purpose is a process that usually takes time. It can involve personal reflection, reading, keeping a journal, or interviewing others. Finding the one statement that rings true requires peeling back the layers until the client reaches the statement that addresses the central questions of his or her life: *What is the hunger I am here to feed? Where is the pain I can ease? What is the teaching I am called to do? Where is the building I have the tools to accomplish?*

Life purpose is about clients using their talents as well as the unique learning of their lives, their experience, and their wisdom. A fulfilled life is one they are able to live with purpose—intentionally, not by accident. (A number of exercises in the Coach's Toolkit online are designed to help clients clarify a life purpose statement.)

The life purpose statement has value in coaching because it focuses attention on a fully alive, fully expressed fulfilling life. The coaching that goes into creating the life purpose statement is rich with self-discovery, values clarification, and vision. Clients are challenged to use all the talents they have been given. It is also a fruitful place for acknowledgment when clients make the sometimes difficult decision to follow their purpose instead of taking the easier way. Living a life of

meaning and purpose is a rare accomplishment indeed and in one sense is the very definition of fulfillment.

Dissonance

When you are honoring your values regularly and consistently, you might say you have a formula for living happily ever after. In that case, why don't we honor our values all the time? There are a hundred variations on the answer to that very good question. A common theme is that our fear is stronger than our desire for fulfillment. That fear, which leads to self-sabotage, comes in a variety of guises.

If a client is not making choices based on his values, then the effect will be some form of dissonance. It can be frustration, boredom, indifference, anger, resignation, or persistent justification for a course of action that looks very much like self-betrayal or martyrdom. As a coach, you will be able to sense it in the air. It may have the acrid smell of fear, or it may be masked in the fragrance of flowery rationalizations. As you use your Level III awareness to listen between the words, you will feel the dissonance. It may be a disturbance in the force—something is not quite right.

Clients may believe that this voice is trying to protect them from danger, loss of relationship, a catastrophe of some kind. The voice is there to keep clients from taking unsafe risks, but it is often overcautious at a time that calls for risks for the sake of change and a more fulfilling life. This dissonant voice is the voice of an internal saboteur. The same voice may recite an old litany of judgments, rules, and limiting beliefs. It says things like “You aren't working hard enough,” “You should be further along in your career,” “You don't do well on tests”—you're not

smart enough, attractive enough, wealthy enough, experienced enough, old enough... you're not enough. Or it could be the opposite: You're too old, bald, frumpy, young, aggressive, introverted, extroverted ... you're too much.

Most of the time, this voice operates quietly in the background, influencing choices and lobbying for its preferred course of action or inaction. Be aware that whenever people take the initiative to change their lives, an alarm sounds, and the saboteur will awaken. Expect it. You can even forewarn your clients.

Fulfillment and the Coach's Role

Fulfillment sounds so good—like a really great meal—satisfying, tasty, and ultimately filling. And yet the path to fulfillment can be difficult, unfamiliar, and scary for clients. Choosing to live our lives based on our values is not what society has taught us to do. It is not the easy, well-trodden way. Most of us settle for what we can have. We make choices based on what others want, what would be easiest, what would cause the least discomfort. We tolerate. We compromise. We give up. It's no easy task to get on the track for fulfillment or to stay on track after that path has been chosen. This is why we emphasize that choosing a fulfilling life is a radical act.

The coach's role is to challenge clients to pursue their fulfillment, in spite of the circumstances, in spite of the voices all around them offering bad advice and contrary agendas, and in spite of the client's own inner saboteur. Even when clients don't want to go there, your job as coach is to be out front, encouraging, pointing the way to a life fully lived, a life that is

valued and without regret. Remember that this big-“A” agenda is, at the core, the most life-giving choice clients can make. Whatever results clients achieve on their goals and plans, this is the true satisfaction for them and the coaches who serve them: that at the end of the day, there is more life in each day.

CHAPTER 9

Balance

In the Co-Active model, balance is one of the three core principles because it is fundamental to the quality of life. At least, if you ask clients, that's what they say. Over and over again, clients tell us that they want more balance in their lives. This issue of balance exists on two levels: the underlying quality of life and the day-to-day experience.

In the big picture, fulfillment is about living a life that is valued, purposeful, and alive, and balance is about choosing a life that is in action, aligned with a compelling vision. When it comes to balance, what clients want is the ability to juggle the precious priorities of their lives. They want more tools to manage their activities and relationships so that these relationships and activities line up and move forward. Clients want to be more empowered and less at the mercy of circumstances and other people's expectations and demands. They want to feel they are choosing their life, not just reacting to it, but they don't necessarily want all the pieces of their lives to have the same weight. Balance is not about making everything even.

Balance also should not be confused with reaching some ultimate equilibrium. There is no static point in life; life is inherently dynamic. We are constantly balancing. Balance is not about slowing down, although slowing down may be just the recipe some days. Balance is not about simplifying, although sorting out the pieces, choosing "yes" to some things and "no"

to others, may be the ideal way to create the most fulfilling flow. In short, what most clients want is not to go faster or slower or to have less or more, but to have a life-giving ride supported on the rails of a fulfilling life vision. How they get that ride is the objective of balance coaching. Note that some clients want a smoother ride and some want the exhilaration of a bumpy ride, at least from time to time, and balance coaching can help them make that choice, too.

Day to Day

That said, clients are not likely to come to coaching with “a more balanced life” at the top of their list. That’s not where their attention is. They’re focused on the issues that are hitting them on the chin that day or that week: the boring job, the stalled project, the dreaded family reunion, the credit card debt, the new relationship. They have their attention on the action of their lives, especially in those areas where they are not getting the results they want. After all, that’s why they are working with a coach—so they can get the desired results.

They may see themselves as blocked, at a crossroads or a dead end, even out of options. They may feel resigned, defeated, or simply frustrated and confused. They may feel powerless, lost, or trapped in a repeating cycle. In your eagerness to help clients move forward, you, as coach, may be tempted to break the problems down into bite-size bits and brainstorm solutions, to get results quickly and move past all that sluggishness. Instead, balance coaching starts with the way clients look at the situation—the need for different action is not the starting point. The client’s point of view is often the main

contributing factor to the blocked, stuck, or stalled feeling.

Balance coaching is designed to restore flow, to get clients into action on today's issues in a way that brings them back into alignment and back in control of their own lives. Balance coaching begins by looking at the boxes in which clients find themselves because the limitations of those boxes are impeding their progress. In doing so, clients restore flow to those immediate areas and, in the process, learn important lessons about creating more flow in their lives. They learn to be more adept at seeing the boxes that hold them in, and the experience of breaking out of those boxes serves them in other areas. This is how balance coaching works with the big-"A" agenda. When clients recognize they have the power to choose, they are empowered to make intentional choices in other areas, too.

Circumstances versus Possibilities

There are always reasons clients are not getting the results they want. Just listen and they will tell you. The reasons almost always sound realistic and convincing. Then begin listening underneath, and you will hear a particular tone or flavor that accompanies the reasons and rationalizations. You will hear about difficult situations and uncontrollable circumstances. You will hear about rigid timelines and expectations, people who are inflexible or unwilling. It may or may not sound like complaining, and it might sound quite normal and understandable.

In fulfillment, you tune your ear to hear the aliveness of values being lived, honored, and celebrated, but you could hear the opposite: deadness, anger, crankiness. In balance, you will

hear a life in flow filled with possibilities and alternative courses of action, freedom, and creativity, or you will hear the harshness of unchangeable circumstances and unyielding boxes. We write these distinctions between fulfillment and balance as if they were sharply different colors on a color wheel, yet we don't mean to imply that the distinctions will be so clear in a coaching session. It should be pretty clear whether you are picking up red or blue, yellow or green, but the shades of emotion may not obviously communicate fulfillment or balance. As you will see, knowing for sure is not crucial to the coaching. By moving in one direction, you will uncover more, get more feedback from the client, dance with it, and then continue in the same direction or switch to another. In balance, we listen for the hard edge of unavoidable circumstances and a boxed-in perspective on the issues.

A Formula for Balance Coaching

The formula for moving from stuck to possibility and from possibility to action has five steps: (1) perspectives, (2) choice, (3) Co-Active strategy, (4) commitment, and (5) action.

Step 1: Perspectives

The first step in balance coaching is to identify the client's perspective and then expand the perspectives that are available. It is much harder work to get clients into action from a stalled or dead-end perspective compared to a perspective that has zoom and flow in it.

As humans, we tend to limit what is possible by what we believe is true, and if a client sees a situation as hopeless, it will be very difficult to create the conditions for change. After all,

the client has already been gathering evidence that confirms this view and can tell you with complete certainty that the situation really is a dead end. The perspective may be firm, and is often well developed, but it is a box. Clients are likely to reveal a habitual way of thinking about certain situations. They tend to apply the same rigid thinking to specific situations, layer by layer until, over time, these ways of thinking appear to be true, immutable, obvious. Case closed.

When we take a perspective on an issue, we have an opinion, a belief, assumptions and expectations. We make predictions based on the assumptions that belong to that perspective. We believe we can predict the outcome because “that’s how things always go” or “that’s just the way it is.” A perspective is a very powerful filter that allows us to see only certain things. If something is not part of the perspective, it is invalid or simply invisible or may be dismissed out of hand. Stereotypes are perspectives of a sort, a habitual way of looking at people that limits possibility: everyone in a particular box is the same, and the expectations and assumptions fit all of the people in that box.

The client’s perspective excludes the possibility of flow, yet it is only one way of looking at the situation. That’s why balance coaching starts with seeing the limiting perspective and then naming it. Once we can name it, we can work with clients to develop alternative perspectives that are more resourceful and creative and will provide more action possibilities.

You can generate more perspectives by simply asking clients, *What is another way of looking at this that would work for you?* You can also brainstorm metaphors or images that provide creative material for additional perspectives. For

example: *How would a five-year-old see this?* or *What is the “good news” perspective?* Or choose one of the client’s values: *Adventure is a value of yours. What if you looked at this as a grand adventure?*

Geography. Imagine placing an object in the middle of a room—a sculpture of some kind, for instance. Now imagine walking around that object, looking at it from a variety of angles. Each perspective would give you a little more information about the object. Working with perspectives has that effect. But it is much more than just a visual difference as we shift from perspective to perspective. What we discover is that each perspective is a world of its own, with a different landscape, a different climate, and different rules for expected behavior. What might be normal in one perspective/world is not normal in another. When we explore the conditions within a perspective with clients, we are looking at the geography of that world. There is a native language in that perspective. There will be cultural rules and well-formed roles. There will also be a posture to that perspective, sometimes quite literally, because people embody the perspective they are in and portray it physically, in their bodies.

Consider this perspective: “A walk in the woods is a glorious embrace of the natural world.” There is a tone in the language. You can practically smell the fragrance and hear the natural sounds of that perspective. And if you allowed your body to represent that perspective, your posture would incorporate its inherent attitude and beliefs. Now notice how dramatically all of that changes with a different perspective. Consider this: “A

walk in the woods is a dangerous, messy, bug-ridden, slimy waste of time.” See how the tone changes. Body posture changes to reflect the different inherent beliefs and expectations. Even the smell is different.

These are simply two perspectives on a walk in the woods. Neither is right or wrong, although those who are advocating for one or the other have no doubt been very busy collecting evidence to support their point of view and are prepared to insist very persuasively that their perspective is the right one, the one that is true.

The Topic Is... The example of a walk in the woods also points up the importance of having a clear topic with the perspective. You need a specific, identifiable topic for consideration, like the sculpture you imagined placing in the middle of a room. The topic could be a situation, a decision that must be made, an event, or a category of events. It could be a contemplated action or an opportunity. It could be a relationship with another person or a relationship between the client and something specific such as a debt, cancer, or technology. Note that it is easier to work with perspectives when the topic is more specific, even if it is a relationship. The topic itself is neither positive nor negative. The client’s reaction to the topic reveals a perspective. And it is the perspective that brings emotion or judgment.

Step 2: Choice

Playing with perspectives involves exploring the rich territory in each land of the geographic map. You might have clients stand in different parts of the room and embody the different

perspectives, trying on each one like a costume, getting a feel for the atmosphere and language. Eventually, clients will need to choose a perspective—one of the perspectives you have been playing with, a combination of perspectives, or even an entirely new perspective that came out of the exploration.

In our formula, “choice” is more than deciding on a certain perspective. To be aware of choice is to be aware of the power of choosing. It is crucial that clients feel they are absolutely, unequivocally in charge of their choices. How clients choose will also be a revealing part of the process for clients and coach. Does the client choose quickly? Impulsively? Is there a great deal of analysis or a complex system for comparing and analyzing? This information will be valuable background for you as you learn how your clients typically handle the decision-making process.

Step 3: Co-Active Strategy

In our approach to balance coaching, this step forms a bridge between awareness and action. A Co-Active strategy recognizes that moving into action is more than just activity. A strategy in the Co-Active model includes the attitude and emotional state that motivates and supports action.

Consistent with the principle of balance, we begin by expanding the range of possibilities so that the action choice comes from a place that is alive. We open up possibilities to create a variety and range of action options. This is an intentionally expansive phase that emphasizes creativity. The skill of brainstorming is one way of generating ideas and options, but no matter what form the creative process takes, the coach’s job is to encourage clients to push the edge of

possibilities, to travel beyond familiar alternatives. In this expansion mode, the intention is to redefine what “possible” means, outside the old boundaries and past what is normally considered “realistic.” The idea of what is “realistic” is too often a holdover from the boxed-in perspective.

Given the rich world of possible actions, the next phase in the process is to narrow the list. This is the next choice point in balance coaching and an opportunity to make sure, again, that the course of action being considered will lead to more flow. One of the things to watch for is a condition we playfully call “OOPS”: Overly Optimistic Planning Syndrome. Yes, we encourage creating an abundance of possibilities, and we help clients build a motivational fire that powers their move into action. But we do this to expand the range, not to cause burnout in our clients, so checking in and consciously choosing are important parts of creating a Co-Active strategy. There is, in fact, a point of balance between what is possible and what will result in flow. It is not a perfect formula; that’s why we add learning to the action as clients move forward.

Ultimately, it is our goal to make sure that there is movement in the issues clients bring to the coaching session. Narrowing the action list is the step that moves the conversation into reality. In coaching, it is not enough to have really good, even profound or wildly creative, talk about clients’ issues or lives. It is essential that clients be in action and that something is made real in the world that they can see and take note of. (The Coach’s Toolkit online —<http://www.coactive.com/toolkit>—includes a variety of strategy and planning tools.)

Step 4: Commitment

One of the core questions for coaches is *What is it that sustains change over time?* We know that clients are often willing to choose a new direction; this is the way they move beyond the dead end or stop their aimless wandering. But once they are on the road, what will sustain them? The energy of commitment is one answer.

Beyond Choice. Strategizing, even in the Co-Active way, can be just another cerebral activity. The emphasis is on thinking about different ways to make things happen, how to allocate resources and calculate the pros and cons of alternative actions. The strategy can become an intellectual exercise and feel external to the client. As a coach, you want this awakened strategy to live inside, in the client's muscle and bone, not only in the brain, where a minor distraction could easily displace it. So before you invite clients to take action, make sure they've really made a commitment to their plans.

People gain a mysterious strength and resolve when they make a commitment. Commitment goes beyond making a choice. We make a choice between lasagna and linguine; we make a commitment to other people, to life, to a course of action. Commitment implies there is no turning back. This is the point where you draw a line and ask the client to cross into new territory: *Will you commit to that plan and take action? Will you do that?* Up to this point, clients may simply have been playing along. Chances are that they will experience a shift once they realize that they are committing to a different way of operating in their world. And so you ask, *Will you*

commit to this plan? This question raises the stakes. We're no longer talking about losing ten pounds or paying the credit card balance this month; we're talking about taking control of their lives. In fact, this act of commitment is so powerful that the coach sometimes asks clients to actually draw a line—real or imaginary—on the floor in front of them, take a deep breath, and, when they're ready to commit to the plan, step across the line. But only when they're truly ready to commit.

Yes and No. These words, “yes” and “no,” are two of the simplest words in any language. Depending on the context of the question, however, they can also be two of the most difficult words to say out loud for the whole world to hear. As clients prepare to commit to action, they must choose between saying yes to their plans and saying no to something else.

In the context of commitment, those words have a deeper ring; they reverberate into your clients' lives. That yes to a simple action is a yes to some deeper commitment, a promise, even a new or deeper way of being in their lives. Saying no to a simple action is much more than taking that one thing off the list. It often means saying no to old beliefs or old expectations, no to self-betrayal, no to habitual ways of reacting to the demands of others. As coach, listen for the depth of the yeses and nos from your clients. You may even ask them to take part in this yes-or-no exercise for a period of time as a way to get clearer about the root choices they are making. For example: *In your life these days, what are you saying yes to? What are you saying no to?* or *In your relationship with your spouse, what are you saying yes to or no to?*

Step 5: Action

The action of coaching does not take place in the coaching session. From the coach's point of view, this is something of a relief. It eliminates the pressure to be brilliant or perfect or transformative. The real action of coaching takes place in the client's life, in the action he takes—or doesn't take—between coaching sessions. That is where the power is. Without action, the balance coaching is incomplete, just an enjoyable conversation about point of view. Action steps in the client's life keep the client moving and motivated.

At the next session, you will check in on progress, explore what worked and what didn't, and go over what the client learned from both. You will uncover what this person wants to take into his life from here, as he balances circumstances and possibilities and makes life-giving choices in action.

Sample Dialogue

COACH (after listening to the client's unenthusiastic report on a particular project at work): I'm guessing you thought you would be much more excited about the project than you are.

Coachee: That's an understatement. I thought this was going to be the creative crème de la crème.

COACH: And it's not.

Coachee: Nope. Definitely not crème de la anything. Oatmeal, I'd say. Day-old oatmeal.

COACH: Sounds like you're up to your hips in this day-old oatmeal.

Coachee: Yeah, I'm not going anywhere fast. With half the people pulled off the project for other things—and a project manager who is not at all invested in making this a priority—it's discouraging.

COACH: So there you are in the oatmeal perspective, looking at the project. What's the air like in that perspective?

Coachee: Air? Stale. Old. Rank.

COACH: Hard to get very motivated from this place.

Coachee: I'll say.

COACH: Want to try looking at it in a different way?

Coachee: Sure. Anything's got to be an improvement.

COACH: So, what would a different perspective be?

Coachee: Well, it could be summer vacation. You know, school's out, no more teachers, no more books.

COACH: Good. What's the theme in this perspective?

Coachee: Freedom. I can do anything I want.

COACH: Okay. Just so we can keep track of these as we go along, let's draw a circle and divide it into eight wedges—like pie slices. Put "oatmeal" in one of those wedges, then select one of the other wedges and put "school's out" in that one. Got it?

Coachee: Yes.

COACH: What would be another perspective?

Coachee: I'm not sure.

COACH: What's something you love to do?

Coachee: I have a workshop at home where I do simple woodwork projects. It's a hobby. It relaxes me. I like working with my hands.

COACH: Sounds like you have a clear sense of this perspective.

Coachee: Oh yeah. I can practically smell the wood.

COACH: What shall we call this one?

Coachee: Just call it workshop—it's creative and satisfying and useful.

COACH: What's another way you could look at this situation at work?

(The coachee finds a few more perspectives, including one he labels "library." Coach and coachee explore the characteristics of the different perspectives.)

COACH: Looking at my notes, I see that we've talked about six perspectives, seven if you include the original oatmeal perspective. Which is the one you will choose?

Coachee: The library.

COACH: And what is there about the library perspective that appeals to you?

Coachee: Well, I wish this project was up and running full speed with this really hot, creative team together. We talked about that, but it's not going to happen in the short term. What would be interesting, though, is to really go in and study the subject. I've got the time. I like the library as a metaphor because it's a quiet place. It's set aside for study, and there's lots of material to explore.

No one's going to bother me there.

COACH: Great. So now that you're standing in the library looking at the project, what are some of the options? What might you be doing with your time?

Coachee: There's some online research I'd like to do... two books I've been meaning to order ... I just haven't done it. And there's a guy in Ireland I'd like to talk to. He's involved in a similar project—we chatted by e-mail a few months back ... There's also a conference coming up in a couple of months—I suppose I could see if the company would fund my trip ...

COACH: Lots of options. What would be the stretch for you?

Coachee: Writing an article on the subject would be a stretch.

COACH: And what would you be saying yes to?

Coachee: I'd be saying yes to taking control of my time. I'd be saying yes to capitalizing on the opportunity. I'd be saying yes to making this downtime a real benefit to me in my career—being willing to be a colleague of sorts, with some of the people I admire—earning my professional credentials, so to speak.

COACH: And what would you be saying no to?

Coachee: Well, the obvious. No to whining and complaining that I don't get to play the way I expected. But more than that, I'd be saying no to that weary sense of helplessness.

COACH: How committed are you to writing this article?

Coachee: Very. This should be really interesting—and it leads to all sorts of other possibilities.

COACH: Good. What would lock in this sense of commitment for you?

Coachee: Committing to some kind of action step.

COACH: I was just about to ask, what do you want to be accountable for between now and the next time we meet?

Coachee: An outline. I would need to do some of the research I talked about—at least a quick look at some things—and I know what that would be. But I could have a draft of an outline.

COACH: All right, then. Here's my request: Send me a copy of the outline by e-mail on the day before our next meeting. Will you do that?

Coachee: Let me put that in my calendar. Okay, I'll do it.

Finding the Balance

The purpose of the balance formula, and balance coaching, for that matter, is to move clients into action. Like a slalom skier speeding down the mountain, turning crisply at every chute, we live our lives in action, and being on the edge is an exhilarating way to experience life in motion. If the image of the skier and the mountain is a little too breathtaking for your taste, the same themes apply to the ice skater and the dancer. Grace and performance make the balance point of leaning into what is possible while still maintaining control.

And yet, we are not assisting our clients with just any action. It's not a service to clients to simply add more action to their

lives. Fulfillment coaching will help identify action that is consistent with the client's values. Balance coaching will help clients choose the flow, a way to balance priorities, expectations, and perspectives on the issues they bring to their coaching sessions. Our use of the word "flow" isn't meant to imply glassy smoothness. You may want to substitute the word "ride" for "flow," because our goal is to help clients create the ride of their life. The action clients undertake by working from the principle of balance is action that fits the big-picture ride that brings them a life of choice.

CHAPTER 10

Process

Clients usually come to coaching to do things differently or to do different things. They want to set goals, come up with plans, get into action, and use the accountability of coaching to stay on track. Clients want to be in motion, not standing still, so naturally a great deal of the coach's focus is on moving forward, helping clients envision the golden future, and the path that will take them there. There is a leaning-forward, feet-moving, arms-pumping quality to the coaching. And yet, in Co-Active coaching, we believe there is more to life than tasks accomplished. Our focus is on the client's life experience, not just a list of action items completed. In fact, we believe clients actually want to enjoy the journey, to savor and appreciate each moment of their lives as best they can.

In general, fulfillment and balance focus on moving forward. Coach and client are aware of what is happening externally in the client's life, and they can see the results. Coaching that emphasizes moving forward is focused, directed, intentional. It is about generating, creating. Action orientation often has a fierce determination to make something happen—clients are looking ahead, and there is momentum.

Process coaching focuses on the internal experience, on what is happening in the moment. The goal of process coaching is to enhance the ability of clients to be aware of the moment and to name it. In process coaching, there is a quality of expanding into the present, being curious about it, slowing down to

explore and appreciate it. Sometimes the most important change happens at the internal level and may even be necessary before external change can take place. Being in the moment immerses the client in the flow of life, the here and now. The feeling is expansive, like going up a mountain to a higher place or down into a valley to a deeper place.

The combination of going somewhere and going more deeply into the experience is the full spectrum of life. Being present in life expands awareness, leads to richer highs and robust lows that are the measure of a true life fully experienced. This is the process-coaching version of the client's big-"A" agenda: a fully expressed and fully experienced life lived in the moment.

The Look of Process

Process coaching focuses on where clients are now. Imagine life as a river, flowing through time. In one place, the river is steady, serene. Then it hits the rapids. Then a waterfall. There are eddies and whirlpools, backwater and swamps. The river of life narrows and suddenly speeds up. Process is about being fully aware and alive wherever you are on the river today: whether you are floating easily on your back, enjoying the sky and sun, or tumbling through the chaos of white water. Clients have their plans and dreams, and sometimes they won't like where they are on the river. And yet, when you're in the rapids, the only thing to do is be in the rapids. You can wish it weren't so, but that's where you are. While you are busy making plans for the future, you are also in the present. You are in the process of your life. In this moment. Right now.

The Coach and Process

Imagine the river on a bright afternoon. The sun reflecting off the water in glittering sparkles can be practically blinding. As with the river, it's easy to be distracted by the activity on the surface of life. Action can be dazzling. But when you look at the river through a polarizing filter, you tune out the distracting sparkles and see the flow of the water. That's the coach's job—to notice the currents below the surface. In process coaching, you are tuning your ear to hear below the surface, noticing anything stirring that feels out of place, inconsistent, something like resistance or an unexpected turbulence. It is a signal to you that there is an undercurrent that is likely obstructing the flow of the river. You can hear it by listening attentively at Level III, and as a coach, you become curious. Very often it is something the client is not conscious of or is avoiding.

Process Coaching

Ultimately, our goal as coaches is to assist our clients in creating the work and lives they want. In a sense, we are always focused on moving forward to an envisioned future. However, the shortest distance between here and there is not always a straight line. Sometimes it is a curved line, as the U-shaped process pathway shows (see [Figure 5](#)). Sometimes the way forward involves going down into the experience first. Or, as we will see a little later, it may mean going up into the experience first, by simply turning the U-shaped curve upside down.

The flow in process coaching has the following steps: (1) the coach senses the turbulence under the surface and names it, (2)

the coach explores it, (3) the client experiences it, (4) a shift happens, (5) energy opens up, (6) the client has access to new resources, and (7) movement happens.

1: The Coach Senses Turbulence under the Surface and Names It

Listening at Level III, you as coach sense there is something unnamed under the surface of the coaching conversation. You can feel the unexpressed emotion; it's blocked, pent up, being held in check, managed. Process coaching draws on the coach's ability to be aware of these emotional undercurrents—they are a crucial part of the coaching conversation, too; they reveal information about what is important to clients. The energy of the emotion is a flashing sign—sometimes dimly flashing, sometimes brightly flashing.

For example, a client could be describing a change in departmental policies at work, and underneath the words there is barely controlled outrage, a fire-breathing dragon burned by the injustice of the way the new policies were introduced. At this point, you become curious. Clearly, something very important is going on just below the surface—something more important than the policies themselves—it's about the impact of this experience on the client. It can happen the opposite way, too: you expect your client to be euphoric about a recent success, but the client's voice and tone are dead flat. That's another good reason to become curious.

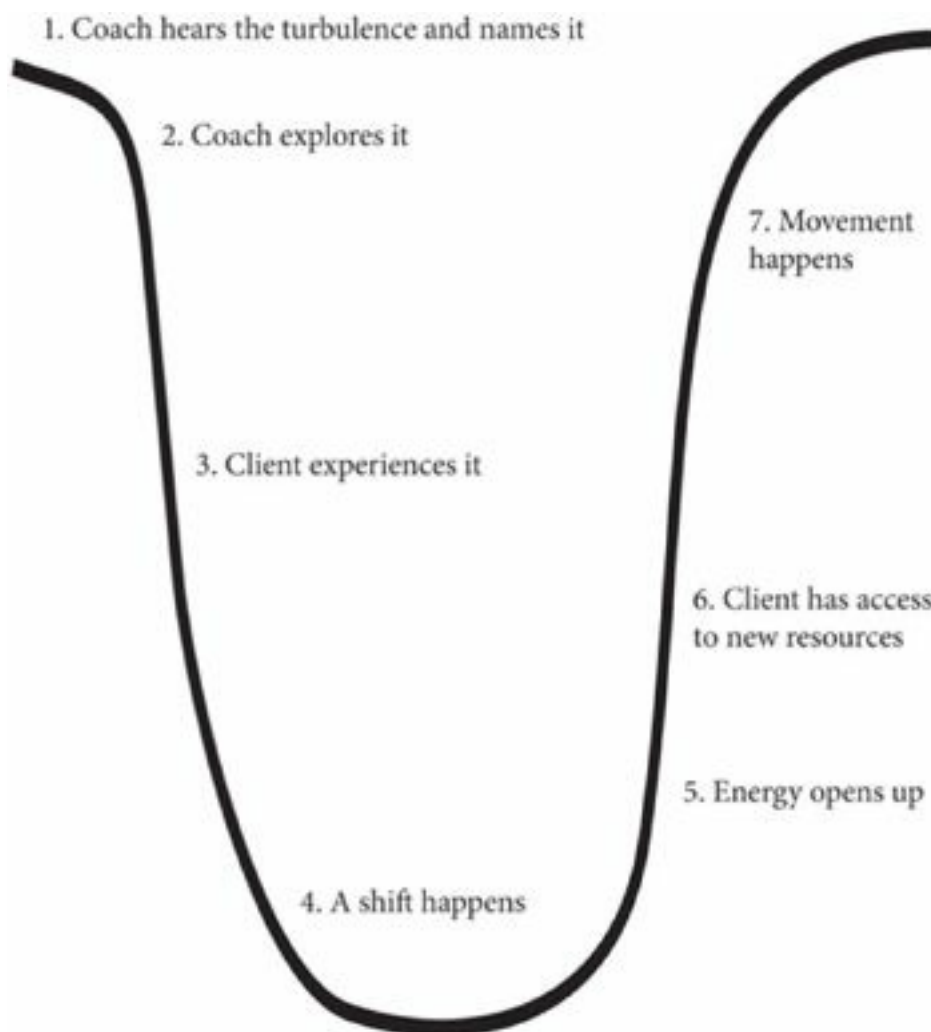


FIGURE 5 The Process Pathway

When the coach hears it, she speaks or names it—and invites the client to look there, too. In relation to the examples we gave, this means that you, the coach, share your observation, without judgment or attachment. It can be as simple as saying, “It sounds to me like there’s something important here about the way you were treated.” Or you could be more specific, especially in ongoing coach–client relationships, with a statement like, “That’s not the outcome you hoped for. It sounds like you’re really disappointed.”

We invite clients to look below the surface, below the facts and data. Why would we do this? The most powerful, most

effective coaching we can do always works with what is most important for the client. When you point below the surface to the energy or emotion, you give the client an opportunity to learn more about what is obviously important. Clients are not always prepared to look below the surface; they often keep their emotional responses under tight control. By inviting your clients to explore the energy or emotion around the subject, you give them the opportunity to become aware and conscious of the impact these issues really have on their lives.

2: The Coach Explores It

Once you have heard and named the turbulence, the next step is to explore the territory—but first you must ask the client for permission. This is important. With some clients, especially in an ongoing coaching relationship, you will find you have great latitude to take them into whatever territory you, as an experienced coach, feel would be most beneficial for them. These clients have granted permission broadly and have empowered you to take the lead in deciding where the coaching conversation needs to go. With other clients, especially those relatively new to coaching or to you as a coach, asking permission creates a container of safety and encourages them to look deeper than the surface details of the presenting issue.

The goal of process coaching, as we have said, is to focus on what is true in the moment. One of the most effective access points for exploring the moment is the client's immediate physical experience: breathing, tension, a furrowed brow, tightness in the throat, or a rapid heartbeat. The body is remarkably expressive and offers a rich source of information about the client's internal experience.

Metaphor or imagery is another effective access point for exploring the moment. Sometimes the feelings are easier to describe in pictures than in words: *The feeling is a small tight ball ... The feeling is a helium-filled Mylar balloon ... It feels like walking through waist-deep mud ... It feels like flying around and around and around in a little circle.*

3: The Client Experiences It

The key here is that the client actually experience the sensation or emotion. It is important for the client to be able to name it and identify it, even if only in a few words, but just talking about it will not usually be enough to shift the feeling. As coach, you can tell the difference between a conversation about disappointment and a client who is reliving the experience of disappointment. An intellectual understanding of what caused the disappointment is a good start, but there is much deeper learning available.

4: A Shift Happens

There is a moment when you can feel a change in the tide. We were going more deeply into the energy and emotion of an experience, and then something shifted: the air, the tone, the light, the weight—it's hard to find the right words for it, but it is a sensation of new movement. We are no longer diving, we are rising.

We have drawn the graphic of process coaching as a very tidy U-shaped curve, but a single coaching session that followed that ideal path would be a near miracle. Most of the time, if you were to graph the movement, you would see that the coaching goes deeper, resurfaces slightly, plateaus perhaps,

goes deeper again, and so on. There is no perfect template for process coaching because the coach is constantly dancing in the moment with each new response. And yet, during listening at Level III, there is almost always a point in time when, as coach, you can hear the client rising up the far side of the U-shaped curve.

5: Energy Opens Up

The shift is accompanied by a sense of opening, release, expansion. Emotion has powerful energy in it. When that emotion is blocked, the energy builds and is sometimes driven down and controlled. Process coaching unblocks that stuck energy and allows the energy of the emotion to serve the client. Unblocked energy creates motion. The motion of process feels quite different from fulfillment or balance because it draws on the client's emotional energy working under the surface. In this way, emotion becomes energy in motion, "e-motion" for the client. Process is about being with what is true; sometimes the emotion is what is most true for the client and supplies the means for forward motion.

6: The Client Has New Resources

Managing, controlling, and suppressing the emotion takes effort; it expends internal resources. Once the shift happens and clients find they are in new, more expansive territory, they also have access to more of their own internal resources. Those resources for making life-giving choices were always there—this isn't acquiring new resources; it's the experience of releasing that energy for the work that matters most to clients. Clients are more energized to take on the tasks, even the battles,

necessary to move forward in their lives.

7: Movement Happens

In this step, there is a sense that movement is under way, that we have entered a new phase. The atmosphere changes. Clients may describe the experience as a feeling of greater buoyancy or as the ability to see the situation in a new, brighter, or more colorful light. They may report a sensation of warmth or more flow, or say they are more relaxed, more at peace or more energized, less stuck or resistant, and so on. In most cases, this new sensation can be linked to a new understanding or awareness in the client. The outcome of process coaching is a shift in the internal experience combined with new or renewed learning. As we said, coaching is about moving forward, and sometimes progress starts with going into the experience, not skipping over it. There is important, sometimes life-changing, information in the exploration that emotions signal to clients and coach.

Going Up Into It

The steps we've just described apply equally to those situations in which clients seem reluctant to go "up" into an experience. Clients can be so driven to move on to the next stage or the next project or challenge that they want to skip the celebration of their accomplishments—and miss the chance to discover more about themselves and the keys to their success.

Some clients have been told too often and for too long that they need to be humble or should not draw attention to themselves, and so they avoid what they consider self-praise and miss out on acknowledgment and learning. Some clients are

simply afraid of being too happy, or they consider the more joyful emotions unnecessary or a sign that they are not taking the issue seriously. As a coach, part of your job is to listen for the kind of avoidance that keeps your clients from experiencing the whole range of musical notes available to them. When clients cut themselves off from the highs and lows, it's like cutting out musical tones. They end up with only a few notes to play, which makes for a very limited and monotonous life song.

Feelings as Information, Not Symptoms

The presence of feelings or emotions is one of the inherent qualities of process coaching. When clients talk freely about issues that are deeply important to them, it should come as no surprise that the conversation takes place in an atmosphere of feeling. Coaches are sometimes alarmed and confused by this. They think that because the client is reacting with feeling, the coaching relationship has turned into therapy.

But emotions and therapy are not the same. Emotions are just emotions. When someone is passionate, even angry, about a perceived injustice, it doesn't mean that she is mentally unstable; she is a human being having a human reaction. If a client is crying, it doesn't mean that he is ill. That's how people sometimes express strong feelings.

It's okay for coaches to allow emotion—sadness, pain, anger, loss—and actually to encourage it. Emotion is a legitimate form of expression, like words, music, and dance. Don't be a detective about it. Don't look at why the client is hurt or angry—which is the typical response. The cause itself is not important; accepting the feeling is important. Nor is it up to

the coach to try to heal it or stop it—another typical response. Just explore it and acknowledge it: “That’s a powerful feeling. There’s some pain in there, I can tell.”

Emotions are part of the normal functioning of a human being, not symptoms of disease. The whole, healthy, resourceful client has full access to his emotions. It’s the hiding, denying, submerging that get clients in trouble. Our feelings give us a way of expressing ourselves. The process can be very cleansing, and if we don’t permit our bodies to discharge and discover whatever we’re holding inside, we don’t grow. We can even get sick—physically and emotionally—by keeping things in. Process coaching is where emotions will show up because you’re encouraging, even challenging, clients to visit the hard places and go into the experience so they can learn why this is important. If it weren’t important, there wouldn’t be this emotional energy around it. When they do go in, they discover more about themselves, become more resourceful, and release the energy in the emotion—what we refer to as e-motion—to motivate new movement. Unless you can explore those places with your clients or coachees, your coaching will lack depth and breadth.

Even though process coaching can be powerful emotionally, there’s still room for humor. Exploring forbidden territory with humor can give clients license to approach the dark areas on light feet or to feel curiosity about the depth of the murky water instead of fearing that they are about to drown.

Sample Dialogue

Client: Looks like I’ll have to dust off the old résumé again after all.

COACH: You finally heard about the job overseas?

Client: I heard. And it wasn't the answer I wanted to hear. So I'm cranking up the search machinery again.

COACH: You had a lot riding on getting that job. I remember how excited you were after the last interview. Sounds like you're kind of shrugging it off now—as if it wasn't that important. What's the truth there?

Client: I've got a decent job and little risk that anything will change there.

COACH: Up until today, that wasn't enough.

Client: I know. It's still not. The truth is, I am disappointed.

COACH: Not just a little, it sounds like.

Client: No. Really disappointed. I was really pumped for that interview. I don't see how it could have gone any better.

COACH: It's a huge letdown.

Client: I don't want to dwell on it.

COACH: I understand. Still, it looks as if your life wants to dwell on it.

Client: Boy, that's the truth. I can't remember being this unhappy—not about a job falling through. Maybe I had too much riding on getting the hell out of the country.

COACH: What does it look like to you? I'm sensing sadness. What's your experience?

Client: It's actually like getting punched in the stomach. I

feel like it took my breath away. Like I can't even stand up straight.

COACH: What's the painful part?

Client: The loss, the waiting, the wasted energy.

COACH: Would it be all right if we explored that right now? I think it's important to go through this, not step over it.

Client: Sure. I want to get over it so I can get on with my life.

COACH: So what's it like there, right now? The place you got punched?

Client: It's dark... hollow... like a cavern.

COACH: Go into the cavern. Are you there?

Client: Yes.

COACH: What are you sensing?

Client: I'm sitting with my head in my hands.

COACH: What's the emotion?

Client: Sadness. I feel defeated. Utterly defeated.

COACH: Okay. What I want you to do now is turn up the volume on it, just a little at first. If it's at 5 right now, turn it up to 6.

Client: The sadness?

COACH: Yes. And the feeling of defeat. Go in there. I'll be right here.

Client: Okay. I'm turning up the volume. There's 6.

COACH: What do you notice?

Client: A sense of failure. Like a huge wave of failure. It's breaking over everything.

COACH: A wave of failure. Are you in a safe place?

Client: Yes.

COACH: When you're ready, try turning it up another notch to 7.

Client: Now I really feel the loss. Like a dream died. Like my last chance to build something important just vanished.

COACH: This is important for you.

Client: It's huge.

COACH: What do you notice now?

Client: That I can turn down the volume.

COACH: Do you want to do that now?

Client: I do.

COACH: What does it feel like now?

Client: The tension is gone from my shoulders.

COACH: Where are you? Are you still in the cavern?

Client: No. I'm sitting on a dock, looking out at the ocean.

COACH: What are you learning from this?

Client: A couple of things. One, I didn't realize just how important it was to me, to get that position, and how hard it is on me to not be chosen—especially when I really feel qualified. And two, I see that I do control my destiny

and how I feel about it, just like I controlled the feeling of failure. I can choose to feel good about myself.

COACH: What's next?

Client: The résumé. I do want to work on that some. And I want to go back and do some research into possible overseas work opportunities.

COACH: Good. Sometime this week, create a plan with deadlines and send me a copy. Okay?

Client: Okay.

COACH: I also have a request—a homework inquiry—that you spend some time journaling about the question “What I have learned from failure.” Will you do that?

Client: Are you kidding?

COACH: Actually, I'm not kidding. You know how to do whatever you need to do in the job search—write a résumé, do the interviews, whatever needs to be done. The hard thing for you is to live with the feeling of failure. The very prospect could derail you. If you could have more capacity to be with failure, what would it give you?

Client: Freedom. It would turn failure into learning instead of judgment about me. It's just... I don't have to be happy about doing this, do I?

COACH: You get to choose, as you said just a minute ago. It's just that this won't be the last time you'll face this sense of loss and failure. If you can be with it now—and develop some muscles to handle it—you'll be in better shape the next time you're in a situation like this.

Client: Like an emotional fitness program.

COACH: Something like that. And the universe has just provided a great gymnasium for you. Let's take advantage of it.

Process and Accountability

The Co-Active coaching model is very clear: the coach brings a context to the coaching relationship that includes deepened learning and action that moves the client forward in life.

Accountability is just as important in process coaching as it is in fulfillment or balance coaching. Without accountability, coaching has not happened, even if coaching skills have been used. The action of coaching takes place in the client's life.

With process coaching, the action is designed to support what the client discovers from the coaching session. For example, the session might uncover the client's fear of disappointing others when he says no to requests. In this case, the client is paying a heavy price to avoid the possibility of disappointing people in his life. The accountability might be to risk disappointing people by saying no five times in the coming week and noticing what happens. Or it could also be a habit or practice that is integrated into the client's life, such as recording, at the end of each day, the times when he said no.

To Be With

A word or two is in order about the expression "be with," which is often used with process coaching. We might say, for example, that clients are "being with" disappointment, or the coach is "being with" clients and their disappointment. Think of

it like visiting a friend in the hospital. Your goal is to be with your friend. There is really nothing for you to do except to be there. And it is more than just showing up. To be with is to be present and fully engaged, attentive, open, even interacting, but with no goal other than simply being together with that person in the experience. Being with is a powerful Level III environment—an experience shared at a deep level. When you are with clients at this level, they are free to share not only their thoughts and analyses but the honest emotions of their experiences as well.

Can't Go There

Process coaching often shows up when the river takes a turn into territory the client doesn't want to enter. As a coach, your curiosity is piqued. Where is it the client doesn't want to go? What is it the client doesn't want to deal with? You may hear any number of explanations: "I don't want any more chaos or judgment," "I don't want to worry about money," "I can't be with the failure I created in my last job," "I can't be with the happiness this person brings to my life."

Clients are uncomfortable, sometimes downright miserable, because their lives are taking them to places where they do not want to go. Clients in this situation want to change course and avoid those areas. What they get, over time, are lives filled with avoiding. They don't realize what it costs them to cut out those parts of their lives. So draw a large circle to represent the client's whole life (see [Figure 6](#)). Now start marking off the pieces the client doesn't want to be with. Color the pieces in and name them: this is the anger the client can't be with... the

disappointment... the risk taking. As each piece is colored in, there is less life left for the client, and it becomes harder and harder to navigate around all the “don’t go there” zones.

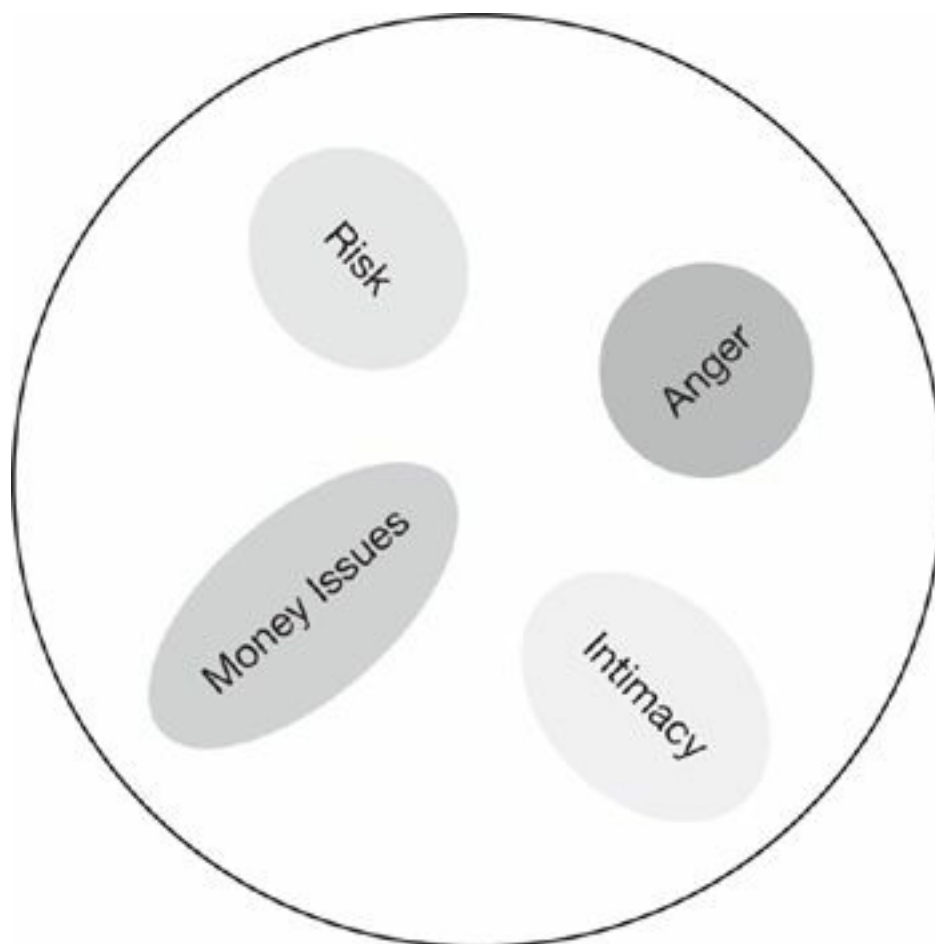


FIGURE 6 Redirecting the Flow

Process coaching helps clients develop the capacity to be with conditions they have been denying or avoiding. Much of our work as coaches is helping clients discover what is true, real, and important, so that they can choose well. We could also say that our job is to help clients stop avoiding, pretending, and denying. From this empowered place, they will be able to make better decisions and be stronger in their relationships at work and at home.

Where Do You Stop?

Before we leave the subject of exploring the hard places, we should ask a pointed question: *What areas in your life are hard for you to be with or explore?* The answer is important because these are the places you'll be reluctant to go to with your clients. You might even stop in your coaching rather than get into these places. Let's say you have trouble dealing with money or anger or rejection. You may avoid these areas in your coaching. Yet these may be the places your clients need and are even willing to explore. If you are not conscious of your own off-limits areas, you'll shortchange your clients, because as soon as they start to go there, you'll steer them away. Coaches, therefore, must do their own rigorous process of self-discovery—ideally with their own coach. Begin to work on these areas so they can be included in your own life and become accessible in your work with coaching clients, too.

CHAPTER 11

Putting It All Together

So far, we have spoken of the three core principles as distinct pathways of coaching. In separating them for the book, we may have left an impression that a coaching session follows one consistent principle from first question to final accountability. In fact, in the course of a single coaching session, you, as coach, are likely to weave together elements of all three principles: fulfillment, balance, and process.

Integrating the Principles

We might think of the three principles as three different sets of tools. When coach and coachee explore values, a future vision, or the self-sabotage that can keep a coachee from achieving her vision, the coach is pulling from the fulfillment toolkit. When the coach helps clients look at an issue from a variety of different viewpoints or consider plans or action options, the toolkit is balance based. The coach who forms a container around the current moment and delves more deeply into it is in the general area of process. So how do you, as coach, decide which tool set to begin with? And how do you recognize that it is time to shift to a different principle? The short answer is that the coaching direction comes from listening at Levels II and III.

As we have said from the outset, in the Co-Active coaching model, the goals and focus areas for the coaching, and the issues for any given coaching session, come from the client. Clients set the agenda for the coaching relationship and each

coaching session. That is their responsibility.

It is the coach's responsibility to determine which coaching approach to take. The client is actually counting on the coach to take charge of the coaching direction and flow. The coach chooses a direction, beginning with the client's very first statement in the session. In our listening model, we say that the coach is paying attention to the client, aware of the strength of the one-to-one connection, listening at Level II. The coach is also paying attention to the client's shifting tone, the pace of speaking or breathing, the atmosphere that is created, and is even gauging the strength of the relationship itself: is the client moving closer, drifting away, running away, defending? This is the coach listening at Level III. For the coach, the information about where to go next with the coaching is right there, in the moment, in the Level II and Level III listening. This is crucial for coaches working in this model. Coaches listen for an overall sense of strength or weakness and use that information to help form the next question or decide which skill to apply next.

This is definitely an art that requires attentive listening and then dancing with whatever shows up. It is not a technique to be learned, as in "When the client responds 'A,' then the coach asks 'B.'" It doesn't work that way. It also doesn't work for you, as coach, to have your attention on the tool set, thinking about which principle you are working in, which context of the model you are using, or what skill to pick from the glossary. This is awareness at Level I, and when you are at this level, you have disconnected from the client. It happens to the best coaches from time to time, and coaches then need to recover and reconnect with the client.

Notice we have specifically said reconnect with the *client*

rather than reconnect with the client's *issue*. In coaching, our primary responsibility is to help clients determine their best course of action and support them in staying on track, helping them uncover the learning for themselves so that they become more resourceful over time rather than more dependent on the coach for answers. As coaches, we are always empowering our clients.

This urge to identify the “problem” as quickly as possible and find a solution in the blink of an eye is embedded in the culture. Yes, of course, there are times when it is crucial to solve problems quickly, but in coaching, we take a longer view of clients and their lives. In our model of coaching, coaches are holding the client's big-“A” agenda—a resonant, fulfilling life, a life of choice and purpose and expression. We help clients look at the issues they bring to coaching within a larger context. For coaches, it is a professional hazard to be seduced into wanting to understand all of the circumstances around a client's issue, as if our understanding would make us better equipped to help our clients. In almost every case, we overestimate what we need to know. After all, clients are the experts on their own lives and work situations; the coach is expert in helping them find the next course of action and reap the learning from the action they take.

We should note here that there is no superficial client issue, only superficial coaching. There is always something important underneath the situation presented, or it would not be worth the client's or the coach's time. Part of the coach's job is to look for whatever makes an issue important in a client's life. Every client situation has within it the potential to move the client closer to his version of fulfillment, balance, or better process in

life. The issue that a client brings is a piece of a much larger puzzle. It should be treated with respect—not as a problem to be solved so that it disappears but rather as an opportunity to move toward a larger goal. In the end, this is the real leverage of coaching: not an answer to a single issue, but a more empowered and resourceful client living a more alive and rewarding life.

Sample Coaching: Integrating the Three Principles

Client: Picking up where we left off last time ... I'm still playing with the possibility of buying the business I talked about.

COACH: You've been gathering data ...

Client: ... and I talked to the broker again.

COACH: As you view this potential acquisition, where are you today? What's the big picture? (**Vision: fulfillment**)

Client: The big picture is, it's risky.

COACH: I notice "risky" hasn't stopped you before. In fact, risk taking is a big value of yours. What is there about this risk that's different? (**Values: fulfillment**)

Client: It's complex.

COACH: Let's try to pull it apart a little. First of all, I trust you have a way to make sure the financial picture makes sense to you.

Client: I'm going to go over all of that with my partner and the CPA we've been working with, but basically, the analysis is handled. By this time next week, we'll know everything we need to know.

COACH: So there is some financial risk. Is that the risky part?

Client: Not really. I'm familiar with spreadsheets, and I can make a solid business decision based on the numbers.

COACH: So what is at risk here?

Client: You remember that theme we talked about, the theme for this year? My slowing down.

COACH: "Getting off the highway," I think, was the way you expressed it.

Client: Well, if I decide to buy this business, it won't be "getting off the highway"; it will be "moving into the fast lane."

COACH: Your voice just shifted there. What happened?
(In the moment: process)

Client: I can feel the pressure building.

COACH: What's the feeling? **(Being with: process)**

Client: A sense of dread.

COACH: What sort of image comes to mind when you let yourself feel the dread?

Client: I get all hunched over at the shoulders, like I'm carrying a heavy weight.

COACH: That's what it feels like when you look at the decision through the lens of "moving into the fast lane." What if you could look at this acquisition through the lens of your theme, "getting off the highway"? What would that be like? **(Perspectives: balance)**

Client: That would be a stretch.

COACH: Want to try it?

Client: Sure.

(Coach and client explore this and several other perspectives.)

COACH: What are you taking away from the coaching today?

Client: Two things: one, that I can handle the financial analysis, and two, the financial analysis is only one part of the decision. What's really important is how this decision impacts my life. I see that I get addicted to the excitement of making a deal and can lose track of what's really important to me in the long run.

COACH: I have a homework inquiry for you to reflect on. Ready?

Client: Yes.

COACH: What is the payoff you most want from this potential acquisition? **(Big-“A” agenda: fulfillment)**

Client: That's good. I'll take that on.

The Coach's Commitment

Just how far you are willing to go for the sake of your clients' fulfilling life? And at what point do you settle into a state of comfort—especially with clients you enjoy working with—and find yourself supporting only a portion of their dream or holding a vision of their potential that is within reach, satisfactory but not great? It can happen, unconsciously, and it

is a reminder that, as coaches, we need to be constantly vigilant, constantly holding a vision for our clients that on some days they are not able to hold for themselves.

Clients count on you to give them your 100-percent commitment. Be alert to those times when you begin to buy into their stories without question. Be willing to push back, to suggest a contrary point of view just for the sake of their exploration, so they are forced to be clear and rigorous in the stands they take. When your clients present the portrait of their world as if it is The Truth and you find yourself nodding in agreement, pause long enough to question the underlying assumptions. For example, when clients say things like “I’m so busy, so committed, I don’t have time to ...,” become curious. It may be true that a client is too busy, but it may also be an excuse that allows this person to avoid a difficult choice that would work out best in the long run. You might wonder, “What is the client really committed to, after all?”

As coach, you are the model of courageous questioning. Part of your job is to be blunt, say the unpopular or even unreasonable thing, for the sake of clients reaching their potential, living their fulfilling life, however they define it. If living a fulfilling life is a radical act, as we have said, then there will be times when yours will be the voice of fierce courage. You need to be willing to ask the tough question or tell the hard truth, even if it means your clients will not like what they hear. There may be times when you must be willing to go too far and maybe even be fired. Sometimes the toughest question is for the coach: “What are you really committed to, after all?”

Sample Coaching: Courageous Questioning

COACH: Is that your final decision?

Client: Yes. I'll be moving back to my hometown as soon as I can make the arrangements—maybe in a month.

COACH: I'm surprised.

Client: I know.

COACH: Look, Kathy, it's your life. You have to choose what you think is best, but as your coach and someone who really believes in you, I have to say I'm confused.

Client: And a little irritated, it sounds like. You think I'm selling out again.

COACH: Don't you?

Client: I'm tired of fighting.

COACH: I understand. I've seen you battle. I've seen you face the rejection letters, work the part-time job, write late into the night. I've seen that struggle. Where did that determination come from?

Client: Maybe I was just fooling myself.

COACH: I'm going to push back here. You tell me if I go too far.

Client: It just seems so hopeless.

COACH: I don't remember "hope" on your list of values. I remember the dream. I remember the woman who came to this city filled with fire and determination, taking a stand for her life and believing in herself.

Client: I was pretty wide-eyed.

COACH: I remember lots of doubt, too. Days when you were down. I don't believe the fire has gone out. I just don't believe it.

Client: The money's almost gone. My job is boring. I'm not having any fun. This is not the dream I signed up for.

COACH: I understand that, and I have a request: take a break from the writing, but don't take any action about moving. Will you do that?

Client: But if I'm not writing, what's the point? I'm just punching a clock.

COACH: You're tired. The dream is tired, too. Give it a rest. When we talk next week we can see how you're doing. Are you willing? You can say no and I'll let it go, but I'm truly asking on your behalf—on behalf of the person who believes she was born to write.

Client: Yes. Okay. For that person.

Wearing Multiple Hats

What happens when the coach really does have expertise that would be valuable to clients? It seems unfair, maybe even unprofessional, to hold back information or experience that could save clients from making costly mistakes or simply help them cut through a long and wandering learning process. The key in this situation is to be clear, on several different levels.

First, ask yourself, whether the information you have is truly relevant to the client and the client's situation. What, specifically, will this client gain from your contribution? Second, be clear with yourself and your client that you are not

wearing your coach's hat. You are wearing the hat of someone who has specific expertise or experience in the area under discussion. Third, make sure your client wants the information. Ask permission, even if you are certain that the client will say yes. Asking permission before offering suggestions preserves the integrity of the coaching relationship. And be ready for clients to say that they'd rather find out on their own. Fourth, be clear that you are offering this without attachment. The moment you believe you have the right answer or the right way, you have begun to impose your agenda on the client's action. Be clear that you are offering this with no strings attached.

Another area in which to establish clarity is the design of your alliance with the client. In some cases, clients will choose a coach specifically because that coach has relevant experience. They hire a coach who they believe understands their world. When that is the case, it is important to talk to clients about your coaching role versus a consulting or mentoring role so that they know what to expect. Both client and coach should continue to revisit the design of the relationship as necessary as the coaching proceeds.

Distinctions Among Coaching, Consulting, and Mentoring

As you can see, there is potential for confusion among these different roles, and that confusion is growing as the term "coaching" spreads around the world, especially in organizations. A growing number of consultants working with organizations have added coaching to their list of services without making the distinctions between coaching and consulting that we have made with the Co-Active coaching model. We are not saying that one is right and the other is

wrong—only that the lack of distinction is likely to create more confusion for people who hire coaches and consultants.

Coaching and consulting can work together very effectively. There is an obvious role for consultants who bring specific skills, experience, and analytical processes to a situation. They are paid to understand the problem and present workable solutions. Coaching helps embed the necessary changes and supports the organization as it applies the solutions and makes the transition. Coaching is an ideal support to help ensure that the new change takes root in the organization.

In addition to being clear about your role, it is just as important to be clear about the boundaries of coaching. If you are giving clients advice, you need to be clear that you have the authority and permission to give that advice. If you are providing professional services that require a license or certification, you need to be authorized. This is true of medical, legal, and financial advice and any other areas in which practice is restricted by law. If you have any doubt as to the propriety of offering advice, it is always best to ask the client to find a qualified source of information. Some coaches maintain a file of referral sources for situations like this.

Therapy and Coaching

Drawing the boundary between psychotherapy and coaching may sometimes be confusing for coaches. It is especially confusing when coaches assume that emotion is the realm of therapy and that they need to steer away whenever emotion appears in coaching. Actually, as we explained in [Chapter 10](#), emotions are part of the human condition. They are as natural in coaching conversations as in any other human conversation,

especially any meaningful human conversation. When clients talk openly about their goals and dreams, their hard-won victories or self-sabotaging defeats, there is always the possibility that they will tap into the underlying emotion.

Unfortunately, the boundary between counseling and coaching is not defined by a set of absolute rules and terms. Counseling and coaching often overlap, especially with some contemporary therapy modalities. What does seem clear is that, in general, therapists are trained to diagnose emotional problems and work with clients to heal the emotional wounds, while coaches are not trained to diagnose and do not focus on healing emotional wounds. Regardless of that distinction, it is also true that when clients in coaching make courageous choices in their lives, they often experience a sense of healing, of breaking old patterns and old bonds, of stepping out of a confining box and into a new strength. Coaching, however, does not focus on the emotional problem. Emotion may be present in the conversation, but it is not the work of the coaching. As long as coaches focus on the three principles and the contexts and skills of coaching, they are very likely to stay within bounds. (The Coaches Toolkit online at <http://www.coactive.com/toolkit> includes the ethical standards for professional coaches published by the International Coach Federation.)

The Expanding World of Coaching

In the years since the first edition of this book was published, coaching has entered the mainstream of life and work, on every continent and in nearly every walk of life. Where it once focused on two main categories, personal coaching for

individuals and executive coaching for corporate executives and managers, today it has evolved and spun off into hundreds of variations and hybrids.

You will find coaches working with individuals at every stage of life and in different life circumstances. For example, coaches now work with such diverse groups as teenagers considering college and career choices, college students exploring life and work, couples considering marriage, married couples who want better relationships, individuals who are changing jobs or careers or are relocating, workers preparing for retirement, and individuals facing life-altering or terminal illnesses. Coaches may specialize in working with certain groups, such as senior executives, biotech workers, artists and musicians, teachers, at-risk teens, or directors and volunteers at nonprofit organizations.

One area of dramatic growth for coaching in recent years is the coach who works with teams in organizations. A team is a living entity with values, vision, personality, even its own self-limiting beliefs. In this case, the “client” is the team as a whole, not simply the individual team members. And yet the team dynamic cannot be separated from the individual personalities and distinct interests of each team member. Balancing group and individual interests is a challenging combination for team coaches, and can be a very rewarding coaching experience.

Some coaches combine their work with other interest areas, including outdoor activities such as river rafting and rock climbing, financial planning, public speaking, time management, and fitness work. Or they combine coaching with an array of related services that might include strategic planning, communications training, or leadership development.

For the Professional Coach

The following suggestions for professional coaches range from considering the coaching form to options such as providing coaching as a complement to other work.

The Coaching Format

As we have noted throughout the book, there is no single, universal, or official format for coaching. Coaches and coaching formats come in every size, shape, and color. Factors to consider include the following: time frame, coaching medium, and length and frequency of sessions.

Time Frame. Some coaching relationships are open-ended and ongoing. They often start with an agreed-on minimum length, such as three months, but can continue for years. The coaching relationship becomes part of the client's support system as she continues to make important changes and faces new transitions and unexpected challenges.

Other coaching relationships are built on a fixed length, such as six months or a year. This is often the case for coaches working with clients in organizations or for consultants who include coaching as a means of implementing changes or programs.

Length and Frequency of Sessions. According to International Coach Federation surveys, the most common form for coaching is a thirty-minute phone session three or four times a month. However, the best answer to the questions "How long?" and

“How often?” is “Whatever works best for coach and client.”

This is a core example of designing an alliance that works for the relationship. That doesn't necessarily mean both coach and client need to compromise until they find common ground. It does mean that coaches need to be clear about what a fulfilling work life looks like and be willing to take a stand for it. So if, as a coach, you feel that you are most effective working with clients for forty-five minutes or an hour, you need to be clear with prospective clients about your work style. And if you have a strong preference on frequency of sessions, it's important to build that into the working policies for your practice. There are coaches who work with clients once a month or every week—even every day for a period of time if they are focused on a pressing deadline. Frequency is ultimately a combination of preference and negotiation. For many coaches, it takes a year or two of experimentation to find the pace that works best with their individual style.

Client Relationships

In this book, we emphasize coaching one-to-one with individual clients. Some coaches, however, prefer to work with couples, partnerships, families, work groups, or teams. Others do a combination of individual and team coaching. The key, in our experience, is to be very clear about your niche, your passion, your sense of mission. You will be most successful, and most inspired, when working with the people you care about most.

For coaches working with individuals or teams in organizations, there is another layer of consideration—the three-way dynamic created among the coach, the client or

coachee, and the organization. For these cases, the coach needs to design a three-way alliance. Issues of confidentiality must be defined and roles clarified. Does the organization expect a report from the coach or the coachee? Who sets the goals and criteria for the coaching—client or organization? If coaching is to be effective, there must be sincere commitment on the part of the coachee, or the work may merely be a way of exerting pressure on compliance.

Special Considerations for Internal Coaches

We know from experience that the Co-Active coaching model works as effectively with internal coaches working inside organizations as it does with external coaches. We have years of feedback from internal coaches in large and small companies, agencies, and nonprofit organizations around the world. We also know that there are certain differences that must be addressed in order for the coaching to be effective.

Here again, a three-way dynamic is at play among the internal coach, the coachee, and the organization or sponsor. The situation can be quite sensitive, and in our experience, the best approach is to establish clarity of roles and expectations in the early design of the coaching alliance involving all three parties. It is especially important for internal coaches to be clear about the boundaries for the coaching relationship. Some organizations insist that the coaching focus only on performance goals; in other organizations, coaches are empowered to help coachees clarify and pursue the most fulfilling and motivating personal path, even if these individuals end up leaving the organization. There is tremendous power in an organization that is fueled by fully

motivated employees, and many organizations are aware that unmotivated employees are a drain on momentum.

Coaching As a Complement to Other Work

Change that takes root happens over time and is most likely to be sustained with attention and support. Coaching is an ideal complement to program changes and a beneficial follow-up for activities or experiences designed to open up new insight or learning. A workshop, seminar, or off-site retreat can have extraordinary impact, but that impact may easily fade as individuals are separated from the experience over time.

Coaching keeps the learning alive; in fact, it nourishes the seeds that were planted in that initial experience. Consultants and team leaders are turning to coaching more and more as a means of sustaining change. Experiential trainers, guides, and program leaders are incorporating ongoing coaching in order to continue the work that began in the initial adventure or experience.

Every system—human and natural—resists change. Inertia is a compelling power that tends to keep things as they are and exerts pressure to return to the way things have always been. There is also a complementary urge for change in every system, but in the human world, it seems to need a fair amount of encouragement and support. Coaching is an ideal mechanism for sustaining change.

So Many Options

We know we have barely scratched the surface of the wide range of possibilities for coaches. There are many books and other resources available for coaches who are looking at launching a practice. The key, we continue to emphasize, for

new coaches especially, is to design your coaching offering so that it is fulfilling—so that it resonates with your values and provides balance in your own life. Make it a design that allows you to love and live in the moment. In other words, let your practice be what you preach.

Coaching Skills for a Different Conversation

Coaching is more than a profession. It is also a communication medium with ground rules and expectations for conversation. This form of communication is also finding its way into business meetings, leadership courses, dialogue between teachers and children, and within families. Coaching emphasizes open listening, mutual respect, clarity, and willingness to engage with even difficult and emotional conversations. Daniel Goleman, with his work on emotional intelligence, paved the way for broad acceptance of this world of open communication, especially the crucial importance of emotional intelligence as a necessary quality for effective leaders. Today, the skills we most associate with professional coaching are finding their way into all sorts of conversations.

Imagine a World

Back in 1998, we wrote about a world we imagined; a world where coaching and coaching skills were a natural part of human relationships. That vision still holds today, but we have a growing sense that what we only imagined then is more and more a real part of the world we experience today.

Those of us who have trained coaches and have coached clients know the extraordinary impact coaching can have on

people's lives. It's why we can take a stand with such assurance for transformative change. We have seen it so often in our clients. We've felt it in our own lives as well. Now extrapolate from that handful of people in one person's coaching circle to a whole world where coaching is part of everyday life.

Imagine a world where the fundamental skills and approach of coaching are widely used—not just by coaches, but by everyone. What if people everywhere simply assumed that the principles of fulfillment, balance, and process were a basic expectation for everyone? What if the axioms we take for granted in coaching relationships found their way into everyday life? Imagine what that would be like.

In this world where fundamental coaching principles abound, people would be committed to fulfilling lives and work. They would be less likely to tolerate second-rate lives and more likely to decide they wouldn't settle for anything less than a full way of living that used their talents and skills completely. Children would learn that fulfillment is not something that will happen for some people someday when they are rich or famous, but is available in this moment, and every moment that follows, for those who are on a path of fulfillment.

Imagine a world where everyone has a compelling vision of his work, a sense of choice and purpose. Imagine a world of passionate, committed people determined to make a difference in the lives of others as they live life fully themselves. This would be a world that receives everybody's best effort, everybody's gift—instead of merely their compliance, their bodies sitting at desks, working at machines, or standing behind counters with 10 percent of their brains engaged. Although people might be in the same exact jobs in our imagined world,

they would have an entirely different frame of reference, a different attitude as they wake up in the morning. The value of work would change because it would no longer be about what job you have but about the difference you make and the values you honor in the work you do.

Imagine a world where the axioms of coaching operate everywhere: in interpersonal relationships, work dynamics, and international relations. Imagine the difference it would make if people designed the alliance before embarking on a business project or a relationship. What would it be like if people routinely told the truth to one another—even the hard truth—and insisted on nothing less than that without feeling the need to erect defenses? Imagine how our political system would change if people felt free to simply tell the truth.

Imagine a world where people are committed to truly listen, not only to the words but to everything behind the words. What if we held out the biggest picture possible of what we and our children could be instead of pointing out everybody's limitations? What if we came to expect greatness instead of failure or inadequacy, and treated failure, when it happens, not as a disgrace but as a form of fast learning? What if we acknowledged people's strengths instead of picking at their flaws?

This would be a world of curiosity and wonder and listening in extraordinary ways. It would be a world in which we hold one another to account for what we say we will do, expecting the best effort. In this world, we would be as committed to the truth about ourselves as we were to the truth we told others.

In this world, learning and growth would be valued over comfort and appearance. Imagine a world of compelling visions

set loose to create and prosper, totally supported, totally encouraged, totally celebrated. This would be a transformative world indeed. Imagine.

Glossary

Accountability. Accountability is having your clients account for what they said they were going to do. It stems from three questions: (1) What are you going to do? (2) When will you have this done? (3) How will I know? Accountability does not include blame or judgment. Rather, the coach holds clients accountable to their vision or commitment and asks them to account for the results of their intended actions. If need be, holding clients accountable includes defining new actions to be taken.

Acknowledgment. Acknowledgment addresses the self and who clients had to be in order to accomplish the action they took or the awareness they achieved. It is the articulation of your deep knowing of the other.

“I acknowledge the courage it took for you to show up for this session, knowing that you had difficult things to share with me today.”

Agenda: big-“A” agenda. The big-“A” agenda is the meta-view, or how clients’ choices and actions relate to their big-picture agendas. This is where clients learn more deeply about how they operate. At its core, the big-“A” agenda consists of the three principles of Co-Active coaching: fulfillment, balance, and process. It assumes that clients want these three things: (1) to live fulfilling lives, (2) to be in balance about those lives, and (3) to be present in the process of life. The coach interacts with clients holding this big-“A” agenda at all

times.

Agenda: little-“a” agenda. The little-“a” agenda consists of the small picture, the circumstances in the client’s life, his or her agenda of the moment. This agenda is focused on a particular event, on the client’s choices around that event, or on the actions the client will take related to that specific event.

Articulating what’s going on. This skill involves telling clients what you see them doing. It may be what you’re hearing with your Level II listening, or you may tell them what they have not said based on your Level III listening and awareness. Sometimes, it is powerful to simply repeat their words back to them so they can really hear themselves.

“Debbie, I know how much you want to change your relationship with your dad, yet I hear you are interacting with him the way you always have.”

“You’re annoyed that your manager didn’t consider your workload when she assigned you to this new project.”

Asking permission. This skill enables clients to grant the coaching relationship access to unusually intimate or sometimes uncomfortable areas of focus.

“May I tell you a hard truth?” “Is it all right to coach you on this issue?” “May I tell you what I see?”

Bottom-lining. This is the skill of brevity and succinctness on the part of both the coach and the client. It is also about having

clients get to the essence of their communication rather than engaging in long, descriptive stories.

Brainstorming. Using this skill, coach and client together generate ideas, alternatives, and possible solutions. Some may be outrageous and impractical. This is merely a creative exercise to expand the possibilities available to clients. Neither coach nor client is attached to any of the ideas suggested.

Challenge. A challenge is a request that stretches clients way beyond their self-imposed limits and shakes up the way they see themselves. A challenge, like a request, includes three things: (1) a specified action, (2) conditions of satisfaction, and (3) a date or time of completion. Clients will respond to a challenge with a yes, a no, or a counteroffer. Frequently, the counteroffer is greater than the concession they initially intended to make.

A client wants to make cold calls to increase his business. He thinks he can make only one call a day. You challenge him: “I challenge you to make fifty calls a day!” The client counteroffers with “I’ll make seven.”

Championing. Championing clients means standing up for them when they doubt or question their abilities. Despite their self-doubt, the coach knows clearly who they are and that they are capable of much more than they think.

Clarifying. When clients are unable to articulate clearly what they want or where they are going, the coach clarifies their

experience. Clarification may be used in response to the client's vague sense of the desired outcome, confusion, or uncertainty. This skill represents a synergistic application of questioning, reframing, and articulating what is going on. It is particularly useful during the discovery process.

Clearing. Clearing is a skill that can benefit either the client or the coach. When clients are preoccupied with a situation or a mental state that interferes with their ability to be present or take action, the coach assists by being an active listener while they vent or complain. Both client and coach hold the intention of clearing the emotionality from the situation. This active listening allows clients to temporarily clear the situation out of the way and focus on taking the next step. When a coach gets hooked by a client interaction or is preoccupied with issues that do not pertain to the client, the coach can clear. The coach clears by sharing his or her experience or preoccupation with a colleague or a friend in order to show up and be fully present with the client.

Dancing in this moment. Coaches are dancing in this moment when they are being completely present with the client, holding the client's agenda, accessing their intuition, letting the client lead them. When coaches dance in the moment, they are open to any steps the client takes and are willing to go in the client's direction and flow.

Designed alliance. Coaches and clients begin designing their alliance during the discovery session. Both client and coach are intimately involved in designing the coaching relationship that

will be most beneficial to the client. Designed alliances tend to shift over time and need to be revisited regularly.

Goal setting. Clients live their big-“A” agendas by setting goals and following through. Goals keep clients focused and on track toward the people they are becoming. Goals are not the same as action; they are the desired results of action. In Co-Active coaching, goals should be specific, measurable, accountable, resonant, and thrilling (SMART).

Granting relationship power. The coaching relationship is separate from the client and the coach. Because the power of coaching resides in the relationship between coach and client, not with either of the two individuals, both coach and client take responsibility for creating the coaching relationship that will most fully serve the client, thereby granting power to the relationship.

Holding the client’s agenda. When coaches hold the client’s agenda, they let go of their own opinions, judgments, and answers in support of facilitating the client’s fulfillment, balance, and process. Coaches follow the client’s lead without knowing the right answer, giving solutions, or telling the client what to do. Holding the client’s agenda requires coaches to put their whole attention on the client and the client’s agenda, not on their own agenda for the client.

Holding the focus. Once clients have determined a direction or a course of action, the coach’s job is to keep them on track and true to that course. Clients frequently become distracted by

events in their lives, by the fears or confusion that come with big changes, or simply by the wealth of available options. The coach consistently reminds clients of their focus and helps redirect their energy back to their desired outcomes and life choices.

Homework inquiry. When the coach gives the client a powerful question as homework, the intent is to deepen the client's learning and provoke further reflection. Clients are asked to consider the inquiry between sessions or over a longer period of time and to see what occurs for them. The inquiry is usually based on a particular situation that clients are addressing at the time. An inquiry has multiple answers, none of which are "right."

"What are you tolerating?" "What is it to be undaunted?" "What is challenge?"

Intruding. On occasion, the coach may need to intrude, to interrupt or wake up clients who are going on and on or who are kidding themselves. The coach does this for the sake of the client's agenda, often pointing the client in a specific direction: "*Stop a moment. What's at the heart of this?*" Intrusion is considered rude in some cultures. In Co-Active training, however, intrusion is viewed as being direct with the client, allowing the client to honestly assess and immediately deal with the situation. Sometimes the intrusion is a hard truth:

"You are kidding yourself." Or the intrusion could simply be a statement about what is going on, such as "You're skirting the issue."

Intuiting. Intuiting is the process of accessing and trusting one's inner knowing. Intuition is direct knowing, unencumbered by the thinking mind. The process of intuiting is nonlinear and nonrational. Sometimes the information received through intuiting does not make logical sense to the coach; however, it is usually quite valuable to the client. Intuiting involves taking risks and trusting your gut.

“I have a hunch that ...” “I wonder if ...”

Listening. The coach listens for the client's vision, values, commitment, and purpose as expressed in words and demeanor. To listen for is to listen in search of something. The coach listens with consciousness, with a purpose and focus that come from the alliance designed with the client. The coach is listening for the client's agenda, not thinking about her agenda for the client. In Co-Active coaching, when coaches listen to their own thoughts, judgments, and opinions about the client's story, they're listening at Level I; listening that focuses on the client is Level II, and global listening is Level III.

Making distinctions. One way to help clients see a situation from a fresh perspective is to help them distinguish between two or more concepts, facts, or ideas. For example, the client may have blended two facts together into one disempowering belief. The belief appears to be a fact of life, but it's not.

“Since I failed, I am a failure” (equating failing with failure). “If I make money, that means I'm successful” (equating money with success).

Metaphor. Metaphors are used to illustrate a point and paint a verbal picture for the client.

“Your mind is like a Ping-Pong ball bouncing between one choice and the other.” “You’re almost at the finish line. Go for it! You can win the race!”

Meta-view. The meta-view is the big picture or expanded perspective. The coach pulls back (or asks clients to pull back) from clients’ immediate issues and reflects back to clients what he sees through the clarity of that expanded perspective.

“If your life were like a road, and we were to take a helicopter ride up above it, what would we see?”

Perspective. Perspective is one of the gifts that the coach brings to the coaching relationship—not the “right” perspective, but simply other points of view. Part of coaching is inviting clients to see their lives or certain issues from different angles. When clients see things from only one perspective, they are less resourceful and may be victimized by their circumstances. When they are able to reexamine their viewpoints, to look at their lives or certain issues from different angles, they are able to see possibility and change.

Planning. The coach helps clients articulate the direction they wish to take and actively monitors their progress. Clients frequently benefit from support in planning and time management as the coach helps them develop their skills in these areas.

Powerful questions. A powerful question evokes clarity,

action, discovery, insight, or commitment. It creates greater possibility, new learning, or clearer vision. Powerful questions are open-ended questions that do not elicit a yes-or-no response. They are derived from holding the client's agenda and either forwarding the client's action or deepening his or her learning.

“What do you want?” “What's next?” “How will you start?” “What does that cost you?” “What's important for you to remember?”

Reframing. With reframing, the coach provides clients with another perspective by taking the original information and interpreting it in a different way.

A client has just been informed that she was selected as second choice for a high-powered position in a very competitive market. She is disappointed and is questioning her professional competence. The coach reframes the situation by pointing out that being selected as second choice in such a competitive market indicates the high quality of the client's expertise and experience.

Requesting. One of the most potent coaching skills is that of making a request of the client. The request, based on the client's agenda, is designed to forward the client's action. The request includes a specified action, conditions of satisfaction, and a date or time for completion. There are three possible responses to a request: (1) yes, (2) no, or (3) a counteroffer.

Saboteur. The saboteur concept embodies a group of thought processes and feelings that maintains the status quo in our lives. It often appears to be a structure that protects us, but in fact it prevents us from moving forward and getting what we truly want in life. The saboteur will always be with us. It is neither good nor bad; it just is. The saboteur loses its power over us when we can identify it for what it is, notice our options in the situation, and then consciously choose the action we really want at that time.

Self-management. This skill involves the coach's ability to put aside all opinions, preferences, judgments, and beliefs in order to hold the client's agenda. Self-management also includes managing the client's saboteur. The coach can aid clients in identifying their saboteur and then provide tools for managing it.

Structures. Structures are devices that remind clients of their vision, goals, or purpose, or the actions they need to take immediately. Collages, calendars, messages on voice mail, and alarm clocks can serve as structures.

Taking charge. The coach chooses and directs the path of the coaching in order to serve the client's agenda. Sometimes clients become lost in their circumstances and forget what matters most to them. That's when the coach needs to take charge and direct the coaching back to what is most meaningful to them.

Values. Values represent who you are right now. They are

principles that you hold to be of worth in your life. People often confuse values with morals, but they are not the same. Values are not chosen. They are intrinsic to you and are as distinctly yours as your thumbprint.

Vision. This is a multifaceted mental image that personally defines and inspires the client to take action and create that picture in his or her life. A powerful vision is sensuous, exciting, and magnetic, constantly inspiring the client to try to bring it to fruition. Vision provides clients with direction and meaning in life.

Witnessing. Witnessing means being authentically present with the client. This skill creates the space for clients to fully express themselves. When the coach witnesses the client's learning and growth, the client feels seen and known at a very deep level.

About the Authors

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Henry Kimsey-House, CPCC, MCC, and one of the first professional coaches in the 1980s, is the cofounder and lead designer of the provocative, experiential learning programs of The Coaches Training Institute (CTI), the foremost coach training school in the world. CTI and its Co-Active philosophy have revolutionized the lives and careers of more than 35,000 managers, leaders, and coaches throughout the world. An actor since age nine, Kimsey-House honed his insights into human emotion and the narrative process through classical theatrical training and years of stage, television, and film experience. With deep conviction that education should be driven by immersive, contextually based learning and not dry information dumps, Kimsey-House is committed to creating richly engaging and transformative learning environments where retention approaches 80 percent rather than the traditional 20 percent. He continues to develop innovative curricula and collaborate with other dynamic thought leaders, and he is completing a book about transformative leadership. He lives with his wife, Karen Kimsey-House, on the coast of northern California.

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¹In this third edition we intentionally use the term “coachee” to indicate the person who receives the coaching. The term “coachee” (in wide use outside North America) implies any person who receives coaching, whereas the term “client” implies a professional coaching relationship. The model applies even when the coaching relationship is more informal, such as a manager and direct report. Using the term “coachee” covers all coaching relationships. In this third edition we will use “coachee” and “client” interchangeably.