

THE COACHING AND MENTORING JOURNEY

Where are we coming from? Where are we going?

SIR JOHN WHITMORE

I had no idea what I was getting into back in 1979 when, with the support of Tim Gallwey and three colleagues, I started a little London based tennis and ski school called The Inner Game. Our attempts to break into the tennis and ski teaching establishment were rejected (they thought that what we were doing was weird), so we set up successful independent recreational courses for adults in both. The training manager of IBM (UK) came on a tennis course, loved it, and invited us to run a tennis day in a week long training for managers, as he believed that what we were doing would be transferable to the workplace. We did and it was, and so the journey began.

Some years later after several incarnations, we ceased to use The Inner Game name as it did not describe, to the world at large at least, what we were doing. Since we were all from a sports background, Tennis, Skiing, Motor racing, Athletics, and Hockey, the obvious word to use was coaching. With hindsight that may have been a mistake because the way we taught was diametrically opposed to the conventional instructional method that the term coaching was identified with, and with which plenty of people had had bad experiences. To invent a new word coaching might have been better. However the non-sport use of the term coaching is now becoming so widespread that it may in turn be changing the definition of the word for (the) good.

However we stuck with it then, and it so happened that at about that time Life Coaching emerged in California using similar principles also based in humanistic psychology, and the term was set. Little did we know then how big coaching would

become, particularly in the workplace. Traditional sports coaching remained largely unchanged and fell further behind the frontier of learning, into obsolescence where it largely remains today. In recent years there have been encouraging signs that the sports establishment is beginning to wake up, and New Zealand leads the way. However non-sport coaching is moving forward fast in quantity, the International Coach Federation membership is approaching 15,000 and now rising at some 400 a month. Coaching is being enriched in quality too with many Academic programmes and degrees available, a wider variety of applications, and the clamour worldwide for deeper Transpersonal based coaching.

Where is this later need coming from? From deep inside the human soul. So many of us have a yearning for more freedom of choice about our own lives and about the world we live in. This is why many people drop out of conventional work to become coaches, and this is what many of our clients want too. We see the mess the world is in; we read about the failings of our political and corporate leaders on the news every day, we see and are even beginning to feel the environmental degradation, and we are appalled by the social injustice that is rife still today.

What has gone wrong, and who is going to put it right? We have, and we are. Our so-called leaders cannot for they know not how. That sounds dramatic, and hugely presumptuous, but wait; there is help on the way, and it is called evolution.

Just as, according to Darwin, biology adapts over time and becomes ever more complex and sophisti-

cated, so does our psychology – or rather our psycho-spirituality both collectively and individually. That is the story and the only argument is, is this a genetic programme, or did someone write the script? The answer to that depends not so much on the reality, which it unlikely to be knowable in our lifetime anyway, but on our perspective, or the story we choose to live by.

The view of the level of collective psychosocial evolution of the many cultures on our planet is a very sensitive subject and it will depend upon the criteria from which we make the assessment. Some people will do so, on economic grounds, and trumpet white Caucasians supremacy, but on the other hand, some indigenous tribes have discovered ways of living harmoniously to which we are yet to aspire, and Asians who are already showing us the way intellectually by other criteria. Asians incidentally don't differentiate between psychological and spiritual development, but see it as the continuum that it is, so for them the transpersonal is normal. Lump humanity together, something that has been enforced by the single global economic system and the internet, and we can see a collective trend, reflecting the predicted emerging stage of human evolution. That trend is the inevitable crumbling of hierarchy and autocratic dominance, and the replacing rise of the demand for, and the reality of, personal choice and self-responsibility. Human beings are now ready for that, but all change like this generates defiant resistance, and a breakdown before the build up. This is where humanity is.

It is into this underlying evolutionary trend that coaching was born, both

as a subconscious part of the evolutionary script, but also more consciously as a service to meet a growing need. So here we are, the pioneers of a fledgling industry that will expand beyond our wildest dreams in the coming decades. It will be embodied into education at all grades, management of all kinds, health and other care delivery, politics and diplomacy in time. The hierarchy of religion will decline and self-determined spirituality will rise, as indeed it already is, and the need and search for meaning and purpose becomes more universal. Hence once more the urgent need for coach training to include transpersonal capability.

Of course the language of Coaching will change too. The methods will be so integrated into education and management in time that they become the norm and the word coaching will be dropped for those applications. But let us shrink to the micro for a moment since the theme of this issue is language and I don't want to miss an opportunity to make a point. Coaching questions need to be absolutely clear and unambiguous, and that is helped by keeping them brief and singular. Many coaches have also discovered that the English language is rather sloppy or at least the way we use it can be. One question that I think should be banned is, "How did that feel?" The alternative, "What did you feel when that happened?" is fine – and if you can't see the difference, take a day off from coaching to figure it out.

While on the subject of feeling, we also often fail to differentiate between feeling and thinking, for example;

**"I feel that you were"
is a thought not a feeling.**

**"I feel sad, happy, pain etc."
is a feeling.**

Yes, my recommendation for the day is that we coaches should watch our language!

But now back to the macro. I conclude with five provocative big picture statements for you to mull over and consider how they may effect your clients now, and influence your coaching into the future.

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Our obsession with the acquisition of **Quantity** with early obsolescence has caused us to lose the appreciation of **Quality**, and even much of our ability to manifest it.

Hierarchy is diminishing and **Self-responsibility** is destined to replace much of it, once we have learned how to be self-responsible from the mistakes we will make, and we emerge from the inevitable period of accompanying social breakdown.

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