

Will coaching rise to the challenge?

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Every crisis is both a problem and an opportunity, depending to a large extent upon whether one is a pessimist or an optimist. The current economic one is no exception for each of us individually, for the coaching profession and for humanity as a whole. I will briefly look at each in that frame.

This crisis gives most of us a real material reason, or at least a wake up-call, to take the time to review our lives, our work, our values, our purpose, and our future. I just read about a banker who had lost his job to become a gardener, and found happiness, and I am sure he is not alone. Too many people get on the treadmill or the rat race and just can't get off again, especially when they have a mortgage, a Mercedes and an ego to support, let alone 2.4 children who demand branded clothing. The illusion of wealth separates some from the reality of daily life, of appreciating and being responsible for small everyday things like changing a light bulb. They may be enriched by the downturn, for by lightening their load and tightening their belts, they may touch reality.

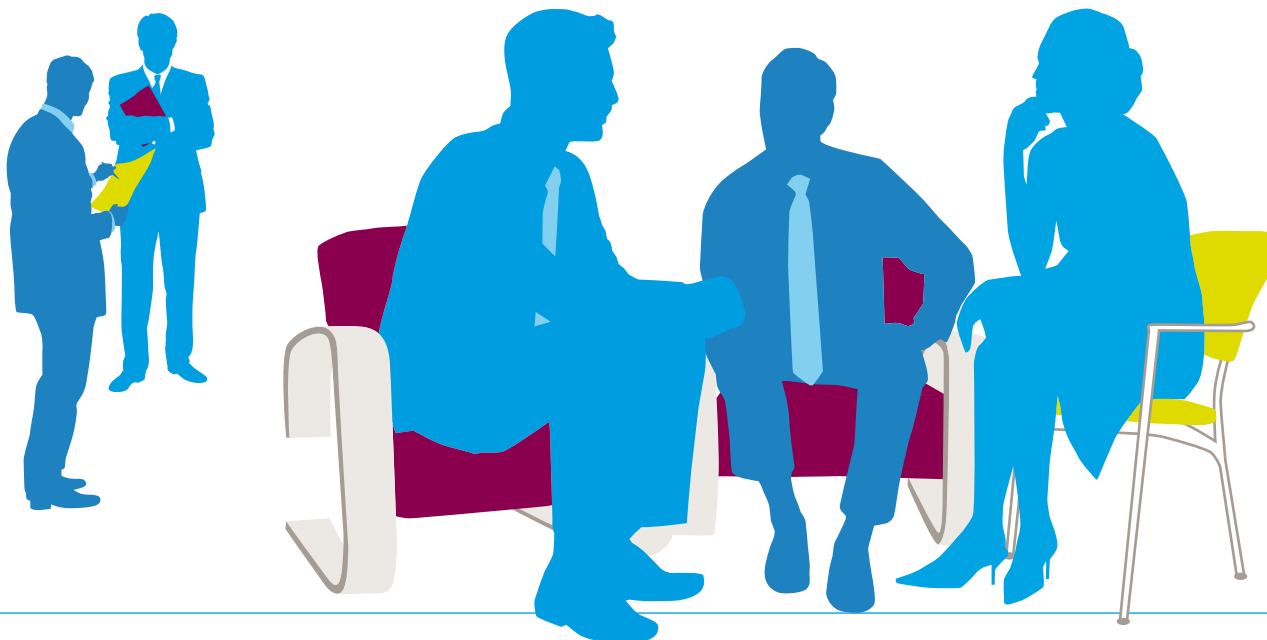
Lest you think I am playing down the suffering and anxiety that some are obviously experiencing, I can only say that personal development often comes without a choice, and its benefits seldom come without a sacrifice, but in time that is usually worth every penny, even if the pluses are not immediately apparent. Half a century ago, I lived in a 12 bedroom stately home but have consistently downsized to my present one bedroom rented flat overlooking the station on the down-market side of an up-market town. I have never been happier, more fulfilled and more active than I am today, despite my 71 years. It is all in the mind, not in the purse. The possibilities that the current fast changing global situation open up for us all for attaining more rewarding lives, are unlimited.

It provides a huge opportunity not just for individuals to change their lives for the better, but for coaches and the coaching profession to facilitate such changes. So many people, even those who are not immediately challenged by the economic circumstances, are asking

themselves questions that they have never been asked before about the meaning and the purpose of life, and their life in particular. People are re-evaluating not only their job and their motives, but also the quality and the sustainability of their relationships and lifestyle. Skilled coaches can facilitate these issues enormously, and better than any advice on offer, for these issues are deeply personal and individual, and there are no textbook answers.

The sad thing is that the people who would most benefit from coaching may not know of the existence or the availability of coaching, let alone be able to afford the fees. There are no textbook answers for that either.

The failure of leadership in politics and in business at this time is abundantly clear, and coaching would surely be in order. Brown rushes in to prop up profligate banks to save the economy, or so he says when he must know that he is only postponing the inevitable demise of an obsolete economic system. The collapse, when it does come, will thereby be more



disastrous and painful than it would be, were we to go through it today, but maybe that will not be on his watch.

The same is true for the American broken and defunct motor industry that may limp on for a year or two. Having done more damage to America's reputation abroad than any other President, Bush has handed the unenviable baton to Obama to stem the inevitable decline of US influence as China rises to lead the way of the world.

It is no coincidence that the coaching profession has emerged in the past twenty five years and grown like topsy ever since. **When hierarchy, autocracy and leadership fail, what will replace them?**

It is a mistake to wait for a new Abraham Lincoln or Winston Churchill to save us. Those days are over, besides the world is infinitely more complex and fast changing today and information far too widely accessible for people to be fooled into allowing one mundane human to lead them, and no saint or saviour is scheduled to show up just yet.

We all are being obliged by default and by circumstance to take more responsibility for our own lives and for the good of the whole. This is indeed the stage of psycho-social evolution that humanity has now entered. The downside is that we are ill prepared to take up self-responsibility for we have not practiced it before, and some just grab licence with liberation. It is not surprising then that the primary products of coaching are awareness and responsibility that can be applied anywhere from the smallest task today, to the long-term global challenge of climate change.

Through spreading the skills that coaches use, asking not telling, pulling not pushing, into normal management behaviour in larger institutions like education, healthcare, the military and the prison service, personal responsibility will grow and with it the

freedom to choose. This is indeed the evolutionary journey that will eventually leave the power hungry starving, and the world a better place.

What it will require is a new breed of coaches prepared to teach large groups the basic coaching skills in quick time. For example the European Commission will before long be recommending that all driving instructors throughout the European Union countries retrain to become driving coaches in order to save the lives of thousands of young male drivers who are too susceptible to lethal testosterone fuelled behaviours. How is such large scale retraining to be accomplished? The coaching profession needs to develop the means of so doing, and its application in driving is but one institution. Education is far larger and presents a far more complex challenge.

As the coaching ethos spreads and becomes an integral part of our way of life, the name coaching may disappear from all but the most specialised of applications, but there is a long way to go before that happens. Meanwhile the requirement of coaches to meet and adapt to the changing circumstances and demands of life will continue. Coaches need to keep abreast of current affairs especially in the economy and the environment, and in other local, national and even global changes to be able to ask the right questions. Coaches will increasingly need to develop the higher skills of transpersonal coaching, to be able to address deeper issues of meaning and purpose and personal performance that will be demanded.

Recently neuro-science research reaffirmed many of the behaviours of the best coaches and offers more, such as a rigorous template for coaching complexity, creating faster change without fear of backsliding, and the possibility of coaching large groups.

Many coaches stick rigidly to the idea that they work unswervingly on the coachee's agenda, however they will increasingly face the fact that their own values and that of their client may be at odds. **I strongly assert that if their own values are of a more inclusive and more universal order, they take precedence over those of the client, and they should not be afraid to say so.** How else are we going to root out the corruption that has become endemic in the world of corporate greed of late?

So the coaching profession faces many challenges and huge opportunities, and a great responsibility. It has grown from personal coaching, to group coaching, from a cottage industry to a workplace profession; can it now shed the inevitable self-limiting beliefs of an expanding role to become a global force to serve humanity on a big scale and on the front line? What coaching has to offer is the means to construct exactly what is most needed all over at this time, the individual and collective responsibility essential for the survival of life as we know it.

"To ensure the destruction of all life in future, we only have to do nothing."

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