

Coaching: A Designed Alliance



Putting the wind beneath
your wings



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COACHING: A DESIGNED ALLIANCE

1. COACHING VS OTHER MODALITIES

COACHING



Coaching helps you get from where you are to where you want to be. It is present-focused, forward-looking, and action-oriented, tailored to your specific goals and needs. A coach brings out your best, helping you uncover and nurture untapped potential to reach higher levels of performance, responsibility, and accountability by developing your insight, awareness, skills, and capability. A coach facilitates change, growth, and development, but it's up to you to enact these changes.

Think of coaching as driving to a destination. You know where you want to go and are driving there, but you aren't making the progress you expect to be making. You might not realize you have your foot on the brake, the handbrake is on, the gas tank is empty, or your engine needs oil. Address these issues, and with a coach guiding you around obstacles, you'll make real progress.

MENTORING

Mentors are role models who have “been there, done that”. They help show you the ropes and guide the way. A mentor, in simple words, is someone who offers their knowledge, expertise and advice to those

with less experience. They make specific recommendations on what you should or should not do. Mentorship tends to be focused on specific skill and knowledge acquisition for career development. Coaching, on the other hand, tends to focus on helping a person grow holistically. It includes both the inner work (mindset, values, beliefs) and outer work (skills, performance, behaviours etc.)

CONSULTING

Consultants are experts in their field. They are hired for their knowledge, skill and ability to recommend specific solutions and strategies to specific problems. Consultants are rarely tasked with implementation: their role is to diagnose what isn't working and why, and recommend the specific strategies and actions needed to reach a defined goal. It is coaches and/or mentors who stick with you through implementation – helping you remove roadblocks you may encounter along the way as you implement your strategy and move towards your goals. Professional coaches, unlike mentors or consultants, are experts in identifying those blocks – especially internal blocks based on attitudes, perceptions or beliefs.

THERAPY/COUNSELLING

Traditional counselling/therapy strives to heal poor mental health (e.g. depressions, anxiety) with the goal of reaching a stable and healthier emotional and mental state, and improved well-being. It helps people move from struggling to coping and functioning.

Coaching, on the other hand, is focused on increasing mental fitness (our capacity to meet life challenges with a positive, rather than negative, mindset). It helps people move from functioning to thriving, from coping to excelling. In coaching, the fundamental belief is that you are capable of creating your own solutions and the future you want; that you are -- whether you believe it or not -- naturally creative, resourceful and whole.



2. A DESIGNED ALLIANCE



Coaching is a partnership of equals. As such, it involves the active and collaborative participation of both of us. I am not “the expert” here to “fix you” or “solve your problems”, although problems will be solved. Nor is coaching primarily about improving performance, attaining goals, or achieving results, although all of those will certainly happen over time in an effective coaching relationship. At its core, coaching is about discovery, awareness and choice. It is a process whereby I, your coach, hold a sacred, safe, curious and empowering space for you as you grow and develop internally and externally.

There are four cornerstones to the Designed Alliance that is the coaching relationship.

YOU ARE NATURALLY CREATIVE, RESOURCEFUL AND WHOLE.

You are innately capable: capable of finding answers, capable of choosing, capable of taking action, capable of recovering when things don’t go as planned, and capable of learning. My role is to champion your capability, not to be your worried hand-holder. Yes of course there will be times when the circumstances may feel overwhelming. And even in those times I will believe in your inner light, your inner resilience, your innate capability. There will be times I challenge you to believe that in yourself, and to live by it. You would want nothing less from me – because living small and safe and stuck is not why you have come to coaching.

This also means that if there is something not working for you in our coaching relationship, you will say so – and then we’ll work through like any other topic you bring to coaching.

COACHING FOCUSES ON THE WHOLE YOU

While you may come to coaching to work on a professional issue, or a personal one, I don’t separate those: they are one and the same, because you are a single, whole person. You are not a problem to be solved. Yes – you may have problems you want to solve, goals you want to reach, dreams you want to live. But you are more than whatever the day’s problem might be. And whatever the day’s issue may be, it is inextricably entwined with the whole you: your heart, mind, body and spirit. It’s not just your thoughts or your actions that we include in coaching, it’s also your feelings and your spirit – that transcendent part of you that is most alive when you are living according to your values and in attunement with whatever it is that feels bigger than you and to which you are connected. So there is no “issue” or “problem” that is too small, or too trivial for coaching. Because like the threads in a spider’s web, it’s all connected: tug a niggles over here and we see a shaking over there.

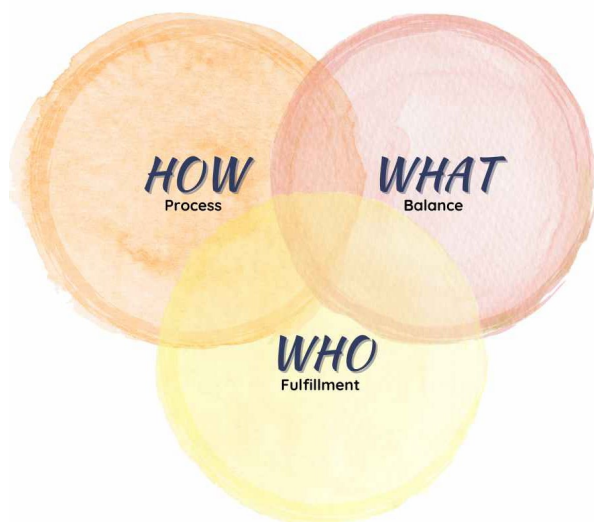
NOW IS ALL THERE EVER IS

We are trained to believe that life moves in a linear fashion. We may feel guilt or regret about the past, or anxious and worried about the future. But the only time we have any control over is the present. Every coaching conversation will be different. We will dance in that moment: we will be very present to what is happening right then, in that moment. It may evoke memories of the past, and fears about the future and we will deal with those as they come up, always coming back to the now, and what choices you have right now, in this moment. We go with the flow of the session. Whatever you need to bring up is what you need to bring up. There is nothing that is too small or off-limits.

WE EVOKE TRANSFORMATION

You will come to me with specific goals. These are but the leaf – you are the tree. My focus is always on you, the tree. Specific tactics, strategies, action plans – these are the leaves that will grow the best when they are deeply connected to who you are, the state of being you are cultivating. I hold the vision of what may be possible for you – given who you uniquely are.

3. YOU AND YOUR GOALS



WHO/FULFILLMENT

If you take away what you do and how you do it: that is who you are. It is your values, your strengths, your beliefs, your gifts, your purpose and vision. You manifest who you are through what you do and how you do it but you don't need to be doing anything in any particular way to be who you are.

You will come to coaching with many beliefs and stories about who you are. Some of these may be true, but the Truth is that you are so much more than any of those. Very often something new on the outside – like achieving a goal or a

vision – includes the creation of something new on the inside. In order to achieve the results you want, you will likely have to change attitudes, shed paradigms, and let go of limiting beliefs. Coaching is the ideal environment for you to peel back the accumulated layers of identity and old roles to uncover the authentic person within.

Fulfillment is about truly owning your who and embracing it – all of it, both the light and the dark. When you truly know who you are, and are living and doing from that foundation, your life feels fulfilled. Fulfillment is about finding and experiencing a life of purpose, grounded in who you really are.

WHAT/BALANCE

There are three lies we are have been conditioned to believe:

- We are what we do.
- We are what we have.
- We are what other people say about us.

Shedding these lies may seem like an impossible task. But it isn't. You've come to coaching because you're passionate about achieving something important to you. And achieving that "what" is just one aspect of your "who". When you are clear on your who, the what and the how becomes effortless, and the lies of "what" you are dissolve without a fight.

What and how we move towards, or away, from our goals and dreams always need to be in balance. When we look at what you are doing, we are looking for balance: a balanced perspective, to being in balance with who you are, to what choices you are making and why, to what are you saying yes to, and what are you saying no to, to what beliefs about your who are driving those choices.

Balance is fluid and dynamic – it is not static or fixed. Balance changes moment by moment as you decide what to do and how to do it.

HOW/PROCESS

We are always in process. Sometimes it looks frantic. Sometimes it looks graceful. Because coaching is effective at achieving results, it's easy to be drawn into the results trap: that success is defined by the outcome, not the process. Our how, the processes by which we go about realizing our who in the world, is like a river – ever in flow. And like a river there are fast periods, and slow, meandering periods. There are rapids, and there are calm, steady areas. We may drift for a bit, carried by the current; we may backtrack a bit in an eddy before we re-enter the main current; we may spin our wheels for a bit in a whirlpool before being propelled out. Wherever you are in your process of being, becoming and doing, there is learning and growth. There can be flow in any moment if you will but be in the river.

4. OUR RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

CONFIDENTIALITY

If you are going to risk making significant changes in your life, you need to be able to talk freely. Being able to be open to raise anything is crucial because it leads to the discovery that is necessary for action. I observe absolute confidentiality with all my clients, with only one exception: if it becomes evident that you may be at risk of self-harm or harm to others. Then my duty of care to you and your wellbeing outweighs my duty of confidentiality. However, I will never take any action to protect your well-being without first discussing it with you.

TRUST

I believe in you and your inherent capability. I trust in your capacity and integrity. There is no need for you to prove yourself to me in any way. I hold that you are inherently worthy – you do not need to perform to some standard to demonstrate your worthiness. That does not mean I will not hold you accountable to yourself. But accountability in coaching is not about proving anything: it is simply doing what we say we will do and being open to learning and growth. I am on your side by holding you accountable to your own vision and action plans.

SPEAKING TRUTH/ BEING REAL

You cannot get where you want to go with being real: without speaking, and being open to hearing, the truth. A safe and courageous place for change must, by definition, be a place where the truth can be told – by both you and me. Truth in the coaching context is not about judgement or blaming. Speaking Truth in the coaching context carries no consequence other than learning, discovery and growth. Truth may be about what you are ignoring or sidestepping. Truth may also be about where you are strong and what you have to give - and where you holding back, giving up, denying or rationalizing.

A real relationship is not built on being nice: it's built on being real. Truth in the coaching context is never a weapon and never unkind: it is gentle, yet firm; it is uncomfortable, yet grounding; it may confront, but it also invites – to more learning, more opening, more growth.

You are so close to your story, your own history, your own habitual patterns, that the truth may be hard for you to see. You come to me because you want the accuracy, the clarity, the freedom and power that only being real and speaking and hearing your Truth can achieve.

OPENNESS AND SPACIOUSNESS

One of the qualities that supports an effective coaching relationship is spaciousness. Coaching is a place where you can breathe, experiment, fantasize, and strategize without limitation. It is a place where you can vent your anger, troubles, spite and perceptions of injustice. It is a place where failure is tenderly acknowledged for its deep pain and hurt, and also for its rich potential to compost those feelings and so nurture new growth. It is a place where there are no absolutes and few rules.

Spaciousness also means I am not attached in any way to the outcome: to what particular results you may achieve or course of action you may choose. I care deeply that you are moving towards fulfillment in a balanced process, but your journey towards that is just that – yours. Success is not about what I deliver: it is about what you create. I may make suggestions or brainstorm ideas with you, but the choice as to what to do, and how to do it: that it is always completely yours.

HOMEOSTASIS

We get into a groove. 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. Homeostasis is life's and our own body's natural process to keep everything within comfortable limits. Change of any kind can threaten the felt sense of safety. However limiting or uncomfortable our current circumstances may feel, they are at least still known and familiar, and there is safety in that. Old beliefs and ways of

being die hard. Self-limiting behaviour will often show up the strongest just when you need the courage to take risks for the sake of change and moving towards your dream and goals. Expect this. It is totally normal. The process of becoming more alive can have moments of profound discomfort – even misery. My role is to support you through that, so that instead of a retreat to the safe, small and familiar, you can feel renewed in your commitment to work through to the other side. Because the only way out is through.

COMMITMENT

In order for coaching to work there must be commitment.

Commitment on your part to exploring, changing, and taking risks. Commitment to persevering when you meet inevitable resistance in yourself or others and to re-evaluating and adjusting course when that is warranted rather than doggedly holding onto a predetermined path. And of course a commitment to investing time and energy into coaching.

Without this commitment to go beyond your comfort zone and step into the unknown, coaching will drift and devolve in chit-chat or to-do lists that don't get done.

On my part, my commitment is to you. It is a commitment to dig deeply and courageously, to listen intently to both what you are saying – and what you are not saying. Because of this level of commitment to you my role is to challenge, incite, motivate, encourage and sometimes even insist that you take charge and take action. You are worth nothing less from me.

It is this mutual commitment that is at the heart of the designed alliance and which creates the safe and courageous space for you to do the important work that you come to coaching to do.

5. HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF COACHING

This is a quick summary. There's a lot more in the short book "[How to get the most out of coaching](#)" by Karen Davis and Alex Mill. (Note: NOT an affiliate link).

Coaching is a partnership - each of us have roles and responsibilities

YOUR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Have coaching goals a.k.a have a focus, know what you want to work on.
2. Improve your coachability:
 - **Experiment:** Be open to experimentation, testing, and trying new things.
 - **Practice self-awareness:** be willing to go inwards and be introspective.
 - **Voice strong opinions:** speak up about what you like and don't like.
 - **Engage curiosity:** be genuinely curious, interested in and willing to learn.

- **Practice optimism:** coaching can be uncomfortable sometimes, setbacks are common as you try new things. That is not failure, that is learning.
- **Embrace productive discomfort:** change can be uncomfortable. "Comfortable," and "easy" often keeps us stuck/ in the same place, doing the same thing. Anticipate the natural resistance to changing patterns and learning new ways of being, thinking and/or doing.
- **Have a sense of humor:** poke fun at yourself, don't take sessions too seriously - bring a playful approach to coaching.
- **Engage with integrity:** be prepared, be on time, be open and honest.
- **Commit to the process:** show up ready to engage, turn off all distractions, be fully present. Would you stand up a best friend? If you wouldn't do that to someone you care about, don't do that to yourself either.
- **Consider guidance:** be open to guidance towards the change you want. Coaching is about change and growth - there may be better ways to do things than you've tried in the past. And – you are always at choice. You never have to accept any guidance.
- **Follow-through:** take the follow-up action/ apply what you're learning - otherwise it's just a good conversation.
- **Hold nothing back:** be open and honest; ask for what you need – most especially if I am doing something you disagree with or don't find helpful.

What else would you like to ask of yourself, if anything?


MY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES


- Keep us on task and pointing towards your goals.
- Meet you where you are at.
- Be your accountability buddy – however you define accountability.
- Be clear on what does and does not work for me (a key one: no coaching while you are driving!)
- Talk through any mess-ups, upsets or disagreements in a blame-free, non-judging way - so that we utilize it for the awesome opportunity for learning it is.
- Hold everything you share in confidence. The only exception is if I am required by law to disclose, or if I am concerned you could harm yourself or others. In either case, I tell you before I disclose. (This has never happened in 7 years of coaching).
- Tell you the truth as I see it with compassion, understanding, and without judgement.
- Guide you in the best way I know how using all the techniques, knowledge, wisdom, and experience at my disposal.
- Be clear about the coaching relationship, expectations and responsibilities.
- Be prepared and on time for each coaching session.


- Return messages when humanly possible, usually within one to two business days.
- Maintain the ethics and standards of behavior set by the International Coach Federation (ICF).
- Refer you to another professional if a topic/issue emerges that is not within my area of expertise or comfort.

What else would you like to ask of me?



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