

Chapter Six

DISCOVERING THE MASTERFUL COACH



Here we explore three different self-identities – the ego, inner observer and original self, representing the viewpoints of the analytical, appreciative and creative eyes respectively. You will discover how, in adopting the inner observer, you awaken an interior rather than an exterior view of reality, question rather than answer and expand awareness, choice and your capacity to relate. As you learn to still, concentration increases and inner distractions minimise, allowing you to place your attention purely on the client and the activity of coaching. This leads to the discovery of a deeper centre of identity (original self) that is the source of awareness and power of the masterful coach.



As we learn to expand our vision, we meet with different identities that comprise our understanding and concept of self. In becoming these different selves we alter our capacity to coach, since they inform the way we see, sense, relate and resolve. To coach others, we need primarily to discover the identity of the inner coach. Our capacity to coach and its mastery is discovered from the inside out. The masterful coach is the person you are invited to be and become. Let's explore this journey of being or becoming a masterful coach by examining the nature of these different coaching selves and how they each influence our coaching practice.

• THE FIRST SELF – THE EGO •

When we adopt the position of a detached observer and look at things from the outside in, we discover the ego. This provides us with a sense of security and containment, affirming our identity and rightness. However, in selecting the good from the bad, the ego subdivides the self. A partial self is created and we are compartmentalised, with a limited view of reality. Yet the ego is without doubt that its vision and knowledge is absolute. The consequence of striving for security and seeing things objectively is that we literally turn a blind eye to the interior world of subjective experience. We devalue our deeper emotions, values and aspirations and instead focus on what is factual, visible and can be rationally known.

We have already explored how the eye of the ego – the analytical eye – is driven to rationalise and answer, rather than to question and relate. These distinctive character traits of ego limit the possibility of coaching. In order to develop our capacity to coach and to step towards becoming a masterful coach, we have to somehow recognise that the vision of the ego is limited and we must learn how to

PAUSE POINT

How well do you know your egoistic self? What does it look like? How does it limit and serve your coaching practice?

(Do not be surprised if these questions seem challenging. We commonly do not question our viewpoint or how well we see things. We assume that the view from the ego is all there is.)

extend our way of seeing. Do not underestimate the size of this challenge. Convincing an eye that is sure of its knowledge and certain of its rightness that it has limitation and blindness is one of the key challenges that we and humanity face. Much of our conflict and division arises from the certainty and conviction of the analytical eye.

• THE EMERGENCE OF THE
INNER OBSERVER •

Discovering the inner observer involves the emergence of a new identity and aspect of the self, distinct from that of the ego. When coaching, I am often aware that while noticing my client, I am also able to notice myself, noticing my client. Here I have stepped into the position of the inner observer and become a witness. When we see through the eyes of the inner observer – the appreciative eye – new and different perspectives become available. When I coach from this position, I can clearly see both myself and my client, and observe how we are relating. Through the inner observer, the coach can now step beyond an exterior view to enter the interior world of subjective experience and learn how to sense. This explains the dualistic

characteristics of the Janus-like two-way mirror described in Chapter 4 – the capacity to observe and reflect simultaneously.

OBSERVING FROM BEHIND THE GLASS

I imagine the inner observer being behind the glass of our two-way living mirror. When we acknowledge this presence, we once more recognise our ability to witness, reflect and relate. Have you ever looked closely at a mirror to see how it is made? You will discover that there is a film of quicksilver intimately attached to the glass that gives the mirror its ability to reflect. The poem below alludes to the enigmatic nature and value of the inner observer to the work of the coach.

QUICKSILVER

imperceptibly close
 a breath away
 your tide calls
 in the ebb and flow
 i yearn to be seen
 my temptation to hide

 like sunlight on water
 do you bathe in quicksilver
 vibrant and real
 yet quite untouchable
 just beyond the visible
 yet seeing all

 what a selfless gift
 to offer your eyes
 that in discovering you
 i too

can discover
my true
self

(taken from *Just Beyond the Visible: The Art of Being and Becoming*)

Through the discovery of the inner observer, the coach is inwardly taught how to become a more patient, attentive and reflective witness, and, in turn, is able to relate empathetically. This realisation gives value and place to the importance of our interior world of experience in the process of development and learning.

PAUSE POINT

What is your experience of the inner observer when you coach? How does adopting this position serve and limit your practice?

SEEING BLINDNESS

One of the important gifts the inner observer gives to the coach is that we awaken to our blindness. In stepping into a place where we can simply witness, we are able, for the first time, to step back from and see our previous attachment and where we have been identified. When I realise the inner observer, I am no longer driven to rationalise and answer; instead I can slow down and reflect; my thinking becomes more open and receptive. Whereas, before, I would rationalise, now I can observe and watch my thoughts without a need to process them. The coach who works from the position of the inner observer is less distracted and becomes much more able to focus on the activity of coaching. In being able to see and accept one's limitation, a further window is

opened to a more expanded and unlimited vision. This is a very important paradox that we need to carefully consider: in accepting limitation we are able to glimpse more of the unlimited.

Stepping beyond the urgency to solve problems, the coach experiences a new sense of inner spaciousness. This is the experience of being able to let go, or what I call the ability to not know. We no longer feel compelled to answer and this frees the coach within us to question. The inner observer offers a deeper concentration and curiosity to the work of the coach and the capacity to contemplate. These are some of the characteristics of the masterful coach.

THE INNER OBSERVER IN PRACTICE

Often when I start a coaching session I imagine that I am moving my attention from my head to my body. I link this conscious shift to my breathing, and I take three long, slow breaths. With each in-breath, I consciously move my attention downwards towards my heart, and with each out-breath let my attention expand into my body. While I am very aware of consciously opening and seeking to expand my awareness and sensitivity, this probably goes completely unnoticed by my client.

Here, I am consciously shifting my awareness to a position where I can observe, sense and listen more intently – to the inner observer. My motivation in making this conscious shift is to more fully understand the needs and desires of my client. I become aware of my inner world, I am deeply curious of what I am feeling and sensing, and I wonder what my client may be experiencing. In my self-reflections I am curious how my own experience might relate to that of my client. I consciously expand my awareness while considering each of these different perspectives of the coaching relationship.

In being willing to consciously expand my awareness beyond the confines of self to better sense, appreciate, understand and care for another, I am guided in how to realise empathy. The inner observer, in essence, teaches the coach how to relate, helping the coach to appreciate and understand the client.

INSIDE OUT

Through the eye of the inner observer – the appreciative eye – the coach can enter into a world of subjective experience. We begin to sense rather than see. To make this shift it is necessary that we invert our perception of reality. We are invited to learn how to turn our perceptions inside out.

In the coaching relationship I often experience my clients arriving at a crossroads or a turning point. Figure 14, p.134, captures the dilemma of the turning point for me.

Like the snail in the snapshot, facing the turning point is not easy and appears to have no rational solution. When you coach, listen carefully to how your clients describe this experience. Their old way of doing things no longer seems to satisfy, but there is no way forward, and no way back. Where do we go from here? An essential aspect of the work of the coach is to help clients to face and negotiate these crossroads, and use this ‘problem’ as an opportunity to expand their vision by turning their perception of reality inside out, towards the subjective.

When the turning point resolves, I commonly experience a sense of release in the coaching relationship. This often parallels a reconnection with the client’s desire to change – a re-engagement and renewed sense of responsibility and commitment to change. When driving forward no longer works, it is then that we are invited to learn how to relax, turn inward and experience a greater sense of

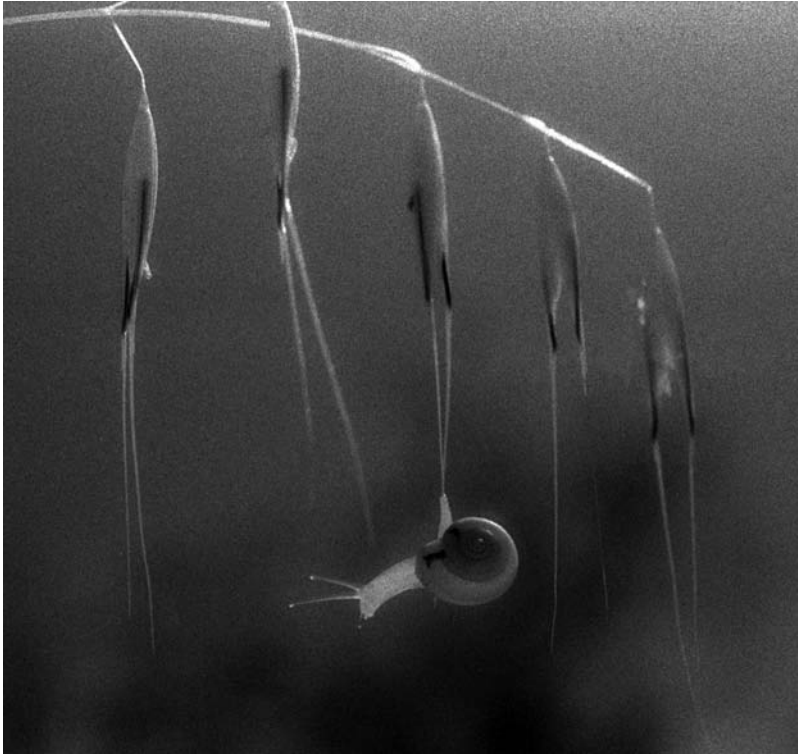


Figure 14

inner space and stillness. Becoming still parallels the process of being able to let go. Not needing to know replaces the urgency to answer. As the coach consciously adopts the position of the inner observer, we model for the client the prospect and possibility of being able to open one's mind and heart. Thinking becomes more receptive and the quality of the coaching relationship deepens.

PACE AND SPACE

Time and again when I coach I realise how the analytical eye, in its preoccupation with needing to work and be somewhere else, ignores how truly busy we are. Clients who operate from the

position of the ego and analytical eye often find the concept of a life–work balance out of reach. In my experience, such clients are often unaware of the extent of their own tiredness and exhaustion. It is only when the coach discovers the inner observer that such a reflective space can be shared through the coach–client relationship. It is here that clients can begin to explore a more extended vision, and feelings of tiredness can be owned. The capacity to manage pace and create space is another important characteristic of the masterful coach.

• THE SECOND SELF – ORIGINAL SELF •

In Chapter 2 we explored the concept of two selves. The first self is a partial self that the ego appears to create. It is the mask through which we meet the world and it is a self that is deemed to be acceptable, often meeting the expectations and judgement of others who have most influenced our lives. The ego can give us a strong sense of identity and yet the consequence is that we can spend much of our lives meeting other people’s expectations, rather than permitting ourselves the things we most enjoy and love.

Through the emergence of the inner observer, we conceive of a second self – ‘the self in potential’. This is the whole of which you are – the original self. Through the position of the inner observer, life develops directionality. Our partial self aspires to become more whole – the first self seeks to find its place and fit within the whole of the second self. In essence, the inner observer facilitates and guides this process.

Whereas the ego is concerned with multiplicity and the original self with unity, the inner observer makes us aware of the

dynamic relationship between our partiality and wholeness. This highlights an essential aspect of the work of the coach, which is to help to make conscious the potentiality and motivation of the client to develop and change.

In studying the process of how we develop and grow, the coach comes to realise the importance of our partial wholeness. As we accept this as an aspect of our deeper and truest nature, the coach learns to see the importance of the paradoxical nature of reality and realises that we are in fact human beings ever in the process of becoming.

As we move close to realising the original self, the coach experiences a deepening attentiveness and a capacity to still and stop. The coach can relax and simply notice everything. Inner distractions become calmed and quietened. The judging, critical and sometimes cynical voices that resound within our heads that instruct us in what we must or should do, quieten and are ultimately silenced. We can place our attention purely upon the activity in hand – coaching – without distraction or condition. If the coach can make conscious the source of our motivation to change, then the realisation of the original self becomes an expression of our innate vitality to change – we experience being in flow. Change then becomes spontaneous and inspired.

PAUSE POINT

How might you experience 'stilling' in practice? How does this experience serve and inform your work?

STILLING AND STOPPING

Let me illustrate the importance of this process of stilling, and ultimately stopping, to the work of the coach by sharing an analogy that I use while coaching.

STILLED LIFE

When I walk in nature with my camera I will suddenly notice something that draws my attention and catches my eye. My pace slows and I stop. I begin to look more closely and observe. I am always curious about why I am drawn to and stilled by certain subjects. I position my camera, focus and take the snapshot.

What is truly a marvel is how, through the medium of photography, we can capture a particular moment on film for posterity. Such moments can be seen in detail by examining the snapshot. What I realise when I do study these instances of ‘stilled life’ is that I am able to see so much more in the snapshot than I noticed in that same moment in reality. When we are busy it seems we miss much of present reality. The moment is passed and our view of it is fleeting. The coach learns how to still and stop in order to help the client to become more aware of current reality and appreciate the fuller picture and true scope of the present moment.

STILLING IN PRACTICE

When you coach, watch for the moments when things begin to still and the client begins to pause and reflect. In these moments I often imagine that I am taking a snapshot. I then muse over what I might discover if I were to study the snapshot in detail – what might I have overlooked or missed in this passing moment? As the pace slows, the capacity to reflect extends, awareness is expanded and we mysteriously see more of present reality than we did before.

The capacity to create space and the ability to still and stop is once more a vital marker of the emergence of the inner compass and is another characteristic of the masterful coach. We discover an inner balance or pivot point to which we can return again and again in our practice. This is a point at which we can consciously re-orientate and realign ourselves with our motivation to change.

When we centre and still, we are free to choose and act

• REMEMBERING OUR ORIGINAL CIRCUITRY •

As we meet with the different self-identities explored in this chapter, the authenticity of the coach continues to deepen. We become more real and natural. Previous divisions that were confining now disappear and dissolve and, together with a feeling of being more complete and whole, we experience being in flow.

One way of considering the experience of being in flow is that we, in realising the original self, complete a long forgotten yet vital circuit. Commonly this deeper circuit is unavailable to us, something has ‘tripped’ – the circuit is broken. Our motivation, desire and will to change is lost to us, yet we somehow know it is there and long to find it. We search for what will complete this original circuitry and provide access to our hidden potential. It is only when we realise the paradox of our ways that we unravel this dilemma. Although we are driven to search for the answer – to find our circuit maker – the need to search and our striving to find is in fact the circuit breaker.

It is important for us to realise, and deeply appreciate, that we and our clients may search endlessly for the answer only to discover that the answer is not to search.

The opportunity then exists for the client, through the coaching relationship, to begin to look and turn inwards, to value the personal experience, and continue the journey to discover the inner observer and, ultimately, original self.

• PARADOX: THE CIRCUIT MAKER •

In my experience, when clients realise their paradoxical nature, somehow they reconnect with and remember an inner source of power and choice.

Rather than experience division, difference and conflict, we can learn to see and embrace the natural contradiction of things

Paradox illustrates a secret deeper relationship that can exist between apparently contradictory elements. Paradox is a portal to a deeper appreciation of reality and a knowledge that guides us close to remembering our original self.

PARADOX IN PRACTICE

Let me share an example of a recent case study where the naming of paradox shifted the client from feeling stuck to discover a much clearer way forward. Adam has a very senior role with major complex responsibilities. When he checked in he was feeling confined and wrongly judged by his new boss, who had given him a poor assessment despite all his very hard work and conscientiousness. Adam is talking about his boss:

Adam: She is quite demanding; she needs a lot of information – she really is needy. It's hard work giving her everything she wants and I don't get

thanked for it. I just get picked up on the one mistake I've made. My work is scrutinised.

I note that Adam is referring to his boss, Margaret, as 'she'. I wonder if Adam realises how devaluing this sounds. It makes me curious about how Adam truly feels about his boss.

Coach: How do you feel about your boss?

Adam: She's hard going.

Coach: How do you feel? Do you respect Margaret?

Adam: *(Pause)* No, I don't. She's not working in a way that I can respect.

Coach: Adam, since you've been talking about Margaret, you have on every occasion referred to her as 'she'.

Adam: Sorry!

Adam is a little shocked and did not realise this.

Coach: I'm not judging you, Adam, just observing. Let's look at what is covertly being said. If I have picked up on how you are referring to your boss as 'she', then it's likely that others may have too. What if your boss has picked this up? If you were your boss and picked this information up, how would you feel?

Adam: *(Pause)* Probably judged and disrespected. I would keep a tight rein and may not trust.

Coach: Do you recognise this behaviour?

Adam: Yes, quite accurately.

Coach: Let's name the paradox here. You are feeling judged and devalued, almost disrespected for the hard work that you are doing.

Adam: Yes.

- Coach: But you are also devaluing, disrespecting and judging Margaret.
- Adam: Mmm (*pause*), that's true and I hadn't realised.
- Coach: Where do we go from here?
- Adam: (*Pause*) I want to try to work on this relationship and see if I can move the trust forward.

In naming the paradox, Adam can see his part in the whole dynamic and he becomes clearer on how he would like to respond and move things forward.

- Coach: Are you willing to do that?
- Adam: Yes.
- Coach: Good. Let's do it then.

Adam explored looking at the situation appreciatively, rather than seeing it through an analytical and judging eye – paradoxically with the intent of building trust. In realising the paradox, Adam was able to own his part in the situation and reconnect with his desire to change and take action.

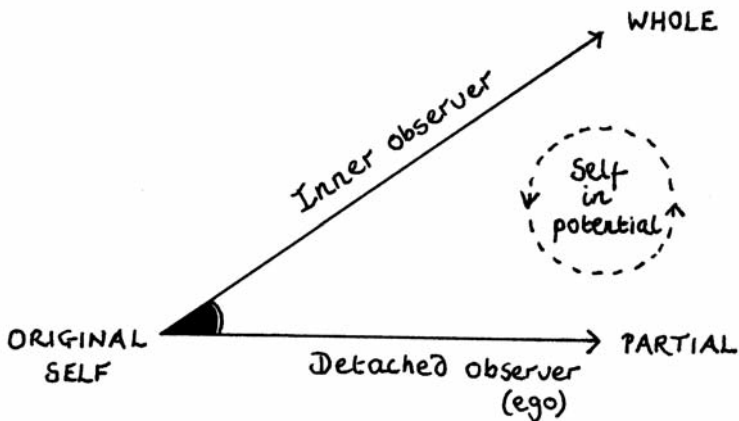


Figure 15

Paradox is a circuit maker. It is a reflection of our deeper nature and is a gateway to original self. In meeting with original self we make our acquaintance with the secret identity of the masterful coach. The interrelationship of these three different identities and aspects of self, and the capacity to coach, is illustrated in Figure 15, p.141.