

INTRODUCTION



This book will be a valuable guide to all those who coach, irrespective of your level of experience. Coaching centres on the occupation of the coach, yet from my knowledge the ability to coach is increasingly employed in many other professions, including leadership, management, mentoring, counselling, parenting and teaching. The coaching relationship may be the key vehicle through which the individual, group and organisation are able to make and sustain change.

For those newly entering this occupation this book will provide an insight into how you can build your confidence and expertise to coach. It explores how you may answer some of the essential questions you are likely to be asked. It will help you to understand more deeply and appreciate the work and journey of the coach and encourage your apprenticeship. To the experienced practitioner this work examines the scope of coaching, how the field is evolving and maturing and the secret of how to be or become an exceptional coach. Through examples taken from my own practice we will explore together how to discover the vision, essential instruments, identity, role, qualities and faculties of the masterful coach.

It is interesting to find that much of our coaching literature presents only a partial view of coaching. This is an exterior view

that looks at coaching from the ‘outside in’ and places emphasis on the facts. This same view is favoured and selected by the leaders and managers who are often the key employers of the business coach. What is brought into focus from this viewpoint is the definition, methodology, process and the external tools of coaching – the ‘what’ of coaching. This view creates a picture of coaching as an occupation that places an emphasis on measurably improving performance and business success. Organisations and coaches alike may often quite unwittingly conspire in believing that this is all there is to coaching – helping to create an exclusive self-fulfilling prophecy.

While recognising the value and place of this perspective as one important piece of our repertoire, twenty years of coaching experience suggests that there is something missing. My quest as a coach has always been to understand the nature of how we develop, learn and grow – that is, how the coach can help the clients to make the sustained changes they desire.

That word *sustained* is key here, and although an exterior view of coaching can have an impact on skills development and even behavioural change, increasingly I believe we may need to include an interior view of coaching to help clients to learn how to shift beliefs, identity and sense of self to make the sustained changes they desire. Only with a combined exterior and interior vision can we help our clients to realise their hidden potential and make these sustained changes, while fostering integrity and a more authentic approach to work. Whereas the ‘what’ of coaching is of value, to discover the truly masterful coach the additional questions we really need to ask ourselves are the ‘why’, ‘how’ and ‘who’ of coaching.

Many thousands of new coaches continue to enter the field each year. As significant numbers have a very limited training, and

have little experience of coaching or supervision, I am sometimes concerned that coaching may be wrongly perceived as an easy option. While understanding how this mistake can happen, you will commonly hear or read, particularly in coach-training literature, that no expert knowledge is required to become a coach.

Think about this point of view carefully. If you are coaching business executives, for example, you do not require their technical expertise. However, to coach well does require an expertise – a personal expertise. Do not be mistaken, coaching is not a superficial practice or an easy option. The capacity to focus purely on the activity of coaching without distraction, and giving your full concentration and attentiveness to the client, is a rare and cultivated talent. From my experience this talent is learned from the inside out and necessitates an inner journey. Watching a masterful coach in action, you will often see a lightness of touch and sense of freedom. These do not come from naïveté and inexperience, they are born from a deep self-awareness and acceptance, as we will explore.

Self-awareness and acceptance are what I call ‘relative knowledge’ – your ability to coach emerges from a commitment to your own personal journey and inner learning: *you* ultimately become your own tutor and guide. Through coaching you remember and discover the identity of your inner coach, whose natural talent and mastery inform your practice. As we learn to manage ourselves, the coach within becomes free to help guide others to the threshold of their learning.

Some years ago I was asked to talk to a group of leaders and managers about the value and nature of coaching. Even then I was curious about the reflective vision of the coach and how

this could be best understood and shared. While musing about an image that might help to explain this, the Roman God Janus entered my mind. Janus has two heads that look in opposite directions and has thus the unique ability to see in two different directions simultaneously. This image of Janus fits well with the requirements of being and becoming a masterful coach.

To coach well, you need to be able both to observe and reflect – to see objectively and to sense subjectively. I often imagine the coach as a living mirror which, when operated with mastery, becomes a two-way ‘Janus like’ mirror. The mirror is an essential instrument of the coach and we will see how this combines with the lens and compass to form the inner toolkit of the masterful coach.

The masterful coach has an evolved vision and ability to sense that includes different ways of seeing – different ‘eyes’. I call these the analytical eye, the appreciative eye and the creative eye. Each has contrasting viewpoints – different visions of reality that impact upon and inform the way you coach in practice.

When you look from the ‘outside in’, you employ an analytical eye that offers the coach a one-dimensional (1D) viewpoint that is partial, objective and detached. When you look from the ‘inside out’, you open an appreciative eye that has a two-dimensional (2D) vision that is both subjective and relational. The vision of the appreciative eye extends beyond our rational awareness. By accommodating both the analytical and appreciative eyes together, the coach opens the creative eye. This offers you a dynamic 3D vision that is more unlimited and can span the objective–subjective divide – *the* essential component of mastery. This eye allows you to expand your awareness of the collective and universal as well as of the individual.

In your journey towards mastery, your work as a coach will change from one of tutor and instructor, to one who becomes a compassionate co-creator of your own and your client's highest future potential and possibility. It is easy to misjudge and wrongly devalue the work of the coach as superficial. Coaching is an enigmatic profession that is learned largely on the job. It is also hard, if not impossible, to rationalise how the work of the coach can have such a positive impact on the learning of the client. But it is important not to reject the enigmatic dimension of the coaching work – if you do, you will never truly discover the secret behind masterful coaching.

I believe there is a masterful coach in each and all of us that we are invited to discover. The secret of being an exceptional coach is in realising that mastery is lost the moment we seek it as something other than our most natural and innate talent and motivation to change. In becoming masterful, we discover the source of our potential and can plumb the depth of our humanity and authenticity, while discovering how to see, sense, relate and resolve.

I do not see my way of coaching as the right way or suggest that I am a master coach. To do so goes against the nature of the very principle and secret of mastery:

**Mastery is a gift we permit ourselves when
we tire of the need to be right or better**

My goal in this book is simply to share my experience of being a coach in an open-hearted way that I hope may inspire debate and enhance practice, with the intent to expand awareness of our occupation and the wider field of coaching.

In reading this book you will take the journey of being and becoming a masterful coach. Each chapter concerns a response

to an essential question of coaching and in its entirety will help you to answer each of the following questions:

- What is coaching?
- Why do we coach?
- How does the vision and essential instrumentation of the coach develop?
- How does super-vision support and encourage the development of the coach?
- Who is – and what is the role of – a masterful coach?
- How do we experience masterful practice and what are the distinctive faculties and qualities of the masterful coach?

Most importantly, we will see how the key to becoming an exceptional, masterful coach is already in your hands.