

Personal Coaching's Evolution from Therapy

By Patrick Williams, Ed. D

Coaching and Mentoring have been common in the corporate environment for decades. Executive coaching has long been accepted as a "perk" for high level management. In addition, people outside the corporate environment have found it possible, and desirable to have a coach.

People today hire a coach to help with career transitions, with the challenges of self-employment (such as isolation, and increased distractibility) for entrepreneurial ventures, for parenting, relationships, and even retirement. Life coaching has become available privately and through agencies, schools, churches and other community resources.

Personal coaching developed from three streams: 1. The helping professions such as psychotherapy and counseling, 2. Consulting and organizational development, and 3. Personal development training, such as EST, LifeSpring, LandMark Forum, Tony Robbins, and others, whose one-on-one "coaching" was part of the delivery of these training intensives.

Psychological roots of coaching

Many psychological theorists and practitioners from the turn of the century onward have influenced the development and evolution of the field of business coaching. The symbolic thinking that Freud emphasized has great usefulness to coaches. Coaches often help clients discover their brilliance, which may lie masked or buried in their unconscious and can be experienced when one begins to design one's life consciously and purposely.

Many of the theories of Carl Jung and Alfred Adler are antecedents to modern day coaching. Adler saw himself as a personal educator. He saw each person as the creator and artist of his/her life and frequently involved his clients in goal setting, life planning, and inventing their future, all tenets and approaches in coaching today.

In a similar fashion, Jung believed in a "future orientation" or teleological belief that we can create our futures through visioning and purposeful living. His writings focused on life after age 40 and he concentrated on

many of the life issues of our later years.

Jung often "coached" clients through a "life review" and encouraged them to consciously live their lives via expressing their natural gifts and talents and moving toward self-individuation by living life "on purpose."

Unfortunately, psychotherapy somewhere along the way adopted or was co-opted by the medical model that sees clients as "patients" having "illnesses" and needing a diagnosis in treatment.

Of course there clearly are serious mental illnesses which can benefit from clinical psychology or psychotherapy, however many people in the past were treated and labeled for what really were problems in living. These situations or circumstances did not need a diagnosis or assumption of pathology.

Influences of the humanistic psychology and human potential movement

In 1951, Carl Rogers wrote his monumental book, *Client Centered Therapy*, which shifted counseling and therapy to a relationship in which the client was assumed to have the ability to change and grow by the clinician creating a therapeutic alliance.

This alliance evolved from a safe, confidential space, granting the client (patient) what Rogers called Unconditional Positive Regard. We believe this shift in perspective was a significant precursor to what today is called Life Coaching.

Abraham Maslow researched, questioned, and observed people who were living with a sense of vitality and purpose and who were constantly seeking to grow psychologically and achieve more of their human potential. In 1968 he wrote his seminal treatise, *Toward a Psychology of Being*. It is this key point in history that I believe set the framework for the field of Life Coaching to emerge in the 1990s.

Maslow spoke of needs and motivations, as did earlier psychologists, but with the view that man is naturally a health-seeking creature who, if obstacles to personal growth are removed, will naturally pursue self-actualization, playfulness, curiosity, and creativity.

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Freud, Jung, Adler, Rogers and Maslow all contributed to what is today called Life Coaching.

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He referred to this as a “being” or abundancy motivation meaning that needs at this level are primarily for nourishment and development of our “Being” or Higher Self.

The distinction between therapy and coaching

It is important to recognize the major distinctions between therapy and coaching. Therapy deals more predominately with a person’s past and painful events (trauma) which brought them to seek therapy (healing). Coaching deals more with a person’s present and seeks to guide them to a more desired future. With coaching little time is spent in the past, except for brief “visits” and the focus is on developing the person’s future.

This philosophical shift has taken root in a generation that rejects the idea of sickness and seeks instead wellness, wholeness and purposeful living. Hence the emergence of Life Coaching! Coaching is a special form of consulting that is a co-creative partnership wherein the main focus is the client’s agenda and his/her desire for creating a fulfilling life, personally and professionally. The coaching relationship allows the client to explore their blocks to greater success or to unlock their biggest dreams and desires with the possibility of living their life more on purpose and at a higher level of satisfaction and expression.

The shift from seeing clients as “ill” or having a pathology toward viewing them as “well and whole” and seeking a richer life is paramount to understanding the evolution of life coaching. Life coaches help clients uncover their intentions and to live them, not just dream about them.

What the future holds

We are on the verge of a fundamental shift in how people seek helpers and why they seek them. People today need connection with a mentor/coach/guide more than ever before, due to the rapid pace of change, difficulty of sustainable relationships, desire to live one’s life purpose and many other reasons.

I believe that the profession of coaching will be bigger than psychotherapy in a very few years. The general public will know the distinction between therapy and coaching and will be clear on when to seek a therapist and when to seek a coach.

Coaching will permeate society in the coming years and be available to everyone...not just executives or high powered professionals. I expect to see coaches in churches, schools, community agencies, and a variety of specialties like Relationship Coaches, Parenting and Family Coaches, Wellness and Health Coaches, Spiritual Development Coaches, and others.

Two specializations will develop as the profession gains recognition: 1. Relationship Coaching, for singles and couples wanting to have the best possible relationship and 2. Protirement Coaching (a term coined by Frederic Hudson, author of *The Joy of Old*) for those entering the later years and wanting to redefine the last few decades of their life avoiding the traditional expectations of aging.

The entire profession, as I see it, will foster the idea of Life Coaching as the umbrella under which all coaching rests. Whether a clients seeks specific coaching for business or job challenges, coaching for a life transition, (such as career, relationship, loss, health) or for pure life design coaching. A coach may also serve as a referral source for specialty coaching as needed or requested by their client.

Coaching is a profession experiencing dynamic growth and change. It will no doubt continue to interact developmentally with social, economic, and political processes; draw on the knowledge base of diverse disciplines; enhance its intellectual and professional maturity, and proceed to establish itself internationally and in mainstream America. If these actions represent the future of coaching, then the profession will change in ways that support viability and growth. Life coaching exists because it is helpful, and it will prosper because it can be transformational. ☞

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