

The Coaching 'Way of Being'

According to Campbell and van Nieuwerburgh (2018), an effective coaching relationship requires three key elements:

- 1) a coaching process;
- 2) coaching skills; and
- 3) a coaching 'way of being'.

The focus for this post is this third element: the coaching 'way of being.' This idea of a 'way of being' is omnipresent in the coaching in education literature. As stated by Bob & Megan Tschannen-Moran (2018), coaching is about "calling forth motivation and movement in people through conversation and *a way of being* so that they achieve desired outcomes and enhance their quality of life"(p.22- italics added). In essence, effective coaching relationships hinge on what coaches *do* and who coaches *are*. However, in order for the coaching models and tools to be effective, a positive relational climate must be established in a coaching relationship.

What is the Coaching Way of Being?

The International Coach Federation (ICF), a leading association dedicated to the advancement of professional coaching, identifies **coaching presence** as a core coaching competency. They define this presence as the "ability to be fully conscious and create a spontaneous relationship with the client, implying a style that is open, flexible, and confident" (ICF, 2008a, p.2). For Whitmore (2009), "Coaching is not merely a technique to be wheeled out and rigidly applied in certain prescribed circumstances. It is a way of managing, a way of treating people, a way of thinking, a *way of being*" (p.19, italics added). Whitmore (2009) reminds us that "good mentoring and coaching can and should take a performer beyond the limitations of the coach or mentor's own knowledge." And this is what makes mentoring and coaching so exciting for me in terms of transformational change. As Whitmore notes, "fundamental to whether we coach, advise, counsel, facilitate, or mentor, the effectiveness of what we do depends in large measure on our beliefs about human potential" (p.14).

We must think of people in terms of potential, not their performance.

For Whitmore, human potential is realized by optimizing individuality and uniqueness, never by molding someone to another's opinion of what constitutes best practice. (p.43).

The phrase 'way of being' was first coined in 1980 by the influential humanistic psychologist, Dr. Carl Rogers in his book 'A Way of Being.' In this text, Rogers outlined two foundational premises that have influenced both psychology and education:

people are their own best experts
people are self-actualizing.

Rogers outlines six "necessary and sufficient conditions" for therapeutic change to occur, which have been usefully revised and applied to a successful coaching relationship by Christian van Nieuwerburgh (2015):

1. There must be a good relationship between the coach and the coachee;
2. The coachee must want to make a change;
3. The coach must be authentic in her interactions with the coachee;
4. The coach's positive regard for the coachee must be unconditional (i.e. the coach must respect the coachee and view them positively as a human being, regardless of what they may say/do during the coaching conversation); and
5. The coach must demonstrate empathy. (p.150)

So, what does a 'Way of Being' look like?

Ultimately, the coaching *way of being* includes a confluence of:

qualities such as humility, curiosity, generosity
skills related to Emotional Intelligence
beliefs including positive regard for the coachee, belief in her ability to change and grow; and
principles including partnership and respect.

For van Nieuwerburgh (2014), there are six essential ways of adopting 'a way of being' all the time:

1. listen to others
2. allow for choices
3. show interest
4. Give feedback
5. Believe in others
6. Select goals (p.167)

For Jim Knight (2007), there are a set of 'partnership principles' that underpin every coaching interaction:

Equality- where each partner's thoughts, beliefs and feelings are held to be valuable; there is a clear commitment to mutual respect

Choice- where the coach respects the autonomy of the coachee

Dialogue-where both parties learn together: "Dialogue is talking with the goal of digging deeper and exploring ideas together" (p.38). For Knight, the coach should only be talking 20% of the time.

Praxis- where coaching is not a theoretical exercise, but the coachee should have "opportunities to think about how to apply new ideas to their real-life practices" (p.43).

Voice- both parties have the freedom to express their points of view honestly

Reciprocity- both parties benefit from the coaching conversation: "Reciprocity is the belief that each learning interaction is an opportunity for everyone to learn--an embodiment of the saying, 'when one teaches, two learn'" (p.44)

Reflection-the 'way of being' should encourage reflection for the coach and the coachee.

Developing your own set of coaching principles is an important component of understanding your coaching 'way of being.'

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