



Coaching: Evoking Excellence in Others

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Author bio and credits: James Flaherty has devoted his career to coaching and leadership training in both the corporate and public sectors. His uniquely effective approach to adult education includes practical applications of the work of such thinkers as Heidegger, Flores, Habermas, Austin, Searle, Maturana, Rorty and Wilbur. He has led workshops in coaching, communication, leadership, and project management for more than 12,000 people.

Noteworthy info regarding contents and chapter titles: there are nine chapters.

1. The Foundation for Coaching

Coaching is a way of working with people that leaves them more competent and more fulfilled so that they are more able to contribute to their organizations and find meaning in what they are doing.

If we know what we are intending to accomplish, we can correct ourselves as we go along and be able to evaluate our success at the end.

The products of coaching are long-term excellent performance, self-correction and self-generation. Coaches have to address both a short- and a long-term view. Short term in the sense that they must support their clients in reaching their goals, but long-term in the sense that the client will always have more challenges later and must be left competent to deal with these situations as they arise, while simultaneously conducting a fulfilling life. It's not events, communication, or stimuli that lead to behavior, it is the interpretation an individual gives to the phenomenon that leads to the actions taken. Our job as coaches will be to understand the client's structure of interpretation, then in partnership alter this structure so that the actions that follow bring about an intended income.

As coaches we do this by providing the client with a new language that allows the client to make new observations. The second vital element the coach provides is practices that allow the language introduced to become permanently part of the client's structure of interpretation. Language is what allows the client to be self-correcting and self-generating, and it's practice that makes it possible for the client to be a long-term excellent performer.

Flaherty outlines 5 principles as a way to design coaching or correct it when it's not working.

- i. The relationship is the background for all coaching efforts. It must be mutually satisfying and based on mutual respect, mutual trust and freedom of expression.
- ii. Coaching must be pragmatic: outcome based with relentless correction based on a feedback loop.
- iii. Two tracks: Both client and coach are engaged in learning. Breakdowns may occur in either person's commitment or competence.
- iv. Always/already: Human beings are always/already in the middle of something. They are not empty vessels. Each has their own immediate concerns. Each has their own commitments.
- v. Techniques don't work: the use of any technique, however powerful, will allow them to escape engaging fully with the client with openness, courage, and curiosity. Techniques can not replace human heart and creativity in coaching.

2. Basic principles

A coach is never able to begin coaching at the real beginning. The coach always begins in the middle. It could be said that the essential job of the coach is to provide a new language for the client. Language provides us the horizon of possible actions, experiences, relationships, and meanings. Language is what allows us to coordinate our actions with others. Provide new language, plus the chance by practice to have the language become part of us, and new observations, new actions, and a new world will inevitably follow. That's the importance of language to coaching.

In coaching, observations are made within a tradition that provides distinctions and standards. Assessment must precede the formal coaching process, because the coach's providing of distinctions and practices must be suitable for the individual client. Excellence in coaching always comes from an adaptation of standard procedures and practices to suit the individual client. The initial, largest, and most challenging part of assessment is the coach's attempt to understand the structure of interpretation of the client and then determine what part of the structure is relevant to the coaching effort and to focus on that. The other aspect of assessment has to do with assessing the level of competence or, in some cases, the presence of quality of the client. Probably the most difficult part of assessment is the verification of its validity.

3. The Flow of Coaching

This chapter suggests a particular flow for the coaching process.

Stage One: Relationship:

The type of relationship necessary for coaching is one of openness, communication, appreciation, fairness, and shared commitment.

Stage two: Openings:

Coaching starts when either the client or the coach encounters an opening for coaching.

Openings occur either by something breaking down, by an offer someone makes to us, or by a change in circumstance that requires a new skill.

Stage Three: Assessment:

First, the level of the client's competency is assessed. Second, the coach assesses the structure of interpretation of the client. Finally, the coach takes time to study the array of relationships, projects, and practices that make up the life of the client.

The best way to do an assessment when an external coach is first to speak with the client and the people who work around him. The second is to observe the client in action by shadowing.

Stage Four: Enrollment:

This means making apparent in the coaching relationship the intended outcomes of the program, the client's commitment to the outcomes, and the coach's commitment to the same.

Stage Five: Coaching itself:

Determine the scope of the coaching project.

4. The Coaching relationship

The background for the coaching relationship is shared commitment. The elements of the relationship are mutual trust, mutual respect, and mutual freedom of expression. Freedom of expression within a coaching relationship invites the client to speak openly, and simultaneously the coach opens himself to receiving what the client has to say without argument or defense, responding instead with clarifying questions and assurances that the client has been heard. Each member of the conversation is listening and considering what the other person is saying. The final component in constructing freedom of expression is maintaining absolute confidentiality. By skillfully combining these three elements - openness, listening, and confidentiality - you will ensure freedom of expression in your coaching relationship.

5. Openings

Most people don't seek out and are not ready candidates for coaching until their everyday life is interrupted. People generally aren't open to being coached because they have a habitual way of accomplishing something with all the resultant components of that process, both physical and mental. When an event occurs that contradicts our story or frustrates our intention we begin to question our daily dealings. These types of contradictions or frustrations create the most obvious and powerful openings for coaching.

Probably the biggest opportunities coaches will have with their work is when the client is experiencing an interruption in her ability to fulfill a commitment. Other recurring events which leave clients more ready to receive coaching: They include performance reviews, breakdowns, the need for a new skill when someone takes on a new position, business needs such as requirements for higher quality and lower cost and the client's request for coaching. The essential point is that the opening exists with the client, not simply with the coach. You must have an opening for coaching before you start in order for the program to be successful.

6. Assessment Models

Use these models as a way of giving form and shape to our observations without limiting the person to the parameters of the model. A model is at best a well-focused snapshot and that human beings are living, changing, adapting, and self-interpreting.

Model One: Five Elements Model

There are five areas of observation:

- i. Immediate concerns: what the client has on his mind at this moment - what is the most pressing problem, either because of its current effects or its potential effects. We can only find this out by asking.
- ii. Commitments: it's always a case of discovering to what or to whom the person is committed. A person may be committed to something but be incompetent in bringing about a change. Understanding someone in this way will allow us to keep looking for what is missing in his ability to fulfill his intention rather than dismissing him as not being strong enough to fulfill it.
- iii. Future possibilities: What is the person interested in bringing about in the future. The important role of a coach is to be someone who can remind us of what we set out to do and can work with us to keep building a way of observing and acting that is consistent with our projects.
- iv. Personal and cultural history has influenced subsequent ways we respond.
- v. Mood: the semi-permanent emotional tone within which a person exists. It gives meaning to present circumstances, defines our engagement in them, and colors our view of the future as well. Superior moods:
 - Skepticism: the behavior is to question. Skepticism maintains self-esteem by disguising itself as sophistication.
 - Cynicism: Cynicism is the judgement that no one and nothing is worthy of respect. The behavior of cynics is to insult, disparage, and put everyone down. They maintain self-esteem by taking their cynicism as sophistication.
 - Resignation: this is the judgement that "nothing new is possible for me". The behavior of resigned people is to withhold commitment and to stake out a small, controllable territory in which to become very comfortable. Resignation maintains

self-esteem by posing as pseudo-wisdom - wisdom that sees justification only for everything to continue as it has.

Inferior moods:

Frustration: The judgement that "I must make something happen and I cannot make it happen". The behavior characterized by frustration is to work very hard, and to complain about the hard work and the circumstances that make success seemingly impossible, but to never give up.

Resentment: the judgement that "something unfair has been done to me deliberately by someone else and I have no power to do anything about it". The behavior of resentful people is to put distance between themselves and the object of their resentment and then to begin to plot covert revenge. They can forget meetings, slow work to a crawl, misplace files, and spread negative gossip. The mood maintains self-esteem by being avengers for justice.

Guilt: the judgement that " I have done something to injure someone and I can never make up for it". The behavior of guilty people has three parts. First is apologizing, second is to work really hard to make up for what they did and lastly they emotionally punish themselves. They are the most self-righteous people.

Model Two: Domains of Competence

The premise of this model is that in order to accomplish anything of substance, we must be minimally competent in each of three domains. The foundation position (the bottom of the pyramid) is **self-management**. This means that we follow through on what we said we would do, we arrive on time, we understand the standard practices of the organization for which we are working, we present ourselves and our ideas appropriately, and we don't allow any personal issues or concerns to impinge on what we said we would do. The qualities and skills of self-management:

- Qualities: vision, passion, integrity, trust, curiosity, daring
- Skills: self-observation, self-knowledge, self-management, self-remembering and self-consistency.

The middle third of the pyramid is labeled **relationships with others** and refers to our capacity to develop and maintain long-term, mutually satisfying relationships. The essence of successful relationships is openness and appreciation.

The qualities and skills of relationships with others:

- Qualities: empathy, reliability, openness, optimism, faith
- Skills: listening (teamwork, real concerns), speaking (possibilities, inspiration), setting standards (developing others), learning, innovating

The third layer of the pyramid is called **Facts and Events** and refers to our capacity to understand mechanisms, processes, statistics, systems, and models.

The qualities and skills of facts and events:

- Qualities: rigor, objectivity, persistence, creativity, focus
- Skills: analyzing (inhibiting factors, sources), predicting (long- and short-term effects), simplifying (Occam's razor), building models, organize/prioritize/release

Model Three: Components of Satisfaction and Effectiveness

This model is a listing of the competencies necessary to be both satisfied and effective.

Intellect:

- Making distinctions
- Predicting future consequences of actions

Emotion :

- Bringing people or events close to us or distancing ourselves from people or events

Will:

- Having what we say will happen actually happen

Context:

- Generating and maintaining the array of meanings, possibilities, actions, and relationships that arise once a purpose is declared

Soul:

- Akin to compassion and kindness
- Our experience of connectedness to the rest of humanity/life-forms on earth

7. Enrollment

In enrollment, both the client and the coach make explicit what they are committed to accomplishing in the coaching program, potential outcomes and possible hindrances. The enrollment conversation requires that the coach listen very intently to both what the client is saying and what the client is keeping silent about. The outcomes must be stated in sufficient clarity that both parties will be able to recognize them as occurring or not, and also be able to discern what progress has been made toward them.

8. Coaching Conversations (page 105)

The author describes three levels of coaching conversations in this chapter:

Type one: the single conversation aimed at building or sharpening a competence

Type two: a more complex conversation held over several sessions

Type three: a profound and longer conversation intended to bring about fundamental change.

A structure for each type is proposed. It is well worth reading the examples and questions as well as the exercises at the end of the chapter.

9. Working with ourselves

This chapter allows you to assess your coaching skills and qualities to design a program to improve them. There is also a series of questions that can direct you in capturing your learning and continuously improving as a coach.

Skills include speaking, listening, resolving breakdowns, assessing and designing. Qualities include rigor, patience, self-consistency and creativity/flexibility.

Author's main point: The author shows that the only way to truly help people grow is to help them in developing new practices and new language, and that the only way to be coach effectively is to enter into a reciprocal relationship where coach and "coachee" engage in a dance of mutual influence and growth. The job of a coach is always to speak about/show what can happen and to do so in a way that frees people to take action. This book doesn't tell you what to do. Instead, it gives you distinctions, ideas, models and principles from which you can design your own actions.

A few supporting ideas:

There are many charts, suggested readings and sample practice exercises.

Reviewer's recommendation:

I found this book very valuable especially the assessment models, which I have incorporated into my own coaching intake forms.



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Frumi and Deborah Gaal are co-founders of the Leaderly Learning Center, a leadership development company specializing in women. We get results because our workshops are led by women who have been CEO's, entrepreneurs and certified coaches. We walk the walk.

Our unique curriculum enables leaders to achieve results through a combination of learning and implementing research-based leadership lessons, coaching to develop self-awareness, and mentoring to provide support.