

EMPOWERMENT OF THE WILL THROUGH LIFE COACHING

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"There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening, that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost." –Martha Graham-

The emerging profession of Personal and Business Coaching is an exciting new arena in which to study the will and to cultivate this vital function in the life of humanity. The will has an even more central and explicit role in coaching than it does in psychotherapy. The rich understanding of the will that psychosynthesis offers can, I believe, make an important contribution to the field. In this paper I will introduce the coaching paradigm and discuss some ways in which the will is used in coaching.

The field of Coaching came into its own in the final years of the 1990's (see Ellis, 1998; Fortgang, 1998; and Whitworth, Kinsey-House, and Sandahl, 1998). Enthusiasts believe that having a personal coach will soon be viewed as a necessity by anyone who aspires to a life of success and fulfillment. At the present time it is estimated that there are about 3,000 trained coaches with 100,000 clients. The numbers are growing by leaps and bounds. At the time of this writing, one of the popular books in the field, *Take Time for your Life*, by Cheryl Richardson (1999) just made the *New York Times Best Seller List* and *Fortune* (February 1, 2000) recently featured an article on executive coaches which stated, "The hottest thing in management is the executive coach."

Coaching has roots in disciplines such as counseling, consulting, and organization development. In the last few years has it begun to articulate itself as a discipline in its own right with professional organizations and standards of practice. The primary resource for business and personal coaches and for those seeking a coach is the International Coach Federation (ICF)¹. The ICF's mission is to support the community spirit and professional development of its members as well as ethical self-regulation of the profession. It is currently developing an accreditation process.

Personal coaches often liken their work to that of a sports coach. Just as an Olympic coach prepares athletes to reach for the gold medal, so a personal coach partners with clients to bring out their best in their personal and business lives. The ICF defines coaching as "an ongoing relationship which focuses on clients taking action toward the realization of their visions, goals, or desires." The definition goes on to state, "Coaching uses a process of inquiry and personal discovery to build the client's level of awareness and responsibility and provides the client with structure, support, and feedback. The coaching process helps clients both define and achieve professional and personal goals faster and with more ease than would be possible otherwise" (ICF brochure).

¹ For additional information about the International Coach Federation, see www.coachfederation.org

There are various specialty areas within the field such as Executive Coaches, Career Coaches, Relationship Coaches, coaches for children, entrepreneurs, and almost any conceivable market niche. Coaching that addresses all areas of a person's life is usually called "Personal Coaching" or "Life Coaching".

Coaches work in a variety of formats. Most commonly coaching takes place by telephone for weekly sessions of 30 minutes. Between sessions, clients take action steps toward goals they define with the assistance of their coach. Progress is reported at the following session. Communication may occur between sessions by e-mail, fax, or brief telephone calls. Teleclasses in which students call in to a common bridge number are frequently used for group coaching. Our virtual-age technologies now enable us to work very effectively at a distance. I find it exciting to be able to work with people from around the world from my home office, free from the constraints of geography.

A Dream About Coaching

Recently I woke up in the night from a dream that movingly portrays my vision of coaching. In the dream a woman was walking along a road, an archetypal life path. I was struck by the unusual quality of her energy. She had an amazing clarity of purpose and her intent was unwavering, as though she was carrying out a sacred mission. I felt that nothing could deter her from her purpose, yet she was not driven in an ego-based way. Her energy was peaceful and balanced. She walked with ease, grace, and quiet confidence, in what could be described as a "flow state." She appeared to receive strength and be moved along her path by an energy that came from beyond herself, as though from a higher power. I was inspired by her presence and remarked to my companion in the dream, "This woman must have a coach."

As I reflect on this dream, several points strike me as significant from a coaching perspective:

- The person is connected to her life purpose or spiritual mission.
- She is able to stay on track with this and not get sidetracked.
- She is so aligned with higher will that this power moves through her without resistance, propelling her forward in a seemingly effortless way.

The sections that follow will discuss how coaching addresses these various aspects of the will.

Coaching and the Higher Will: The Spiritual Connection.

As a spiritually-based coach, my aim is to help people connect with their higher Self and live a soul-infused life. Though I hold this ideal as a psychotherapist, I find it to be a more explicit focus in coaching. Since coaching clients tend to be more self-actualizing than the average psychotherapy client, they tend to focus on the life they want to create rather than on fixing what's wrong. This naturally leads to an exploration of their higher purpose.

Establishing the Essence Connection

I deeply believe that the most important way I can support clients in building their spiritual connection is to connect with their essence myself. This bond is an energetic one. It is a silent appreciation and affirming of who that person is as a being. It invites their essence to come forth and take its place in the world.

Most of us suffer from the primal childhood wound of not having been recognized as a sovereign and unique spiritual being. Instead, we have been manipulated by conditional love to fit in with someone else's idea of who we should be. The coach's unconditionality and honoring attitude helps to heal this wound. One of the best-known life coaches looks at a picture of each of his clients several times a day to help him maintain this kind of connection. When a person feels held in this way, they feel safe to come out of hiding and express the will of their true Self in the world.

Holding sacred space

The second most important thing we can do is to "hold sacred space" for the client. This too is something that happens at an energetic level. It is based on affirming and trusting the client's process. It involves intentionality toward the ability of the client to connect with their wisdom nature and to find the answers they need from within. It involves deep and respectful listening to what is trying to happen in the client's life. This attitude of invocation calls forth the client's deepest truth and inner resources.

Enabling Processes to Clarify Vision, Core Values, and Life Purpose

Coaches often assign exercises to clients to help clarify their vision, core values, and life purpose. When people make choices based on their core values, their passion and genius are released. Typically, I use a values exercise in which the client lists peak experiences which have given them a sense of deep fulfillment. The person then explores the personal qualities, skills, and values operative in these experiences. Common threads are found and a list of five or six core values is made based on these common threads.

"The Future Self" guided imagery exercise is also widely used in coaching (Whitworth et al, 1998, p. 219). It takes the client on a journey into the future in which they meet a fully fulfilled version of themselves. The Future Self shares with the present-day self how he or she got from where the client is today to that future state. In a related exercise, the client imagines the Future Self on a stage in front of an audience. The Future Self speaks to the audience in a way that is profoundly moving and changes people's lives. Exercises of this kind can provide useful clues to the client's core values, essence qualities, and spiritual mission.

Coaches also use more conscious processes to explore their clients' visions for their lives. This could include asking questions such as:

- "What do you want your life to look like five (10, 20) years from now?"
- "What contribution do you want to make to the world?"
- "What do you want your legacy to be?"
- "How do you want to be remembered?"

Providing Intuition and Spiritual Practice Training

Some coaches teach clients skills to develop their intuition and strengthen their spiritual connection. It is common to suggest a meditation practice. One spiritually-oriented coach has clients identify the “clair” skill that works best for them, be it clairaudience, clairvoyance, clairsentience, or claircognizing. The coach then trains the person to pay attention to this channel.

I may ask clients to get an image or a felt sense in their body when they focus on a particular issue. The classic psychosynthesis technique of having the client confer with a wisdom figure or inner advisor also lends itself well to coaching. Depth techniques of this kind bring fresh perspectives from beyond the surface mind. These depth approaches enable the client to access their internal guidance system and often inspire highly creative ideas. Dream work is also quite feasible in the coaching context.

At times I use my own intuitive skills to assess what is going on with a client. I have been trained in the Stillpoint Institute’s² process of Energy Diagnosis which provides a useful “x-ray” of the psyche based on the chakra system. This helps me to understand where the will of the higher Self is being directed, as well as issues the person may be facing with their personal will.

I find that centering awareness in the heart is one of the most rapid and effective ways to access the wisdom nature. A simple technique that lends itself well to coaching invites the person to place a hand over their heart while focusing on an issue and sensing the heart’s message about this issue. This is easy to do this while talking on the telephone. In an instant this simple technique can shift a person from being identified with a negative mindset to an expanded state in which they experience clarity, compassion, and release of healthy will functions.

An example of the “hand on heart” technique in telephone coaching took place in a session I conducted this week. My client, who serves on the Board of a community theatre was about to resign over a disagreement she had with the casting director. Though reluctant to give up her membership on the Board, which she valued, she felt unable to resolve the conflict. She feared losing control of her rage if she had to interact with this person. When she placed her hand on her heart, she experienced an immediate shift in perspective. This enabled her to see that she herself had a part in creating the conflict so she could choose to forgive the other person. She made a plan to work on this during the week and agreed to meet with this person as soon as she feels ready to approach the meeting in a healing spirit. Through connecting with the wisdom of her heart, she was able to step back from the victim stance and align her will with resolving the conflict.

Another effective method for focusing awareness in the heart is the “freeze-frame” technique (Childre and Martin, 1999), developed by the Heartmath Institute³. In this approach the heart is activated by breathing into it (imaging sending your breath to your heart) and evoking memories of open-hearted experiences in the past.

Connecting with the Higher Will

² For additional information about the Stillpoint Institute, see www.stillpoint.org

³ For additional information about the Heartmath Institute, see www.heartmath.org

There are many methods to help clients connect with their higher will. It seems important that the coach have a personal connection with the method being used so he or she can hold the thoughtform with greater clarity of intention. It is also important, of course, that the method be suited to the client's own temperament and preference.

One method I find particularly useful is providing feedback about the client's energy when he or she is talking about a topic. When people are connected to their higher purpose, I experience a sense of excitement, a kind of electric charge. When they are doing something because they think they "should" do it, there is a heavy energy with no life. Reflecting this back to the person can increase their awareness of what they really want. In this way it supports the will of their true Self.

Related approaches that have become quite popular among life coaches are "attraction coaching" and "radical self-care". The aim of attraction coaching is to help people shift from struggling to get what they want to attracting these things effortlessly. There are two basic rules:

- eliminate what drains your energy, and
- add what gives you energy.

The premise is that by eliminating "energy-drainers" (e.g. clutter, unfinished business, a missing button on your coat, or neglected finances), you become more "attractive" and create space in your life for good things to come in.

Talane Miedaner (2000), an advocate of the attraction principle says that, when her life is uncluttered, she is able to simply think of something she wants and it shows up in her life almost instantly. She tells a story of deciding that she wanted more publicity and being invited to lunch the same day by a person who opened the door to a major publication. This sounds more like the New Age concept of "manifestation" than our traditional view of the stages of willing (Assagioli, 1974/1999).

The "radical self-care" idea is attributed to Shirley Anderson, former coach to Cheryl Richardson (1999). Cheryl describes this approach in her best-selling book, *Take Time for Your Life*. Coaches working in the self-care mode can be very helpful to people on the burnout track. They encourage clients to lead balanced lives, establish healthy boundaries, and do what nurtures them. The assumption is that overwork and stress diminish our creativity and effectiveness. Through radical self-care, well-being and health improve, relationships flourish, and clients actually become more, not less, productive.

The self-care and attraction approaches are based on treating oneself as a person whose life has value for its own sake, rather than as an expendable machine. Perhaps these ideas are arising to counter the self-abuse so prevalent in our workaholic culture. In any case, they open up a fresh perspective on the will. They suggest that there may be a gentler and easier way to get things done than by laborious striving. Could it be that uncluttering our lives, eliminating self-sabotage, and honoring our true needs creates sacred space in which the will of the Self can more easily manifest? Can deeply valuing ourselves raise our vibration to a point where the power of our intention is vastly amplified? The coaching field may be fertile ground for researching the principles of "manifestation".

Coaching and the Personal Will: Setting Goals, Priorities, and Boundaries

Coaches differ in their emphasis on personal and transpersonal will. Spiritually-based coaches tend to begin by exploring the client's values and higher purpose. This provides the context for establishing specific goals. When a person's goals express core values, passion and creativity are released. Personal will becomes aligned with carrying out the will of the higher Self.

Establishing an Agreement

A "Coaching Agreement" is usually drawn up which establishes the client's desired areas of focus. Some people have a specific concern such as finding a new job or dealing with a particular crisis. Others want to consider all areas of their lives, including such things as health, relationships, finances, and their environment. Having explored their core values, clients work with their coach to develop goals that express these values in the various areas of their lives. It is crucial that the goals be those of the client and that the coach avoid a parental or nagging role.

The coach assists the person to envision possibilities, expand options, establish time lines and priorities, and commit to realistic goals within a specific time frame. Each coaching session reviews the client's progress with goals established in prior sessions and new goals are created for the following week. Clients may recommit to existing goals or revise plans made at an earlier date. In the parlance of coaching, "requests" are made by the coach (often developed collaboratively with the client) for specific action steps to forward the client's goals between sessions. The client is free to accept, renegotiate, or decline a request.

Reflection on One's Goal-Setting Process

I often explore with clients how they make choices and set goals in their lives. We do this when they set goals for the period ahead and when they report on what they accomplished between sessions. It is helpful to look at what part of a person is drawn to particular choices. There is frequently a subpersonality or complex involved like the pleaser, the rebel, the driven person, the martyr, or the one who feels inadequate. Belief systems such as "I can't have what I really want" or "It's selfish to focus on my own needs" may come into play. Clients are often tempted to set goals they believe they "should" accomplish rather than goals with intrinsic value. One of the most useful interventions a coach can make is to let clients know when "should" energy is present and, on the contrary, when they light up with authentic joy and passion.

Other will problems that frequently show up are tendencies to over-commit, to give up, to lack boundaries, or to set one's sights too high or too low. Subpersonality integration may help to align a client's will behind their goals.

Inquiry About Actions Taken or Not Taken

When a client fails to accomplish goals they have chosen, a wonderful opportunity for learning is present. Coaches need to protect clients from the inner critic (both the coach's and their own) at

such times, cultivating an attitude of neutral observation. It is important that the coach be “in neutral” herself or himself, modeling an accepting attitude.

I find the following questions helpful in guiding the client’s reflection:

External Action Taken.

- What steps did you take and what were the results?
- If you did not accomplish certain goals you intended to, what was this about?

Internal Experience.

- What was your experience of doing this?
- Did you feel confidence, anxiety, joy, guilt, resistance, etc.?
- What beliefs generated these feelings?
- Were all parts of you aligned behind your goals?

Processing the Experience.

- How have you been processing what happened?
- Can you witness it from a neutral place without self-judgement?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What do you conclude from this experience?
-

Processing from a Higher Self or Wisdom Perspective.

(Using a centering process, such as meditative, heart-centered, or imagery techniques, view the situation from an expanded perspective.)

- What learnings or new options does this reveal?
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Next steps.

- Based on the above, what next steps would you like to plan?

If the process is handled with sensitivity, it can be just as valuable to reflect on goals not achieved as to actually accomplish the goals. For example, a client who is an aspiring actress had set a goal of going to three auditions. She noticed that she resisted doing this and in fact had not done so when she came to the next coaching session. In discussing this, she became aware that she envied her friends who had agents and didn’t have to waste time on auditions. She realized that she really wanted an agent herself and could probably get one. She made the important shift from complaint to empowerment by clarifying what she wanted and setting her intention to achieve it. The following week she focused her will on taking steps toward finding an agent.

Setting Boundaries

Most people have difficulty in setting healthy boundaries. Even prominent coaches say that, without their own coach, they lose their way. They become side-tracked, over-committed, and over-stressed, making self-sabotaging decisions that undermine their true interests.

In our culture, it is rare indeed that a person's real Self has been acknowledged and supported. Instead, there is pressure to conform to other peoples' perceptions and agendas. Listening to one's own needs is not a highly encouraged skill. To the contrary, children all too frequently get the message that it is selfish to think about their own needs and presumptuous to want too much happiness or success for themselves. Not surprisingly then, as adults, we often feel on shaky ground when it comes to making decisions on our own behalf. When we lack a foundation of unconditional love in our lives, we seek to validate ourselves by pleasing, impressing, or taking care of others. A coach provides needed permission and support for people to dream big dreams and to follow through on them.

I had an interesting experience recently in helping a client set boundaries. She had been offered a job as executive director of a human service organization where she had worked as a volunteer teacher. Though she disliked administrative work, she felt she should take the job. She wanted to please the other staff members and liked the validation of a salary. I helped her listen to her real feelings about this and encouraged her to stand by what she really wanted. To her surprise, she was able to negotiate the job of her dreams doing what she loved without having to handle the administrative tasks. Through taking this stand to be true to herself, she was able to access deeper resources within her being. She entered a period of intense communion with her higher Self in which she felt that her steps were divinely guided. Shortly thereafter, she received what she believes is her life mission. This has unleashed an incredible passion in her that is inspiring to behold. The moral: when we set boundaries that honor our true nature, we create space for the higher Self to enter our lives.

Use of therapeutic techniques to free the will in coaching

When clients reach an impasse in using their will, the coach needs to decide to what extent he or she is comfortable addressing therapeutic issues in a coaching context. Opinion differs within the coaching field about whether a coach should attempt to deal with emotional issues. Some prefer to avoid this area altogether. Others freely draw on a therapeutic background to help clients resolve issues that get in the way of creating desired results. There is, nonetheless, a fine line to be maintained between doing therapy and doing coaching while using therapy techniques. In contrast to psychotherapy clients who seek to alleviate pain or dysfunction, coaching clients want to go beyond the ordinary, to fulfill their highest potentials. A coach must not lose sight of this context in dealing with emotional issues.

I find that certain tools from my therapist's toolkit lend themselves well to the coaching work. Since most coaching takes place by telephone, methods used must be applicable when the client is not physically present.

In the last few years, new methods that vastly accelerate the processing and release of unhealthy patterns have entered the field of psychotherapy. Referred to as the "power therapies" or "energy psychotherapies," they produce remarkable breakthroughs in freeing the will. Within the past year, the Association for Comprehensive Energy Therapies⁴ was formed, providing an umbrella for practitioners interested in these and related methods.

⁴ For additional information about the Association for Comprehensive Energy Therapies, see www.energypsych.org

The best known of the power therapy methods is EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing). This method, widely used in trauma treatment, has the client focus on a disturbing thought, feeling, or incident, while receiving bilateral stimulation through eye movements or binaural sound. I often use this highly effective process when working with a client face to face, though it is not recommended for telephone work.

Some of the energy psychotherapy techniques are more appropriate for telephone coaching. These methods have the client gently press or tap certain points on the acupuncture meridians while focussing on the undesired thought, pattern, or emotional state. Typically, and often within a few minutes, the emotional charge on the issue dissipates, the client gains insight into the problem, and he or she is able to disidentify from the beliefs which underlie it. This process combines intention with balancing the energy system to achieve results so rapidly it sometimes appears miraculous.

The meridian-based therapies I prefer are the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT)⁵ and Tapas Acupressure Technique (TAT)⁶ because of their simplicity and ease of use. I recently used EFT in a coaching session with a man employed as an art director. This individual suffered so deeply from feelings of inadequacy when making presentations that he almost quit his job. In a five-minute round of the EFT process, he saw how he created his own anxiety. He perceived how his imagination turned others into judges so that he then felt he must bend himself out of shape to accommodate them. He realized that he could view the other people, not as judges, but as team members, helping one another to solve the problem. He said, "I've chosen to put myself in a maze, but nothing stops me from walking out of it." By the end of our telephone call, his will was committed to success in that firm. He immediately felt confident in making his presentations and within the week was offered a promotion to Creative Director.

Summary

The emerging profession of Life Coaching seems destined to play a significant role in the future, providing support for relatively healthy people to realize their full potentials. It is a discipline which assigns a central role to the will, drawing on both personal and spiritual levels of this core psychological function. In contrast to psychotherapy, coaching assumes that clients have sufficient emotional integration to function in self-responsibility, at least as an ideal, and that they can use their will with some degree of effectiveness. This would imply basic levels of good will and skillful will, in psychosynthesis terminology. In this context, Assagioli's (1973/1999) profound insights into the nature and functioning of the will, so far ahead of their time, will likely find a receptive audience.

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⁵ For additional information about the Emotional Freedom Technique, see www.emofree.com

⁶ For additional information about the Tapas Acupressure Techniqui, see www.tat-intl.com

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