

Coaching – It may be the difference between having a life and living a life!

“Encouraging people to change their lives in the way they want.”

I’m approached by people who want to change their lives. People make this step for all sorts of reasons. Often they know things about themselves they’re not satisfied with. In a sense they’ve already made a commitment to change their lives by seeking out help. Others are not so sure about what it is they want to change, but never the less, are unsatisfied with ‘how things are’. Sometimes it’s others they want to change. Sometimes they’ve been sent as part of their job. Whatever the reason, if people decide to work further with me, the outcome is a learning partnership between us that extends over a period of time. This learning isn’t just about them. I continually learn from the people I work with – Its as much about myself as a ‘people worker’ as it is about them becoming more effective and joyful in their lives.

“Where has it come from, where do we see it?”

So what is this partnership I’m referring to? Its about what’s becoming very flavorsome in personal development circles – personal coaching. Now the idea of coaching isn’t new – its been around ever since the first human decided to help another human do something – such as light a fire, or give advice, or support someone through difficult times, or as the analogy has developed to ‘meet goals’. The coaching image is strongly rooted in the sporting tradition and its there that we have some excellent examples. You only have to read any of the local daily papers to see how coaching is related to the successes of key individuals and teams.

Outside the sporting arena, coaching has been part of management and business development for several decades. Now the concept of coaching has extended into the wider arena of personal and business development, making it available to just about anyone.

When you compare coaching with other strategies for personal development, it is cost effective and enduring. Its amazing the applications you find for a coaching relationship – everything from changing a career, relationship issues, health, developing business skills – whatever is chosen as an area for personal development, coaching is an effective strategy.

“So what is coaching?”

Is it really therapy by another name? Well, most approaches to therapy and coaching share similarities. Both therapy and coaching require a commitment by the client to “do different” to change their lives. Both require similar skills by practitioners, e.g. empathy, listening skills, organisational skills, rapport, flexibility, responsiveness and spontaneity, etc. The biggest difference between coaching approaches and therapy is in the focus of the interventions used. Therapy often moves between past oriented, present oriented and future oriented activities. Coaching assumes people are normal, and through the coaching sessions, the coachee comes to understand how their behaviour and thinking may be limiting their future success. Coaching really orients the ‘coachee’ to solutions – immediate and longer term.

The aim in coaching is for the partnership to assist the coachee find out what they really want from life – how to have a purpose and work towards achieving it. It is based on changing patterns of behaviour. To give you an idea of how a coaching relationship might work the following analogy might help. Imagine eight people sitting in a rowing skull for the first time. How do they get the boat to go forward? It’s likely that the initial

steps will result in random movement. All sorts of things need to be decided and worked through if the people are to work together and move forward. Who's best to sit where, what sorts of skills do people have, how do we start, how hard do we pull etc. This is where a coach can be useful. Sometimes being 'outside the boat' can help what happens 'inside the boat'. So getting everyone to row together in the same direction may be the focus of the coach – assisting individuals to see what's required and how they contribute. Once the boat is trimmed its amazing how much less effort is required to get to where it's going. From time to time, during training or in a race, one of the crew might 'crab' or drop a blade in the water at the wrong moment. The coach can help with this too.

A personal coach will work with individuals or groups in a similar way. In a sense a coach helps people work though the following questions;

1. Where am I now? Understanding my present situation and what has contributed to where I am now. Valuing what I do well – and not so well, appreciating my strengths and learning edges.
2. Where so I want to be? Setting a personal vision for the future based on some core values.
3. How will I get there? Setting a plan for improvement and implementing it. Setting appropriate goals along the way – achievable, step by step, relevant, timely and measurable – I can see what I've achieved. Who else can help me with my chosen path, how can I work with others?
4. If I do this what might happen? This is my monitoring plan. Not everything goes as we'd like it. By assisting the coachee get answers to this question, the coachee is better able to deal with obstacles along the way as they make changes to their life, practice new behaviours and get feedback on their effectiveness. By doing this the coachee develop "robustness" in dealing with potential conflicts created from this new direction.

"Is coaching for everyone – how does it work?"

Well, this depends. How ready for a coaching relationship are you? Are you open to being supported and challenged in your behaviours ? Are you ready to commit to a course of action, which you determine as needed for greater personal satisfaction? How willing are you to try new ways of doing things? Are you prepared to be open and honest about your needs and wants – with yourself – with a coach? Are you prepared to speak up to a coach if you're not getting what you want? Do you see coaching as a worthwhile activity and as such are prepared to invest your time/money /resources/ in it?

If you've answered in the positive to the questions above, than coaching may be for you. This doesn't mean that by not answering in the positive that you're not ready, but you may need to think about you're current situation if you are intending pursuing the coaching option. I usually advise prospective clients to work with me for a session to see whether they'd like to progress further. We then contract to do a number of sessions – this will depend on individual situations, but I usually suggest fortnightly contact over a period of 2-3 months. This will enable people to see realise step by step goals and start to feel the impact of the changes they are making. I continually contract with people throughout this period as a check to see we are on track. After all, this is about developing a partnership and relationship. My personal style may not fit with theirs! Coaching isn't a magical cure to all of life's issues.

So that's really it. The coach helps the coachee develop his or her own internal coach. Oh, and you may need some additional assistance along the way.

“Something to think about...”

We can't change the past..... But, we can change the way we think about the past. We don't have to keep being a victim of our past successes and failures. Life happens to everyone – the good people and the bad ones and we're all both good and bad at times. Finding out what is important and meaningful for us as individuals is a journey and not a destination. Sometimes it helps if we have someone else who can walk beside us on our journey....not to hold our hands, although this can be useful at times, but to help us put our inner voice into action. Maybe coaching can help.

**About the Author:
Chris Patty**

Chris is an organisational development consultant. He is a partner in Human Ingredient, a leading edge consultancy using creative learning technologies to assist people develop their Leadership. He is the director of CEEJAI Consulting, a small OD consultancy based in Brisbane, Qld. . He works with individuals and groups and conducts regular forums with business professionals, 'prac –ademics' and other practitioners as a way of developing communities of practice.

To contact him directly call + 6 1 418 726 487 (Aus) or through the website: <http://humaningredient.com.au>
(e-learning capacity coming soon)

