

But What About *MY* Needs?

Getting the Me Out of Your Coaching

by Tony Stoltzfus

Years ago my extended family got together for a reunion, and apparently all of my brothers and sisters had just seen the same episode of a popular TV show, with a signature line that stuck in their memories. So all weekend, whenever we were discussing a decision, planning an activity or just trying to choose which kind of cold cuts to set out for lunch, at some point one person would break us all up by dropping into a whiny, victim tone and delivering the show's punch line: "But what about *MY* needs?"

Focusing Outward

Coaching pushes us to focus time and attention on others, instead of on our own needs. *One of the key disciplines in coaching is letting the conversation be about others, instead of about me.* In a classic self-focused conversation, I **take** 80 or 90% of the air time, out of my own need for approval, recognition, or acceptance. In a true, healthy friendship we **share** the conversation, so the airtime works out to about 50-50. Coaching pushes us even farther: in a great coaching conversation, I **give** 80 or 90% of the airtime to you, so you can process or progress in the ways that are important to you.

Giving airtime to others is a discipline. One way to improve your coaching is to regularly practice decreasing your portion of the airtime in ordinary conversations. The opportunities are all around you. One great place to do this is with your kids. Another is with new people you meet. Focus on learning about who they are, what they do and what they want instead of talking about yourself. Or how about really listening to your co-workers, or the gal you run into twice a week at the gym, or one of your neighbors? Can I challenge you to pick one of these areas and make this an exercise for the next two weeks?

What makes you attractive as an ambassador for Christ is this overflow from your life (or we might say, from Christ's life in you) to others. Jesus gave up his life for the sake of others, and we are learning to be like Him. That's what Christianity is all about. One of the best evidences of a heart God has deeply shaped is that it has an abundance of what are *truly* the best things in life (love, attention, time, acceptance, honesty, believing in you, relationship) to give away to others, and it doesn't grasp for anything in return. You might say that when we are giving freely, so absorbed in the joy of the gift that we aren't even thinking about what we'll get back, that we look most like Christ.

Need-Traps of a Coach

On the other hand, a life that is all about my needs doesn't attract people to Christ—and it doesn't make for very good coaching, either! Here are four common ways coaches can get trapped by their own needs, with coaching questions to help you develop steps to move you out of that trap:

1. Being Impressive

It's easy to get trapped into trying to impress the person you are coaching. Sometimes this shows up as talking or interrupting too much, but often the sign that a coach is trying to be impressive is that you are working very hard to think up the perfect question that will produce

transformation in the coachee. We show off when we don't believe in ourselves or need affirmation or recognition.

Question: What one step could you take to build a pattern in your own life of deeper confidence in God as the one who leads your coaching and transforms lives?

2. Lacking Boldness

Another way coaching becomes about us is when we fail to honestly challenge people who need to hear from their coach. If you often find yourself thinking, 'I wish I would have said that!' after your coaching sessions, you may be in this trap. Or take a step back and look at your coaching relationships: if you have wonderful times together as buddies but rarely challenge the person to reach for more, change perspective or let go of something, your need to be liked may be dominating your coaching relationships.

Question: What one step could you take that would give God more access to this area of your life so He can transform you?

3. Grasping for Coachees

Sometimes we get so excited about our new coaching skills that we try to foist them on everyone we meet. Working the fact that you are a coach (or giving your whole elevator speech) into the conversation with everyone you meet is just being needy – you need people to coach. Coaching people because you need clients is not service: that's about your needs, not theirs.

Question: What one practice could you institute in your life to build trust in God as your sole provider, instead of your elevator speech, your mailing list or your web site?

4. Get-First Focus

A common theme in life coaching is that you first need to provide for your own needs in order to have something to give. Coaching books urge you to "create a superabundance," "learn to love yourself so you can love others," or "set tight boundaries so you keep demanding people away and attract those who will meet your needs." Unfortunately, this value is fundamentally at odds with the gospel. Jesus did not say, 'Get so you can give.' Instead, he says, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.' True life comes from giving everything to Christ, not through getting your needs met first so you have more than what you need. If you are in coaching so you can work at home with great people, be your own boss so you can have the lifestyle you want, that's about your needs.

Question: What practical step can I take as a coach this month to lose my life so I can find it in a new way in Christ?

Tony Stoltzfus is an author, leadership coach and master coach trainer. More articles and materials from Tony are available at his on-line bookstore, www.coach22.com.