

PART I

The Coaching Paradigm

The Disciplines, Skills and Heart of a Coach

At its heart, leadership coaching is about helping people solve their own problems, not telling them what to do. One of the most difficult changes beginning coaches must make is learning to ask questions instead of giving advice. As they struggle to get used to this new approach, the following kinds of questions invariably come out:

- *“Would it help if you’d keep track of how much time you’re spending on that project?”*
- *“Could you just come right out and say something to her about the problem?”*
- *“Do you think you should talk to your pastor about that?”*

To see what’s really going on, simply cross out the first several words of each question, like this:

- *“~~Would it help if you’d~~ Keep track of how much time you’re spending on that project.”*
- *“~~Could you~~ Just come right out and say something to her about the problem.”*
- *“~~Do you think~~ You should talk to your pastor about that.”*

Oops! What we thought were good coaching queries turn out to be statements instead. The coach is dutifully attempting to ask questions, but what actually comes out are pieces of advice with question marks stuck on the end.

The statements above are what I call *solution-oriented questions*: advice-giving masquerading as coaching. While the coach is working diligently at the technique of asking, the change is only skin-deep. The coach is still the one identifying and solving the problem, then trying to lead the client to a certain solution. On the surface it looks like coaching, but the underlying advice-giving paradigm hasn't changed.

Solution-oriented questions are a great illustration of what it looks like to try to change what you *do* without changing who you *are*. Jesus discussed this age-old problem when He stated, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). In other words, what you do and say comes out of who you are—your "being". What you say won't change until *you* change. According to Jesus, to fundamentally alter the way you function, you have to be transformed at the "being" level (values, identity, paradigms and worldview) and not just in your "doing" (skills and techniques).

If you approach leadership coaching as a set of tools and techniques to add on to your existing ministry paradigm, you'll never be a coach. I can't emphasize this enough: *leadership coaching is a whole new discipline*, with an underlying philosophy and value set that most likely is far different than what you are used to. Becoming a great coach is a major remodeling project that will alter your values, the way you look at people, and the conversational habits of a lifetime. Becoming a transformational coach starts with being transformed.

Disciplines, Skills and Heart

As Director of Training for a Christian coaching school, I've worked with hundreds of aspiring coaches around the world. In the process, I've developed a training philosophy based on the idea of *disciplines, skills and heart*. While all three are needed for maximum effectiveness, the heart of a coach is the foundation. When you begin to think like a coach, believe in the coaching values and see others through the eyes of a coach, the coaching skills come naturally to you. Simply put, coaching is a radical belief

Coaching from the Heart

I once sat in on a coach training role-play where the trainee was floundering badly. She interrupted the client, gave unwanted advice, asked solution-oriented questions—it was painful to watch. In the debriefing time afterward I struggled to find anything positive in her performance to affirm.

Later that afternoon I came around to her table and watched her coach again. The difference between her first and second attempts was like night and day—she listened intently, asked excellent questions and helped the client develop his own great solution. Afterward I complimented her profusely, then inquired, “You did so well this time—what changed from the first session?” After thinking it over for a moment, she replied, “Well...I guess I was just so interested in what this person had to say that I really wanted to listen.” It was a great demonstration of the principle: *When you have the heart of a coach, the techniques come naturally.*

in people, practiced in a consistent, disciplined way in order to help others grow. Understanding and embracing the heart of the coaching paradigm is vital to coaching success.

When you start with the heart of a coach, the coaching skills take on a greater significance. They are not practiced as stand-alone techniques, but as *the disciplines of believing in people*. Coaches don’t listen because listening is a good technique, or because it is effective, or even because people like to be listened to. A coach listens because to listen is to believe in you. It’s a conscious imitation of the way Christ treats others. Listening is one of the most powerful, compelling ways to say, “You are a great person—I have confidence in you!”

When I practice a technique as a discipline, an important by-product is that it changes me as well. For example, when I pray regularly, my ability to tune into God increases, I see more clearly how God is at work in my life, and I come to value prayer even more. In the same way, when I listen habitually, my ability to tune into others increases, I see more clearly how God is sovereignly at work

in them, and I come to value what they have to say even more.

Practicing the coaching techniques (listening, asking, goal-setting, taking responsibility) in a disciplined, consistent way is living the lifestyle of a coach. It's when you believe enough in the coaching paradigm to reorder your own life around it that you'll truly be great at coaching others.

Your Biggest Obstacle

The biggest obstacle faced by the Christian coaching revolution is the get-skills-quick mentality we bring to leadership development. Everybody wants to go to a one-day workshop and then come out magically transformed into a coach. It doesn't work that way. That approach treats coaching as a set of techniques, not a lifestyle. Practicing techniques on people just to get a certain result ultimately fails: technique without heart is manipulation. Sooner or later, people will realize that you are more interested in the results than you are in them.

Reading a book in a few hours won't make you a coach either. Beyond what's in this book, the things you'll most need to coach well are:

1. To have your own heart genuinely and radically transformed by the coaching values;
2. Lots of practice;
3. Interaction with a professional coach trainer.

But, ultimately, everything comes back to your heart. If you have the heart of a coach, you can make every technique mistake in the book and you'll still transform people's lives. My prayer for you is that this book makes you hunger to discover the passion and live the lifestyle of a coach.

Chapter 1

What is Coaching?

“I’ve been through counseling and all kinds of training in business and in church, but I’ve never had anything like this before, that combines the business world and the church and what is going on inside me...I’m just growing so much.”

Christian Entrepreneur

My first coaching appointment of the morning was 15 minutes away. The client, Doug Jefferson, was a church planter in a Midwestern metro area. We’d met at a workshop the year before, and several weeks after the workshop he called to explore what a coaching relationship might look like. After a 30-minute “test drive” session, Doug was charged up and eager to be coached.

Doug’s gregariousness, character and work ethic had served him well so far in his church plant. In only two years, without a whole lot of support (“My supervisor just rented a building one day and told me, ‘Here’s where you start—your first service is this Sunday!’”) he and his wife had built the congregation up to 125 people. While Doug was a naturally high-energy guy, two years of working flat out had taken a toll on him, and he realized he needed to refocus and give attention to other priorities.

My first step in getting ready for the coaching session was to review the client’s change goal and my notes from our last meeting.

Doug's goal was to "Make the transition in my schedule and time management from start-up church-planter mode to a sustainable, long-term lifestyle by the end of the year." So far we'd worked on developing a plan to raise up leaders for several key teams, and on finding time in his schedule to visit the gym and work out three times a week.

Glancing back through my notes reminded me that Doug's progress had been outstanding. Each time we'd talked about his action steps, I'd found that he'd met his exercise target for that week, and he was on track with the deadline he'd set for himself to get new team leaders in place. In our last appointment, Doug had identified the need to reduce his workload by an additional eight hours per week, so we spent most of the session brainstorming about different options. Doug settled on several responsibilities he could delegate or let go of all together, and wrote them down as his action steps for the next week. I was looking forward to hearing back from Doug about his progress on this latest set of steps.

I settled down in my black leather "coaching recliner," plugged the headset into my cordless phone and spent a little time in prayer for Doug as I waited for his call. A few moments later he was on the line.

What is Coaching?

Like most people who have discovered leadership coaching, Doug signed on with a coach to help him reach goals that he had a hard time accomplishing on his own. He knew what he wanted to do, but he also knew enough about himself to realize that a demanding job made taking control of his schedule a big task. Change always takes energy. Having a change expert to walk with while he pursued this important goal kept Doug focused and reduced the energy he had to expend—and that made it possible for him to tackle bigger changes at a faster pace than he could on his own.

Simply stated, *coaches are change experts who help leaders take responsibility to and act to maximize their own potential.* Learning to coach is learning to set up relationships that provide the exact kind of support a leader needs to radically pursue his or her God-given destiny. A coach is a true friend and a close confidant on the path of life, someone who often hears, "I've never told this to anyone before, but..." A coach is someone who sees you as made in

Definitions of Coaching

“Coaches are change experts who help leaders take responsibility and act to maximize their own potential.”

“Coaching is like having a personal trainer for every area of your life.”

“Coaching is a dialogue, not a monologue.”

Joseph Umidi

“Coaching is practicing the disciplines of believing in people in order to empower them to change.”

Tony Stoltzfus

“Coaching is unlocking a person’s potential to maximize their growth.”

John Whitmore

“Coaching is the art and practice of guiding a person or group from where they are toward the greater competence and fulfillment that they desire.”

Gary Collins

“Mentoring is imparting to you what God has given me; coaching is drawing out of you what God has put in you.”

Dale Stoll

the image of God, and tells you the truth about who you really are. A coach pushes you to think, to stretch yourself, to take responsibility for your life and get done what you know you need to do. A coach is also someone who will hold you accountable, challenge you to live out your values or occasionally give you a swift kick in the pants when you need it.

Coaches are many things, but the essence of coaching is *believing in people*. Nothing is more empowering, nothing causes us to reach higher and accomplish greater things than having people in our lives that love us for who we are and believe unconditionally in

what we can become. That is what Jesus does for us—He sees in us who we were made to be and loves us for who we are. Coaching is a conscious imitation of the way that Christ looks at us and the way that God develops leaders. It’s a relationship centered on helping people discover and fulfill their destiny, which uses goals and action steps to move strategically toward that end. In summary, coaching is *Relationship-Based, Goal-Driven* and *Client-Centered*.

All that being said, trying to give a description of coaching that makes sense the first time around is a tough row to hoe. It’s when I *show* a group what coaching is (usually by pulling a volunteer from the audience and coaching them in front of the group) that the lights really start to come on. So in this chapter we’re going to examine a typical coaching conversation to highlight several key principles that make coaching work.

Exercise 1.1: Who Sets the Agenda?

Let’s start by returning to the narrative about Doug at the beginning of this chapter. Flip back to that story, and underline each time a goal, objective or action step is mentioned. Then at each place you marked, note whether the *coach* or the *client* came up with that goal or step. By the time you are done you’ll have discovered the first of our key coaching principles:

“The _____ sets the agenda.”

If you’ve skipped down to this paragraph to find the right answer without doing the exercise, you won’t see it here—and there’s a good reason for that omission. Coaching is about pushing you to discover a solution, not about giving you the answers. This principle, one of the key differences between coaching and mentoring, is stated well by one of the founders of the coaching movement, John Whitmore:

“Coaching is helping people learn instead of teaching them.”

This is one of the key differences between coaching and mentoring. And here’s another important coaching distinctive. Malcolm Knowles (known as “the father of adult education” in the US) states, “One of the most significant findings from adult learning

Coaching vs. Mentoring

Coaching and mentoring are one-on-one relationships that use support and accountability to grow people toward a better future. Here's an example of the difference. A person has a job opportunity that would move his career forward but requires relocating and leaving friends and family behind.

The Mentoring Approach

"That sounds like a great opening! It must be rewarding to be recognized like this."

"Yeah, it sure is!"

"I had a few similar opportunities when I was a youth pastor. One was a great move; the other was sort of a disaster."

"What was the difference?"

"One position was in a college town with a lot of people in our age group. My wife thrived on the fellowship, and loved the cultural events she could go to in the city.

"Then we moved to a country church in Nebraska. People were spread out all over. They'd offered me 40% more than what I'd been making, plus the senior pastor role, which was a big step up. But my wife never felt like she fit in; she had a hard time making friends, and it was tough on her and on our marriage. In retrospect, she didn't really want go, but she was deferring to me. I didn't tune into what my wife was saying, and that was a mistake. What is your wife saying about this decision?"

The Coaching Approach

"That sounds like a great opening! It must be rewarding to be recognized like this."

"Yeah, it sure is!"

"How would this move change your life?"

"Well, probably the biggest difference is going to be the relationship with my parents. We'll miss going over for Sunday dinner, and the free babysitting. Vacations and dates will be a lot tougher. Oh—mom and dad are going to really miss doing the grandparent thing. I better talk this through with them."

"Is that a step you want to take?"

"Yes. I'll do it this Sunday."

"How else will this affect your relational life?"

"We'll be able to make new friends eventually. It'll be harder for Patrice, because I'll be spending a lot of time at the church while she is stuck at home with the kids. Her mom's group is a big deal for her. We better talk that one over, too. I can check and see if the new church has a mom's support group or something like it..."

Coaching vs. Mentoring (Cont'd)

In the example on the previous page, the mentor is showing the younger pastor the ropes and giving wise counsel gained from life experience. A mentor is a more senior individual who *imparts* what God has given (wisdom, opportunities and counsel) to a more junior person. In the same situation, the coach is building the client's decision-making ability by asking him to think things through in a structured way. A coach *draws out* the abilities God has put in someone else.

When I'm mentoring, I'm teaching a person, letting him draw from me or learn from my experience. When I'm coaching, I'm pushing a person to draw from his or her own resources and experiences. Coaching is helping people learn instead of teaching them.

research...is that when adults learn something naturally instead of "being taught," they are highly self-directing [i.e. they feel ownership and act on it]... What adults learn on their own initiative they learn more keenly and permanently than what they learn by being "taught." (Malcolm Knowles, *Designs for Adult Learning*, pg. 10.) Put into a catch phrase, that nugget might sound something like this:

"Your own insight is much more powerful than my advice."

If you come up with the solution for an issue you want to work on, you'll be much more likely to act on it than if I tell you what to do and how to do it. One of the many places Jesus uses this principle is in the story of the Good Samaritan. At the end of the parable, Jesus asks, "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor...?" He lets His hearers figure out the lesson themselves, so they owned it, instead of sharing the moral of the story Himself.

Adults learn best when they are *learning from life*: taking real challenges that they are motivated to address, developing their own solutions, immediately applying them and seeing the results. As leaders, they take responsibility for their own growth and their own problems. Part of what makes coaching so effective is that it is

designed around the basic principles of how adult leaders learn.

Exercise 1.2: Support Structures

Let's do another exercise while we continue our dialogue with Doug. Coaching is a support structure for change. As you read the story, look for that structure: what is Doug's coach doing in this appointment to bolster him and keep him moving toward his goals? Underline the places where you see this structure, and try to name or define what the coach is doing in each instance.

The Progress Report

"Hey, Doug, how are you doin' today?"

"Pretty good—and yourself?"

"Looking forward to the day. Tonight I'm going to the hockey game with Taylor. That'll be fun!"

"How old is he again?"

"Ten. His favorite part is when they shoot T-shirts into the crowd with an air cannon during half-time. So—what's the most interesting thing that's happened in your life in the past week?"

"The most interesting thing... Well, that's sort of what I wanted to talk about today. I was stuck in traffic last Thursday on the way home, running 45 minutes behind and already missing supper. I was bored, so I started thinking back to some of the stuff I used to do with my Dad when I was a kid—going to basketball games, working on our old VW together out in the garage, that kind of thing. Suddenly it hit me: my boys aren't going to be boys for too much longer. I want to make sure I make the most of the years before they grow up."

"It sounds like you hit on something that's important to you. Before we go into that, can I ask you to give me a quick progress report on your action steps from last time?"

"Sure. Let me get my list in front of me. OK—I had two things I was going to delegate to get them off my plate. I asked Bob about leading pre-service prayer, and he seemed excited about it. He said he could do it three times a month, so that was easy."

"Quick question: Bob is going to do it three times a month; what do you want to do with the fourth Sunday?"

"Well, I guess I was just going to keep doing it—but now that

you ask, I could probably try to find someone for those off weeks... Or here's an even better idea: I'll ask Bob to take initiative to find someone for the Sundays he is out of town. That way he is really taking on the leadership role and that responsibility is off my plate completely."

"Sounds like a great solution. So is that a step you are going to take?"

"Yeah, definitely," Doug replied, "I'll call Bob this week and ask him about taking care of that as well."

"Excellent. What other steps were you working on?"

"I talked to the Johnson's about leading the college-age group, and it seemed like we were right on the same wave length, so I'm going to transition out of that role. I'll go another month or two to wrap things up, but I should be done by the end of the summer. That will free up one evening a week. I also talked to the elders about having a limit of no more than three counseling clients at a time, and they agreed to hold me accountable to that."

"Sounds like you really made some progress. Anything else?"

"Well," Doug offered sheepishly, "I let go of working on the bulletin all together. My step was to give it to the secretary to format and then come back and check everything after she was done—you know how picky I am about how things look. But after sitting there for 10 minutes going over everything with a fine-toothed comb, I just thought, 'You know, if she's ever going to get the confidence to do this, I can't keep looking over her shoulder.' So I gritted my teeth and told her I didn't need to look at it any more and she could just run with it." Doug sighed, "It's hard for me to let go of stuff like that, but I guess it'll probably be a good thing in the long run."

"So what do you think—will it be a good thing to let go of that or not?"

Doug thought for a moment, then laughed. "Yeah, it will. If I don't quit piddling away my time on trivia we'll stop growing and I'll burn myself out."

"Good insight. One last thing: I want to keep checking in on your exercise goal for a while even though you've been doing great. Did you get to the gym three times in the last week?"

"Yeah, no problem—except for the one time I got there and had forgotten my clothes!" Doug chuckled. "I just stop by on my way in on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and then go straight from there to

work. *That's going well.*"

"It seems like overall you're making a lot of progress. You feeling good about that?"

"Absolutely!"

"OK. Well let's get back to your agenda for today. You mentioned that you wanted to make the most of your time with your boys..."

Supporting Change

What did you discover in this story about how coaching facilitates change? Doug came eager to talk about getting more family time, but instead his coach redirected the conversation and asked for a progress report first on the action steps he'd chosen at the last appointment. In fact, each time Doug settled on a step, his coach made a note of it and asked for a report the next time they met.

It's amazing how much difference accountability makes. It's easy to put things off or let circumstances interfere with reaching our goals—until we know we are going to be asked about them! Whether you are dieting or developing a Bible study habit or trying to complete a task you've been avoiding at work, accountability makes it more likely that you'll succeed. It's a simple but powerful principle for supporting change.

Did you also notice the repeated affirmation that was coming from the coach? When Doug accomplished something it was recognized. Workplace studies have found that the top motivator for employees is not good pay, or job security or promotion opportunities: it's appreciation. When what we do is recognized and cheered and affirmed, we perform at a higher level. Support, encouragement and accountability form a support structure the coach deploys to help the client get things done.

Coaching is a support structure for change.

If you thought a little more broadly about this story, you may have noticed that coaching revolves around taking action to create a better future. Coaching is about focusing forward, not about fixing the past. At each appointment we follow up on previous action steps and generate new ones. This future-orientation is one of the key differences between coaching and counseling.

Coaching vs. Counseling

Coaching and counseling are both one-on-one relationships focused on growth. However, counseling tends to concentrate on helping people get well, whereas coaching works with healthy people who want to further improve their lives.

For example, this individual is having trouble dreaming about future possibilities because of past baggage. Here's what a counseling and coaching approach might look like.

The Counseling Approach

"So what I'm hearing is that dreaming wasn't accepted in your family."

"Yeah—my dad was always denigrating 'those dreamers who want to have it all without doing an honest day's work.'"

"What else does your dad denigrate?"

"Oh, he's got an opinion about everything. That was tough when I was at home; he didn't like the way I did my hair, didn't like my friends, and didn't like my ideas. He's always pontificating about something."

"How do you feel about that?"

"How did I feel? Well...I'm not sure. Sometimes I got mad; sometimes I'd just leave the house. I don't even remember a lot of it. It just sort of all blends together in my mind now."

"So your dad treated you this way pretty often?"

"Yeah, he did it to mom, too."

"So it sounds like there was a pattern of verbal abuse in your family..."

The Coaching Approach

"So what I'm hearing is that dreaming wasn't accepted in your family."

"Yeah—my dad was always denigrating 'those dreamers who want to have it all without doing an honest day's work.'"

"So what do you think: is dreaming incompatible with doing an honest day's work?"

"No! Why should it have anything to do with my work ethic?"

"I agree—I've always known you to have a great work ethic, and I think being able to dream can only make you more focused and productive. So what do you need to do to get beyond this obstacle?"

"Good question...I'm thinking. I guess I just need to push through this. My dad is wrong. I think he got that idea from his dad—maybe it's a depression-era thing. It feels uncomfortable, but I'm just going to do it. And if I get stuck, I'll sit down with my husband and we'll pray through it."

Coaching vs. Counseling (Cont'd)

The counselor is diagnosing the client's emotional or psychological state and helping the client become whole. By contrast, the coach pushes the client to set goals and take action to solve the problem on her own. Coaching improves your quality of life by focusing on creating a better future, instead of by fixing problems from the past.

Note that the coaching approach is not "superior" to the counseling approach, or vice versa. Both are valid, useful and different. Which one you use depends on the person you are working with and what you're attempting to accomplish.

In a coaching relationship, we're not meeting just to talk: we have an agenda, clear expectations, and concrete goals we're shooting for. Coaching is a growth-centered relationship. And not only that—there is a distinct expectation that if an action step is decided on it is going to get done! Establishing and maintaining this standard is a big part of what makes coaching work. Here's the way I state that principle:

Don't set any goals you aren't going to meet.

That's a pretty obvious idea, right? But it's utterly divergent from how our lives usually work. I just had a physical, and my doctor suggested some changes in my diet to improve my health. What percentage of his patients do you think actually do what he recommends? (Maybe I'll ask him next time I'm in.) I'd be surprised if it was 20%. How many of us actually follow through on those annual New Year's resolutions? How many times have you set out to improve your devotional life, or watch less TV, or spend more time with your kids, or exercise regularly? If you've ever mentored or disciplined someone who never followed through on your advice or suggestions, you know how frustrating that can be.

This highlights another important coaching practice: coaches give very little advice and make few suggestions. That fact runs counter to every instinct: I'm going to pay a professional *not* to give me advice? Why would I do that? The answer can revolutionize the

way you work with people: *Being motivated to make a change is more important than knowing what change to make.* Anyone can tell me what I ought to do; but internal motivation can only come from within me.

Most of the time we have a pretty clear idea what God is asking of us. *God initiates change* in our lives—He has a change agenda for us, and is always speaking and always arranging circumstances to bring it to our attention. This is what I believe John was thinking about when he said, “And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as his anointing teaches you about all things... abide in Him.” (1 John 2:27) The Holy Spirit is pretty skilled at getting our attention. We know what we need to work on. What we lack is the energy and motivation to get started and then to follow through. In coaching, we say:

Change is more a function of motivation than information.

Prioritizing motivation over information makes an enormous difference in how we do one-on-one ministry. When we believe that in order to change, people need us to tell them what they need to do, we give advice. However, when we believe the most important factor in change is motivation, we ask questions and encourage people to come up with their own solutions, because we know that buy-in and motivation are highest for steps that we develop and choose on our own. That’s why the coaching approach of listening and asking questions (the disciplines of believing in people) is more effective at fostering change than the advice-giving approach. Coaching prioritizes buy-in and motivation over giving people the right solution.

In the next chapter, we’ll continue exploring the key principles that make coaching work.

Chapter 1: Exercise Answers

- 1.1** The client sets the agenda in a coaching relationship. That's what it means to be *client-centered*.
- 1.2** Examples of things the coach is doing in the dialogue to support change:
- *“Before we go into that, can I ask you to give me a quick progress report on your action steps from last time?”* The progress report supplies accountability for the client's prior set of action steps.
 - *“What do you want to do with the fourth Sunday?”* The coach asks for a follow-up action step to complete the hand-off of this responsibility.
 - *“So is that a step you are going to take?”* The coach makes sure the client is committed to the step and verbalizes that commitment.
 - *“Sounds like you really made some progress. Anything else?”* The coach affirms progress and makes sure that accountability is provided for all the client's steps.
 - *“I want to keep checking in on your exercise goal for a while even though you've been doing great. Did you get to the gym three times in the last week?”* The coach continues to follow-up until the new habit is fully established.
 - *“It seems like overall you're making a lot of progress. You feeling good about that?”* The coach encourages the client by calling attention to overall progress.