

CONFESSIONS OF A MENTOR COACH: THE POWER OF THE “PURE” COACHING PROCESS

INTRODUCTION *(include this section with each installment)*

As mentor coaches we are privileged to partner with incredibly bright and dedicated individuals as they step into expanded professional coaching artistry in their skill set. As coach trainers, we also deeply appreciate the power and the wisdom that the International Coach Federation’s (ICF) core coaching competencies contain. At first glance you may see the competencies as profoundly simple and in fact, they are simply profound.

The growth of professional coaching worldwide generates a diverse understanding among coaching clients about what coaching is and what it isn’t. We believe that in order for clients to receive the full impact of coaching as it is defined by ICF, we coaches are required to take a stronger stance for the power of “pure” coaching.

When coaches steadfastly commit to deliver the coaching process to our clients without blending it with other modalities such as consulting or counseling, we too more deeply experience and appreciate “pure” coaching’s power. As we draw out the client’s wisdom and provide access to as-yet-unknown approaches to the situations and topics being explored within the coaching relationship, client awareness unleashes latent potential and innate creativity better than any other human development modality.

In this series we offer, from our experience as mentor coaches and professional coaches for more than 35 years combined, what we believe to be four key elements that make the “pure” coaching process powerful in its own right. These four elements are: Trust in the Process, Copious Curiosity, Risk Taking, and Skin in the Game.

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Installment 1:

Trust in the Process

The International Coach Federation (ICF) defines coaching as: “Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative *process* that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.”

One dictionary definition of ‘process’ is, “*a systematic series of actions directed to some end.*” The ICF coaching competencies represent the *systematic series of actions* of the “thought-provoking and creative process that inspires...” and the ‘*end*’ to which these actions are directed is, “...to maximize their personal and professional potential.”

Within the “pure” coaching *process* defined by the coaching competencies, a professional coach:

1. Is in integrity with the coaching ethics and standards,
2. Co-creates clear agreements with clients (including individual session agreements),
3. Provides an environment of trust and intimacy,
4. Stays fully present in each moment,
5. Actively listens,
6. Asks powerful questions, and
7. Uses direct communication, all of which contribute to
8. Creating awareness, from which
9. Actions are designed,
10. Plans and goals for those actions are set, and
11. Progress and accountability are measured.

Notice that the process contains 11 parts, all of which are incorporated from beginning to end within any coaching session. Although the process itself is straightforward its application is highly nuanced, especially as we each progress toward mastery in our professional development.

The concept inherent throughout the competency language is that the client is whole, capable and resourceful and that the coach fully believes that to be true, interacting with the client accordingly. In our experience as mentor coaches and coach trainers, no matter what level of credential a coach may be qualified for, the Master Certified Coach (MCC) level is typically the ultimate artistry being sought.

At the MCC level, the language of the skills and behaviors of the competencies includes phrases such as, “Coach is confident in self, the process and the client as a full partner in the relationship.” “The coach fully trusts the client to choose the responses to the coach’s communication that are best for the client.” and, “The coach lets the client lead...”

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Within the “pure” coaching process, there is no push, shove, mold or drive with our clients. Instead there is complete trust in the client to choose wisely. The masterful coach is consistently available for what is and what shows up in each moment, confident to perceive what is most important and respond to it authentically. The masterful coach surrenders to the flow and momentum created in the reciprocal field between client and coach that occurs through the process of “pure” coaching.

Invitation to Exploration:

- 1. During your upcoming coaching sessions, notice at which point(s) you find yourself not trusting the “pure” coaching process.*
- 2. As you notice it, what do you find yourself thinking and doing?*
- 3. What beliefs, attitudes or experiences underlie those thoughts, prompting you to insert your own knowledge, expertise or viewpoint?*
- 4. Experiment with the “pure” coaching process and notice the degree of commitment and follow-through you witness with your client.*

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Installment 2:

Copious Curiosity

In the first installment of this series, we emphasized the *process* of “pure” coaching as it is outlined in the International Coach Federation (ICF) definition of coaching and the coaching competencies. Here we look at the element of a coach being willing not to know, which we call ‘copious curiosity’.

One of the more common statements we hear from coaches is, “My clients expect me to know and to tell them what I know.” When you enter into a relationship with a client with this premise as an expectation, you enter into a consulting relationship, a relationship based on you as expert rather than equal peer, not a coaching one. Remember, the definition of coaching describes a “thought-provoking and creative process.” What is thought-provoking or creative about telling someone what is already known?

Referring again to the language of the competencies at the Master Certified Coach (MCC) level we find: “The coach is comfortable not knowing as one of the best states to expand awareness in.” “The coach evidences a complete curiosity that is undiluted by a need to perform.” and, “The coach’s questions are fully based in curiosity and the coach does not ask questions to which the coach knows the answer.”

Cultivating a state of copious curiosity means a willingness to TRULY not know; to set aside everything you think you know and to ask questions that can elicit what the client knows or solutions that are completely unique to the client and the client’s situation. This precludes asking leading questions, those to which you are attached to or know the answer; in other words, there are no conditions on the questions you pose nor a preconceived outcome expected.

This state of curiosity asks you, as coach, to be spontaneous, to be bold and to revere not knowing for both you and your client. By doing so, you can effortlessly invite, solicit and draw out from the client new awareness, clarity, and solutions which *emerge from the exchange between you* rather than from history.

Copious curiosity is a space in which you and your client can celebrate mystery and wonder about everything without needing to know why. It’s a space of innovation, creativity and unlimited exploration that can yield surprising and impactful insights.

Invitation to Exploration:

- 1. During upcoming coaching sessions, notice at which point(s) you find yourself allowing your own experience, beliefs, attitudes or knowledge to block your ability to be copiously curious.*
- 2. As you notice it, what do you find yourself thinking and doing?*

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3. *Having identified those thoughts, how can you choose to return to copious curiosity?*

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Installment 3:

Risk Taking

Last time we explored the benefit of a coach cultivating copious curiosity, which dovetails perfectly with our discussion of risk taking in this segment. The context in which we're addressing risk taking in coaching is that it is in service to the client's ability to express their greatness. Risk taking also serves to *create awareness that has not yet been accessed* as a higher goal than affirming what is already known.

Once again our guiding beacons are the language of the Master Certified Coach (MCC) competency behaviors: “The coach is not afraid of questions that will make either the coach or the client or both uncomfortable.” “The coach's invitation to exploration precedes and is significantly greater than invitation to solution.” and, “The use of the client's greatness is invited and welcomed. There is no evidence of ‘fixing’ a problem or the client.”

When a coach consistently trusts the process of “pure” coaching and explores with a client from copious curiosity, the opportunities for risk taking become obvious. Coach and client attune more easily, and openly access and name what is seen, heard, sensed and felt in the space between you and the client. In other words, your own expertise and knowledge do not put blinders or limitations on your multiple sensory capabilities. In MCC fashion, you and the client take comfort in the discomfort of the unknown and facilitate fresh breakthroughs.

The synergy of multiple ways of perceiving generates permission to see, hear, sense, feel, relate to and share everything being experienced in the exchange; the wholeness of the situation in which everything matters is clearly evident. Within this space, client assumptions, perspectives and beliefs can be challenged; you can both dive deeply into any incongruity, inconsistency, incoherency or paradox inherent in the situation or conversation.

By being willing to tell the truth as it emerges, freedom from self-protection is available because it's no longer required. When you, as coach, model risk taking with and for the client they gain full permission to reciprocate and do the same, opening richer and deeper avenues of exploration. New awareness is a natural by-product of risk taking.

Invitation to Exploration:

1. *During upcoming coaching sessions, notice at which point(s) you hesitate to be bold or take a risk in service to your client.*
2. *As you notice it, what do you find yourself thinking and doing?*
3. *What will support you to develop ease and comfort with taking risks in service to client awareness?*

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Installment 4:

“Skin in the Game”

We end our series with the concept of ‘skin in the game’, which is a sports term indicating a willingness and commitment to follow through. In the context of professional coaching this term addresses how a masterful coach employs the last three competencies in the “pure” coaching process, which are *designing actions, planning and goal setting, and managing progress and accountability*, in service to forward momentum by the client.

In our work as mentor coaches we commonly see two attitudes from coaches around these three components of the process. One is that the coach drives the session to action, goals and accountability without applying copious curiosity or challenging client assumptions. The other is that the coach allows the client to leave a coaching session without addressing client commitment to action, goals or accountability. Both of these scenarios truncate the power of the coaching process and do a disservice to both coach and client.

Through trusting the “pure” coaching process, exploring with copious curiosity and risk taking in service to new awareness, the masterful coach animates client choices in all ways: mind, body, emotions and spirit. The doorway is wide open for the client to bridge their actions, goals and accountability to their core essence and spirit rather than only to ego or will.

These elements contribute to restoring client sovereignty and creating ease with action, goals and accountability, providing inspiration about having ‘skin in the game’ for both coach and client. Inspiration then provides the impetus for continuing in forward motion.

The Master Certified Coach (MCC) behaviors yet again point the way: “The coach allows actions to include thinking, creating and doing.” “The coach engages the client in relating designed actions to other aspects of what the client wants, thereby broadening the scope of learning and growth.” “The coach works with the client to clarify and develop goals that achieve more than just the presenting concerns of the client.” and, “The coach trusts the client to be accountable to themselves and calls the client to account or discussion if agreed upon forward movement does not occur.”

By committing in these ways to ensure that there is meaningful skin in the game, sustainable, conscious choices are available to the client; they’re clear about their accountability investment and forward movement can occur effortlessly and with great vigor.

Invitation to Exploration:

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1. *During upcoming coaching sessions, notice at which point(s) you find yourself either moving too quickly to action or avoiding asking for a commitment to action.*
2. *As you notice it, what do you find yourself thinking and doing?*
3. *How will you develop the rhythm of employing the “pure” coaching process in each and every session?*
4. *Share your insights and fresh awareness that occurs from choosing the “pure” coaching process through an ongoing dialogue with us:*
<http://www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=2781955>

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ABOUT OUR EXPERTS:

Amorah Ross, Master Certified Coach (MCC) & Certified Mentor Coach, launched her coaching

practice, [Positive Life Works™](http://PositiveLifeWorks.com), in 1997 after more than 20 years as a

professional in Human Resources. A passionate champion of the human spirit & its potential, Amorah brings a holistic & compassionate viewpoint to her students as well as to her coaching and mentoring clients. Truly a ‘coach’s coach,’ she adds an uplifting perspective and inspiration to ongoing professional development and coaching excellence.



Positive Life Works™
Claim Personal Clarity...Unleash your Authentic Self...Activate your Life's Purpose

She is a passionate contributor to the coaching profession as an International Coach Federation (ICF) Assessor, and was a member of the ICF’s Credentialing & Program Accreditation Committee for 4 years, serving as its Vice-Chair in 2010. A Senior Faculty Member of inviteCHANGE since 1999 she currently serves on the Board of the Puget Sound Coaches Association as co-VP of Programs, Education and Credentialing. She became one of the first coaches in the world to earn a PCC credential and attained her MCC in 2005.

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www.inviteCHANGE.com, a company in the business of change, offering meaningful processes, methods and skills for inviting transformation and generating wholeness through professional training programs and coaching services, including professional coach certification (ICF-ACTP) and advanced, continuing coaching education (ICF-CCE) programs. Executive and entrepreneur, Janet’s career spans 30 years demonstrating a commitment to transformative leadership, excellence and mastery.

Engaged with individuals and teams, Janet awakens latent potential and catalyzes action from the inside out, the true source of imagination, innovation and powerful creativity. Janet embraces transformative

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coaching as a discovery process that invites and enlivens clients to choose beliefs and behaviors that generate a magnificent life experience, a consistent expression of a person’s core and essential self and a life of generative wholeness.

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