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## *Musing: Philosophy of Coaching*

By Mike Jay

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# MUSING

## Philosophy of Coaching

BY MIKE JAY

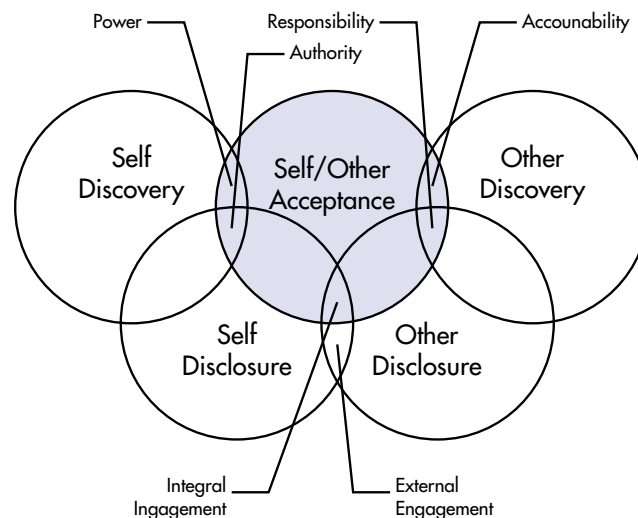
When people ask me about the philosophy of coaching, I usually am unable to tell them much, because the industry at large is still in disagreement as to what coaching actually is, whether it should be professional or not and so the debate continues.

Aside from the ongoing debate above, many of us who have been around a while and are still alive and working, have put this need for coaching to be something, other than what it is...usually two people working jointly to improve being, having, doing and becoming.

Lately, with my work in Requisite Organization, our coaching has taken on a number of the attributes of facilitation. I'm sure others in facilitation would argue that this process came from their camp, just as the psychologists would claim that coaching originally stemmed from their abode. Without question, coaching is a lot of things and while the philosophy of coaching is many things as well, it is becoming less important to identify what it is, than to engage in practicing whatever you think works.

I was at the Albert Ellis Institute talking to a group about what coaching was. Albert, who was feeling his oats at 90 something that day, said there were two things that were required for people to be ok: to accept yourself, and to accept others unconditionally. After that understanding, I felt that coaching was merely about engagement in the following form:

### **INGAGEMENT + ENGAGEMENT = Personal Responsibility**



Self-Acceptance – Self-Discovery – Self/Other Disclosure – Other Discovery – Other Acceptance

I've used this diagram to help many people, regardless of what they think coaching is, to understand how coaching happens and the philosophy behind coaching. Obviously, a person is remiss without mentioning the role that people like Albert Ellis, now deceased, played in bringing coaching-like practices into the mainstream.

Another area which has influenced coaching is the idea that essentially was placed in the foreground by Emotional Intelligence, another focal point of executive coaching lately. The idea is this: without self-awareness, you can't get either self-management, or social awareness, and without those, almost no capability to manage socially. The essence of Self-Awareness is seeing yourself as others see you.

- Research shows that people with high Accurate Self-Assessment (ASA) have smaller gaps between self and others' views than people who score low on ASA\* (Burckle & Boyatzis, 1999). \* N=214, t-values range from 2.27 to 6.46,  $p < .001$
- Feedback and coaching are critical for obtaining objective insights and developing perspective.

I mentioned Requisite Organization previously and the work of Elliott Jaques is an obscure outpost to most coaches, who still continue to wrestle with the blank slate notion that we're created equal, and possesses a "blank slate" at birth to be written upon by our socializing functions. Jaques showed that not only are we not created equal, we don't develop equally in terms of maturation over time. What's more, we can predict how much complexity is appropriate for developing success over time. Jaques is a small piece of the developmental paradigm that now exists to support the growth in things like Jane Loevinger's (passed this year) Ego Complexity, now handed off to Susanne Cook-Greuter. Michael Commons' model of Hierarchical Complexity and Kurt Fischer's Skill Theory are combined in an online developmental group of assessments. We are now able to assess our own level and our client's level of hierarchical complexity—our ability to take a perspective more complex at each stage by coordinating, or integrating, less complex items at the stage below.

Now, add back into this equation, Robert Kegan's Subject-Object interviewing methods (now becoming more available) and you have a developmental soup that can bring any stalwart coach to their developmental knees. Are coaches ready to be assessed developmentally?

So, while we have a cacophony of voices clamoring for attention from the philosophy of coaching, in the end, it's clearly a new world. The philosopher coach is being left behind by those who daily put into practice new methods of dealing with runaway complexity and client sophistication.

*Mike Jay*

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