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Professional Challenges Facing the Coaching Field From an Historical Perspective

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Coaching emerged during the postmodern period of the late twentieth century, born of a rapidly changing socioeconomic environment and nourished by the root disciplines of psychology, business, sports, and adult education. Now, approximately twenty years later, as we look forward to the professional challenges the field is facing today, we can benefit from the perspective we have gained on its short but explosive history. That history, characterized by the interaction between and the cross-disciplinary development of its root disciplines, is further complicated by the generational differences and varying professional backgrounds of its originators, as well as the changing socioeconomic conditions of the period.

The business and personal coaching field evolved during the second half of the 20th century from an intersection of people, disciplines and socioeconomic factors – characterized by generational and linked patterns of influence. Coaching entered the global mainstream at the turn of the 21st century amidst a proliferation of training organizations, professional associations, media coverage – and the blossoming of evidence-based coaching. In this article I will share two observations about the coaching field, look at three challenges facing the coaching field, and ultimately describe one possible future for coaching.

TWO OBSERVATIONS ABOUT COACHING

First, coaching sprang simultaneously from several independent sources and birthplaces, and then spread through a complex and somewhat unpredictable series of relationships. This initial stage occurred during the 1960s, an era of unprecedented personal and professional exploration and growth. The Human Potential Movement, a product of those times, gave us Esalen, the National Training Laboratories (NTL), Tavistock, and Findhorn, among many others, and the rapid diffusion of coaching was fueled by a series of serendipitous, interdisciplinary gatherings in the above venues. The key figures in those meetings, long before technological advances made such interaction much easier, connected through face-to-face conferences, workshops, and forums.

Coaching first emerged in business in the late 1970's apparently in response to an unmet need and changes in leadership models and organization culture. Ten years later coaching emerged in areas outside business (the late 1980's) as part of an extension from business, and the self-improvement and human potential movements. Once the information age dawned, around 1995,

the spread of coaching has been put into hyper-drive by conferences, workshops, and forums, in both face-to-face and virtual environments.

Second, coaching has a broad intellectual framework that draws on the synergy, cross-fertilization, and practices of many disciplines (Figure 1).

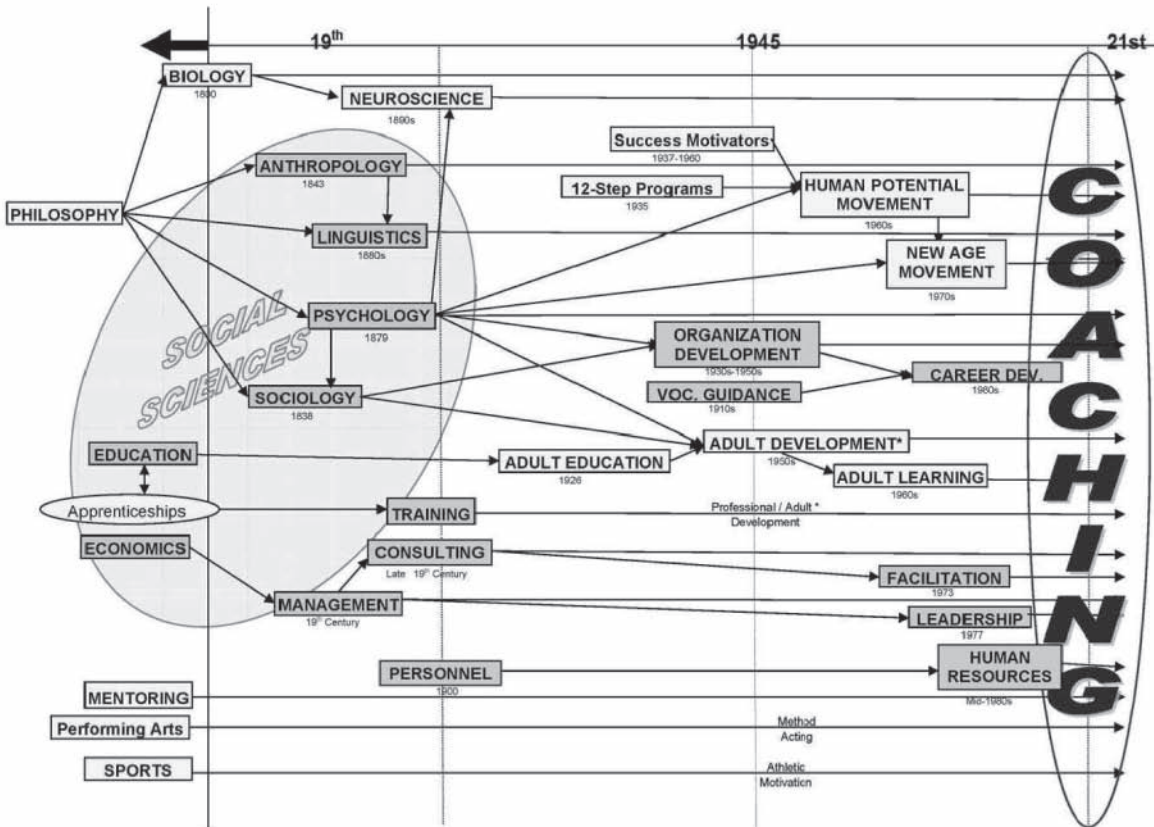


Figure 1. Root disciplines of coaching

People entering the coaching field adapted theories and models from various fields to the normal population with a focus on potential for human growth and learning in the business and personal contexts. Early practitioners were consistent in taking key concepts, principles and philosophical perspectives from their education and experience into coaching. Coaching models borrowed from academic disciplines and also imported values, principles, and philosophical perspectives from non-academic disciplines.

Looking at a brief timeline of coaching's emergence (see Figure 2 below), we see that extensive counseling of executives was engaged from the 1930's to the 1950s. These were generally the problem-executives who couldn't get along, motivate or communicate well with others. The counselors/consultants who were doing the developmental counseling in organizations had usually been trained and educated as industrial/organizational psychologists.

This early coaching, then called counseling, took place behind closed doors. Many people didn't know what was going on – in fact some referred to it as “charm school”. There was also sales coaching by sales managers as a means of improving sales training. This coaching focused on how to perform better as a sales person and much of it was motivational in content and delivery.

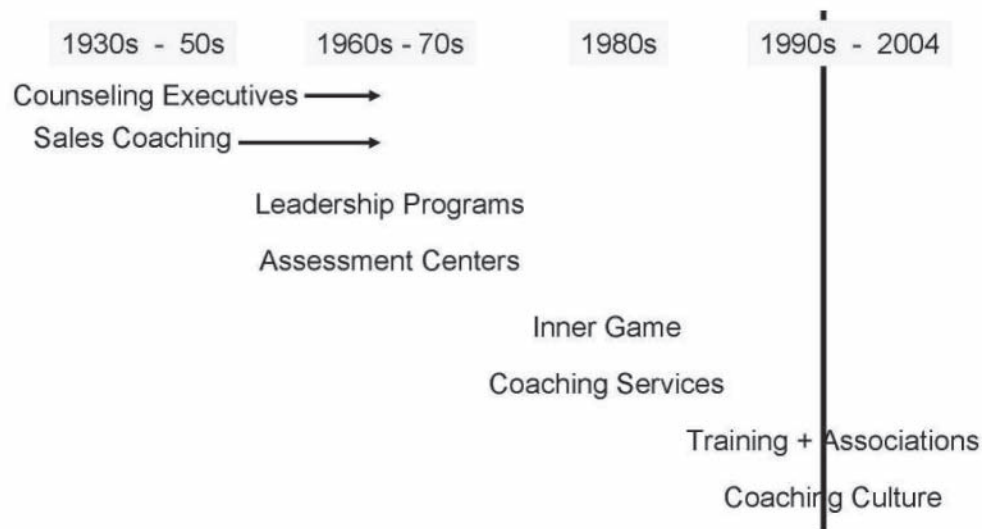


Figure 2. Emergence of coaching

The first real trend in coaching, which continued into the 1970s, involved managers or supervisors acting as coaches to their employees and staff. Much of this was not viewed as coaching, as we describe it today. The word counseling was still used to describe this activity. The late 1940s brought the first manager-as-coach training program which focused on establishing a coaching culture and enhancing the manager's interpersonal skills. During the 1950s a few professionals began using a blend of organizational development and psychological techniques in working with executives. Ten articles were published on effective coaching by management to improve performance.

During the 1960s and 70s we see the rise of leadership development programs, which included assessment centers, that corresponded with the rise of coaching. It was actually during the late 1970s that some hardback books were published on coaching. These included Lovin and Casstevan's *Coaching, Learning, and Action* and Fournies' *Coaching for Improved Performance*. Both described coaching as a supervisory role and were concerned with improving performance. *A Manager's Guide to Coaching* was written by Megginson and Boydell to capitalize during the late 1970s in Britain on the wave of interest among managers about coaching. The interest was coming from companies, senior executives, and HR professionals. These leaders

wanted their managers to coach rather than to use command and control strategies. As David Megginson recalled,

We felt that to do that they needed to cope with the tensions of having responsibilities for controlling the performance of their staff, and, at the same time, having responsibility for developing their staff. My definition of coaching at that time really dealt with a skill set to be used by a manager.

Two other events that took place in 1979 influenced the emergence of coaching. First, Fernando Flores completed work on his dissertation, "Communication and Management in the Office of the Future." After the dissertation was completed, Erhard incorporated Flores's ideas into *est* and invested in Flores's first company, Hermetnet Inc., a communications-consulting and software firm. Second, the Actors Information Project (AIP) was started in New York City by Jay Perry and David Rosen as a resource, information, training and community center with a focus on the business side of acting. The AIP offered counseling that was really a form of coaching. Erhard's concepts and work informed the services provided. Original members included Madeleine Homan and David Matthew Prior. Other members were Cynthia Loy Darst, Henry Kimsey House, Isabelle Parlett, Eric Kohner and Rich Tamlyn.

The real birth of executive and business coaching emerged from leadership and supervisory development, sports coaching, and personal development training during the 1980s. Some say that the term executive coaching came into use during the late 1980s because coaching sounded less threatening than other types of interventions. In 1980, Tim Gallwey's *Inner Game* approach to coaching was brought to the UK by Sir John Whitmore and others. It initially started in the sports arena, and then some of their clients said they wanted to bring it into their companies.

Coaching services started up during this period, with Personnel Decisions International (PDI) being the first management consulting firm to offer executive coaching as a stand alone service—yet it may not have been exactly as we define coaching today. One UK coaching company that was founded by Jinny Ditzler in 1981 (but no longer exists) provided life coaching services and trained coaches. In looking at some materials used by Results Unlimited during the early 1980s, I noticed similarities to coaching tools and techniques in use later in the 1980s by Thomas Leonard and Laura Whitworth in the US. This similarity may be in part due to the common *est* background all three shared. This same year saw the founding of Peer Resources, a Canadian company, by Rey Carr, Greg Saunders and David de Rosenroll to work with mentoring in education. During the 1980s industrial psychologists also brought coaching into German speaking companies.

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As we look at the 1990s when coaching gained popularity and media attention, we see the rise of training programs and professional associations serving the coaching community. Coach training schools grew from two in 1990 to 8 in 1995, to 164 in 2004. Professional coach associations grew from 0 in 1990 to 12 in 2004, with annual coaching conferences growing from 0 to 16 by 2003. Seventy-nine coaching books were published during the 1990s (62% in 1998-9), while 153 coaching books were published from 2000 to 2004. The whole concept of coaching culture came into being about that time and by 2004 was a term commonly used in business.

THE TIPPING POINT

Following this quick overview of the emergence of coaching by decade, I will share a conceptual model I developed as a way to look at coaching's emergence, where it is today and where it might be in the future. I used two points that Malcolm Gladwell popularized in 2002 – the tipping point and the diffusion of innovation curve. Let's go to Figure 3 and I will walk you through it.

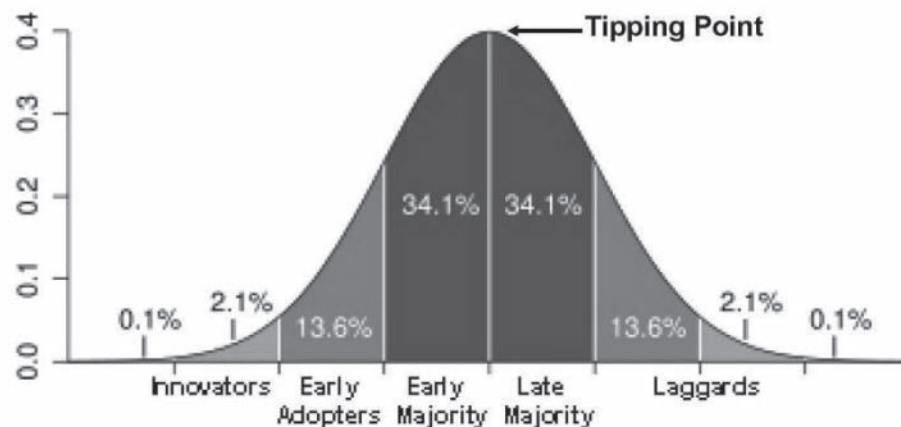


Figure 3. Diffusion of innovation curve

This is a diffusion of innovation curve – it's a standard bell curve and it illustrates what happens with adaptation to a new phenomena (see Table 1 below). It begins with the innovators, the people who are the adventurous ones who may see it before it really happens, and follows with the early adopters or early opinion leaders in the community. This is the model of Everett Rogers (Orr, 2003) which was not well known until Gladwell popularized it in 2002. The innovators are those who say "there is a better way of doing this" and the early adopters are those who say "Hey, this is really cool – I'm on board". Next we have the early and late majority, which are the two largest groups. The early majority are the masses who include three types of individuals who say "I will train people to be effective coaches", "We need a professional association with

ethics and standards to self-regulate this new field” and “me too I’m a coach – I will get some training to be an even better coach and provide this service in my current line of work.” The late majority is composed of those people say: “I guess coaching isn’t just the fad of the year. It might be around for awhile. I guess I will provide coaching for a specific niche, use technology to provide low cost coaching to the common person, or maybe add coaching to my business card and profit from this movement.” It is between the early and late majority groups that the innovation curve starts tipping. As the phenomenon gains more acceptance and standardization, there is less innovation and the curve begins to drop off. Finally, we have the laggards who, like the reactions of some psychologists to coaching, initially resisted coaching and subsequently wished to oversee the field or at least contribute rigor and structure to the field of coaching. What happened with contribution by psychologists to the coaching field? They might add something new—a new innovation curve is formed. The psychologists, who have been the laggards, might become the innovators.

Table 1. Diffusion of innovation

- Innovators are transmitters.
- Early Adopters are second generation.
- Early Majority are those who sought to make incremental percentage improvement.
- Late Majority are those who commodify and institutionalize.
- Laggards arrive when reinventing or being eclipsed by a new innovation.

The tipping point is where the phenomenon has a life of its own and it begins showing up everywhere. Gladwell describes a viral epidemic – which can be positive or negative – that follows the shape of this bell curve. The tipping point is when change can happen instantaneously and you don’t know where the epidemic will go.

I applied this curve and these concepts to the emergence of coaching. I created an emergence curve (Figure 4) that starts in 1985 and goes to 2015. It’s a thirty year curve. In 1985 some coaching was happening in the UK and US, and there were many more people becoming involved with this new field called coaching. I have divided these people, whom I have termed *influencers*, into three categories – the first were originators, who don’t appear on this chart as they were long before 1985. They were people like Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Fritz Perls – the people who created the original theories and models in related disciplines when coaching didn’t exist. The second group I call the *transmitters*, or first generation coaches. Those people were the innovators and the early adopters of coaching between 1985 and 1995. They took the models and theories of the originators and translated them

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into coaching. Timothy Gallwey, Sir John Whitmore, Thomas Leonard, and Laura Whitworth belong to this group. Some of the psychologists, who did coaching under the title of counseling, also are included in the transmitter category. The third category include the second and later generation influencers, or from a historical perspective, *the emerging influencers*. Included in this category are Marshall Goldsmith, Anthony Grant, and Cheryl Richardson, among others.

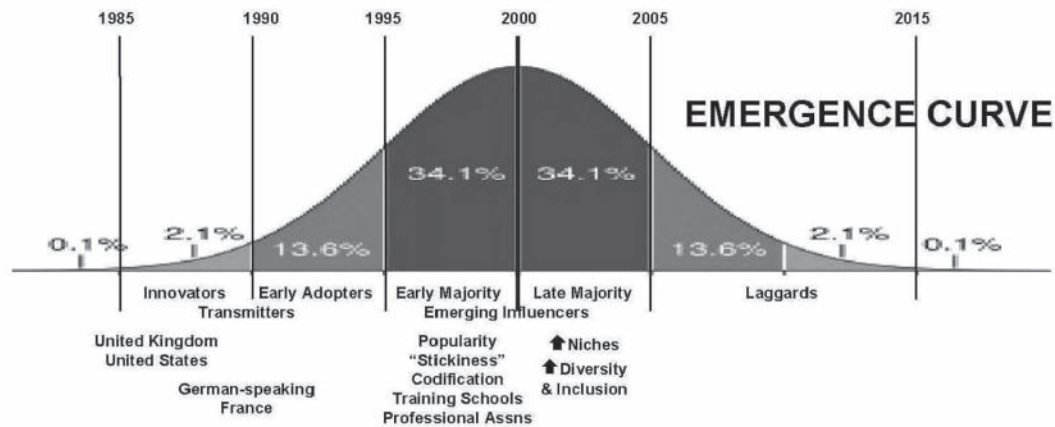


Figure 4. Coaching emergence curve

Along with the emerging influencers, there were those who developed the structures of the field. These included leaders of the increased number of training schools and professional associations after 1995. By the year 2000 there were at least 10 professional coaching associations in existence. Prior to 2000, 165 books on coaching had been published in English—with 95% of them being first distributed between 1995 and 2000. From 2000 to 2005 another 200 books were written and published. Today I can't even count the number of coaching books that have been published. The proliferation of later books cluster around coaching niches, how to build a practice, and the evidence for coaching.

When we began to reach the tipping point in 2000 we saw a surge of competition: “my coaching is better than yours; you must be trained and credentialed to be a ‘real’ coach.” This competition spreads throughout the field from professional associations attracting members to schools attracting students to coaches attracting clients: “How do I differentiate myself?” If we looked only at the emergence curve in 2015 we would conclude that coaching will not be there any more. We are on the downside. Yet coaching is getting even stronger.

I hypothesize that another innovation curve started in 1995. If you look at this next curve, which I call the prominence curve (see Figure 5), it actually started ten years after the emergence

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curve. This curve was energized in the early years of the current decade by people who came up with evidence-based and scholar-practitioner models. These are the terms that were not heard early on in coaching. The academics got involved and started re-linking the theories and models to the actual practice through research. With that curve's impact, we have until 2010 for the next tipping point and 2025 for the end of the prominence curve. There may be another curve. This is a possible future that is based on an hypothesized worldview of coaching.

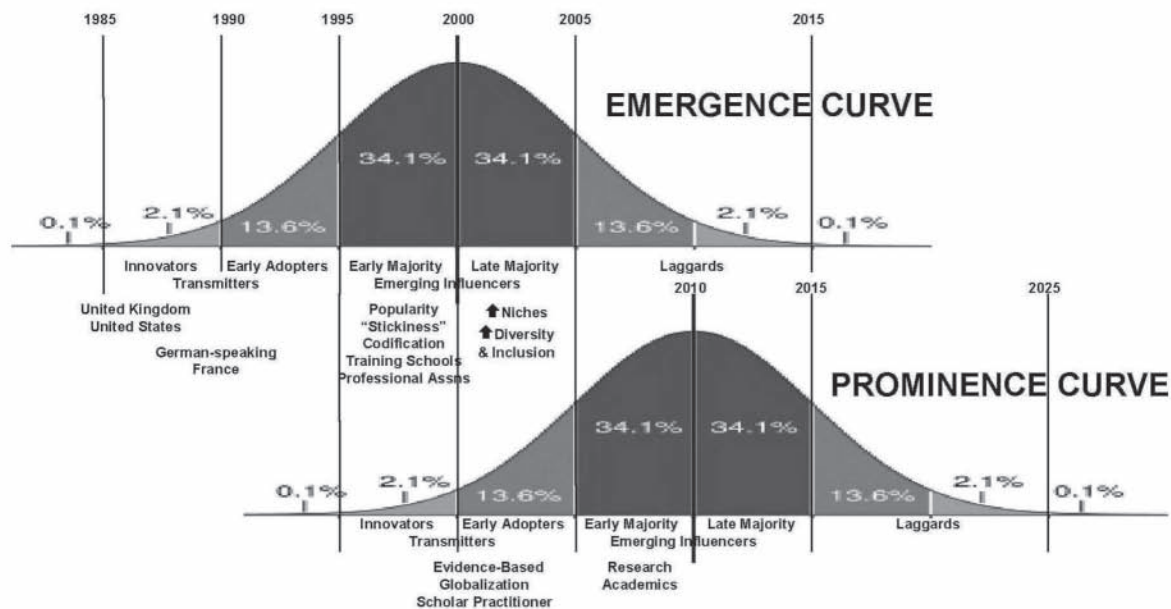


Figure 5. Emergence and prominence curves overlap

However if coaching just continued the way depicted in the prominence curve, and still had the competition and further narrowing of the definition of coaching (who's a coach and who isn't a coach), then our rate of increase or acceleration will begin to decline in 2010, even though the field is still growing. Another factor is how the external socioeconomic factors will play into this given the worldwide recession. While there are internal factors that we in the field of coaching can control, there are numerous external factors that are beyond our control and many other adaptation curves in all areas outside coaching. The innovation curves I have identified are not happening in isolation.

THE CHALLENGES

Just what are the challenges facing the coaching field today? Looking at the challenges from the modern socioeconomic perspective that divides and separates, we have the first challenges with theories and models from the root disciplines: "How can someone like me, who is not a psychologist or an education learning specialist, ethically and effectively apply these models? Yet I have been applying them

In fact, each business discipline of consulting, management, and organization development sees coaching as a subset of its respective discipline and practices coaching as a part of its primary discipline.

for years because someone said ‘here’s a model’ and I said ‘great’ without knowing from where it came.” That’s one of the challenges—because we are now making these linkages. What are we as members of the field going to do about this? The psychologists are dealing with this by putting proprietary fences around coaching psychology and saying: “if you don’t have psychological background and education you are not qualified to use these theories and models.” Conversely you could say: “if you don’t have coach training and background you are not qualified to be a coach.” Or: “unless you have worked in a business you are not qualified to coach in business (even if you are a psychologist or educator).” One might even take a cynical view that the difference between a psychologist and a coach is \$50,000 per year. There are many different perspectives that each can generate its own valid argument.

Challenge number two concerns how coaching can have a uniform body of knowledge for coaching — a uniform foundation that allows all of us with our diverse backgrounds to practice and yet not blur the boundaries between the disciplines from which we came. It was not until the mid-1990s that a body of knowledge began to appear as professional organizations and training programs were founded with the focus on evidence-based coaching, graduate-level education, and research. Yet since people can practice coaching without really knowing anything about it as a separate discipline, the result is that many practitioners engage coaching differently from professional coaches and in conjunction with a primary role that is not professional coaching. In fact, each business discipline of consulting, management, and organization development sees coaching as a subset of its respective discipline and practices coaching as a part of its primary discipline.

The third challenge concerns clients’ expectations about what we are going to do and provide as a coach. What are our skills? How do we show up in a specialized area, when no coaching body of knowledge, specific training or qualification (certification) is required? We may possess these skills, even when they are not required. Surveys have been done of clients regarding the important criteria that are identified when they pick their coach—and they do not include whether or not they are credentialed or trained. In fact, in a survey done by the American Management Association in 2008, the most important characteristic in choosing an executive coach is relevant business experience. The least important is possession of a doctoral degree.

These three are challenges only when assessed from a modern point-of-view — where things are grouped separately. Looking from a post-modern socioeconomic perspective, one that reintegrates and links, we see that these challenges cluster around a common body of knowledge. What have we chosen to do as coaches to identify a body of knowledge and ensure that people have the understanding and competence to practice coaching? One choice taken by the

The truth is that all of our root disciplines are facing the same questions we are facing. What worked in the past may not work now as the environment is different—so our root disciplines are being called to evolve differently just as we are.

European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) has been to institute quality awards. This contrasts with the International Coach Federation (ICF) choice of certification standards. We have the potential to redefine coaching in a 21st century version or to fall back to the 1990s version – it is our choice.

IMAGES OF THE FUTURE

We need to put a new discipline in context with others that preceded it (as in Table 2 below). We need the shoulders of the giants that came before for us to rise to that level. Given that we are all connected, from a post-modern perspective, it's difficult to imagine a next generation discipline where we form something different from the current generation discipline. The truth is that all of our root disciplines are facing the same questions we are facing. What worked in the past may not work now as the environment is different—so our root disciplines are being called to evolve differently just as we are.

One of the future scenarios holds the prospect that coaching becomes the dominant worldview and global culture. In this future, coaching is:

1. an open, fluid social movement that is
2. spread virally through human relationships and interactions,
3. woven into the fabric of life, and
4. has become the preferred communication process and style for human interaction.

What can you do to make this world view of coaching a reality? First, you can understand who made contributions to the emergence and growth of coaching, and then value those contributions. Next, you can embrace an inclusive definition of coaching – one that is dynamic and contextual, delivered across a range of attributes, and customized to the person being coached, the coach, the context and the specific situation. Third, you can promote diversity and inclusion – getting away from the competitive model. We talk about coaches being collaborative. Yet, I have seen more politicized and competitive behaviors among coaches than I have seen in other professions that do not profess to be collaborative. Fourth, support the effective use of coaching, so that doctors and managers can be effective coaches. Everybody can be an effective coach. We can support this behavior in others rather than saying “Nope, you can't be a coach unless you are a professional.” Using a coaching approach with patients, employees, and children enables doctors, managers, and parents to be more effective. This is modeling and living coaching in your life, in every moment and interaction.

The last action item is “champion coaching as a social phenomenon”. We can shift from looking at coaching as a set of practices and we look at it as a social phenomenon – something far

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bigger than we might have desired or imagined. We start looking at it outside the discipline and we don't confine ourselves within the walls of professional coaching. This is the only way coaching can become the worldview – when it gets much bigger than professional coaches. We want to shift from the scarcity of “what's in it for us” to the abundance of “what's in it for all and the world will be a better place when we open this up.”

Table 2. What you can do...

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand influences and contributions. • Embrace an inclusive coaching definition. • Promote diversity and inclusion. • Support effective use of coaching. • Model and live coaching. • Champion coaching as a social phenomenon.
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Coaching can become the worldview without achieving the status of a profession--nor does coaching have to be clearly distinguished from related disciplines. We now have the rare opportunity to contribute to the wellness of the planet, including its flora, its fauna, and our own race. As coaches, it is up to us to ask the big powerful questions. In this article I have asked some of these questions and invite you to join with me in identifying and answering these and other powerful questions currently facing the coaching field, and ultimately the world.

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A Master Certified Coach (MCC), Certified Executive Coach and Professional Mentor Coach, Vikki Brock brings the wisdom, experience, and proven processes to move leaders and individuals to higher stages of personal awareness and effectiveness. Employing a multifaceted approach to individual development, she partners with and respectfully provokes her clients to create authentic strengths-based success from the inside and by their own definition. Her coaching emphasis is on authenticity, talent development and individual improvement for personal and organizational health and increased productivity. Her role as coach is to “raise awareness so clients are at conscious choice”.

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