

INCREASE THE POWER OF COACHING BY UNDERSTANDING ITS HISTORY

Bill Duese

The rapid emergence of personal coaching has been accompanied by an influx of thousands of practitioners, almost 300 coach training organizations, and more than 60 different credentialing systems. Not surprisingly very few people associated with this flood of coaches know the history, origin or roots of the field. Yet without an understanding of the foundation upon which coaching stands, it is unlikely that practitioners will be able to respond to the changing client base, ensure the economic survival of their practices, or align themselves with the strengths that have contributed to the effectiveness of coaching.

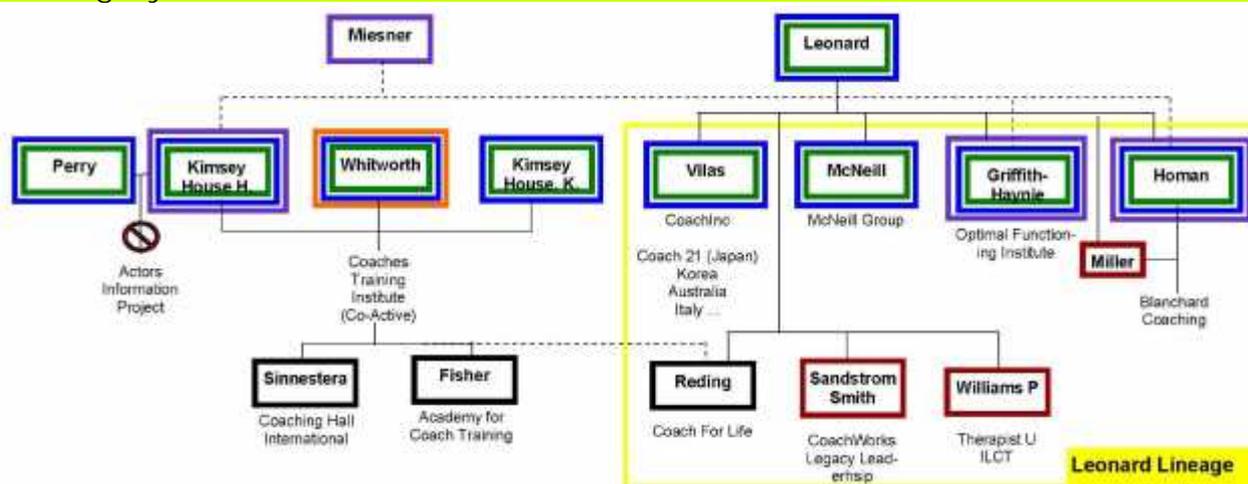
In addition, ignorance of the foundation of coaching can reduce practitioner credibility, prompt dubious claims about the speed and ease of becoming an effective coach, decrease coach resourcefulness to clients, and create competitive rivalries that interfere with public understanding of the value and purpose of coaching.

I am not a historian nor am I trying to be one. I've been around coaching since what I thought was its beginning, and I've had some direct experience with what I had assumed were coaching's founders. However, now that I've read the 693-page doctoral dissertation by Vikki Brock entitled: "Grounded Theory of the Roots and Emergence of Coaching," I've found a validation of some of my personal experience, a new understanding and appreciation of the breadth of the field, and a few surprises.

Thomas Leonard's Influence on the Personal Coaching Process

Dr. Brock's work as well as my own direct knowledge and experience provide the basis for this article on the history of personal coaching. Her dissertation is recent, thorough, academic, and lengthy, and her purpose was to describe the roots and development of coaching. Her discoveries and my personal experiences and knowledge converge to show that Thomas Leonard was the principal architect and driving force behind "defining, documenting, codifying training, and popularizing" the coaching process and coaching industry as we know it today. The coaching process that I describe often in the [Coach Connection blog](#) and is used by [The Coach Connection](#) is a direct result of the work of Thomas Leonard (see Figure 1).

The Legacy of Thomas Leonard



From Vikki Brock's dissertation and reproduced in Peer Bulletin 173 with permission.

The Sports Coach Looks Inside

The term coach originated in the sports field somewhere in the late 1880s, and has been a well-known sports profession with many different forms for years. "Even today, the term coaching often produces a mental image of a football or basketball coach, and depending on what the coach actually does, this analogy may or may not be adequate because the head coach is usually a general manager or chief executive officer responsible for running an entire program. The image of the quarterback coach or the

offensive line coach is somewhat more accurate by enabling others to play through teaching." (Brock, page 93)

When W.T. Gallwey wrote his seminal book in 1972 entitled [The Inner Game of Tennis](#), it was, according to many people, the first major transition from the sports coaching model of control and teaching to what Werner Erhard and eventually Thomas Leonard developed and fine-tuned into personal coaching. Dr. Brock further shares that "Gallwey's 1974 inner game approach to sports was based on humanistic and transpersonal psychological principles, where the concept is that the opponent within is more formidable than the one outside." Sir John Whitmore believed that "Gallwey was the first to demonstrate a simple and comprehensive method of coaching that could be readily applied to almost any situation."

Thomas Leonard came on the coaching scene in 1988 from the financial world. Leonard created a life-planning course entitled Life Creates Your Life. Dr. Brock emphasizes his contribution by noting that "Leonard is credited with codifying coaching into a curriculum to teach people how to be a coach and that could be taught globally, taught telephonically, in the early days of coaching." (Brock pg. 313)

Dr. Brock's study provides additional testimony about Leonard from Dave Buck, the current leader of Coachville -- an organization created by Thomas Leonard. Mr. Buck "describes Leonard as a synthesizer working with hundreds, thousands of people to create. But while he was collaborating he also had in his vision, a vision of himself being highly impactful, being a leader, being competitive against other companies doing similar things. He was intensely competitive and intensely collaborative at the same time."

Other people that Dr. Brock interviewed also credit Leonard with popularizing coaching. In addition to codifying coaching, he launched Coach U in about 1993 and the International Coach Federation in 1994. Leonard also started Coachville in about 1999, and he was a behind-the-scenes developer of The Coach Training Institute in 1992. All of these organizations have had a profound affect on the development of coaching as Leonard saw it and even more on the entire coaching world.

Dr. Brock further reports that "Leonard's contribution as a transmitter was codifying, popularizing, and globalizing the discipline of coaching. Leonard's background was in business, specifically finance, where he was working for (Werner) Erhard and doing life planning on the side. Leonard, and others such as (Laura) Whitworth and (John) Whitmore, took some basic ideas and applied their business background to creating an industry that is called coaching."

Thomas Leonard was often described as a "real character with strong beliefs." He wasn't interested in politics, turf, or ownership; he designed the personal coaching process in great detail and wrote about it for all to see. He was a strong believer in giving things away, and was continuously searching for ways to make coaching accessible to the general population.

From my understanding of what Thomas Leonard intended for the field of coaching, he would be disappointed by its exceptional commercial development and the practice of coaches receiving payment to "mentor" other coaches. Thomas saw the development of the coach as learning to maximize his or her own gifts, then passing that gift on to another who, in turn, passed the gifts to the next person.

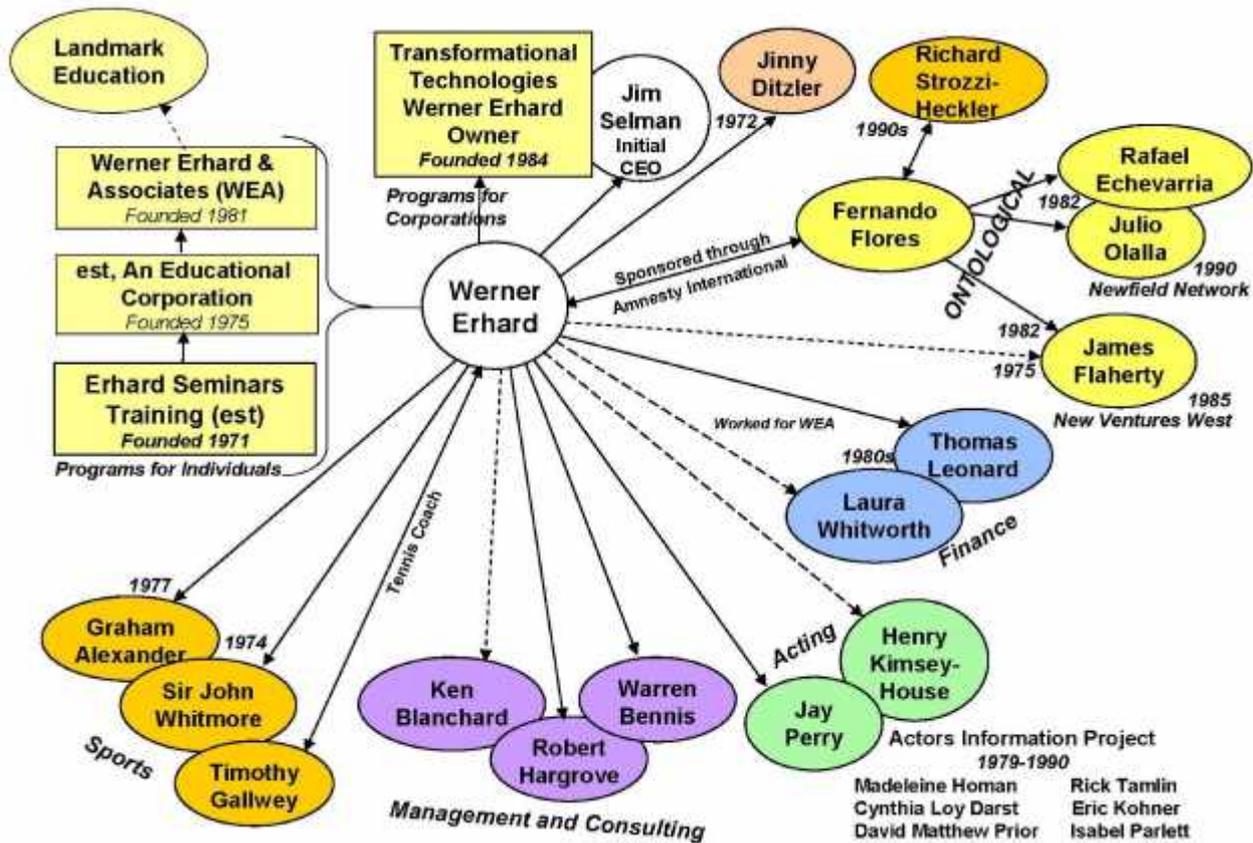
His perspective was echoed in the book by Lewis Hyde called [The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property](#). In this book the author details the evolution of the gift as a way of establishing an emotional bond between people compared to a gift being seen as a "commodity" with a monetary value. The focus in Hyde's study of other cultures and embodied in Leonard's principle was on giving not getting. Thomas Leonard wanted everyone to benefit from coaching.

Life Coaching Versus Personal Coaching

I believe the term "personal coaching" best describes the coaching process, because coaching is very personal. Thomas Leonard experienced this directly from his association with Werner Erhard. Mr. Erhard was the first person to create activities in a large group to specifically break through the barriers and fears that kept people from being personal with each other.

While his techniques were somewhat controversial, he and his colleagues provided an opportunity for his seminar participants to directly experience personal coaching. Erhard did not call this process "personal coaching," but he did intend for the outcome to be highly personal. This was the essential basis of Erhard Seminar Training (EST), and what Thomas Leonard meant by "personal coaching."

Figure 2: The Influence of Werner Erhard



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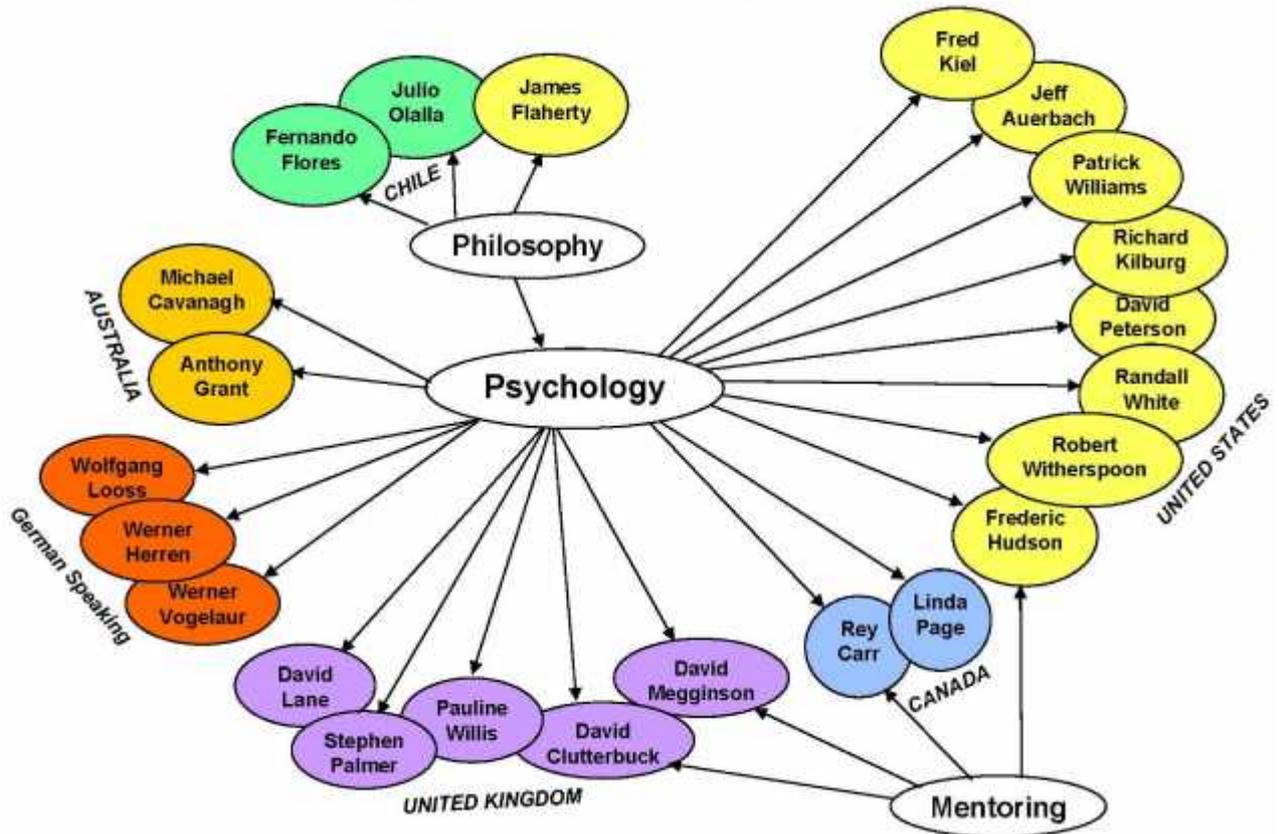
The term "life coaching" is a more recent concoction, and was popularized in early 2000 when Hollywood and TV-writers used it for their "reality" shows. Many coaches in their eagerness to gain public acceptance and credibility attached themselves to this media-created term and started calling themselves life coaches.

Thomas Leonard documented and popularized the new process he called personal coaching to assist people to improve their lives by focusing on the person within. In essence, Thomas and his partners designed, organized, documented, and developed this new process that would fulfill the one human void that none of the other nine major human improvement processes consider addressing and seem ill-designed to or capable of fulfilling.

Leonard's perspective was recently validated by a study conducted by the [Harvard Business Review](#) of 140 leading executive coaches. The analysis of the study results showed that while only three percent of the coaches were hired by companies to attend to issues in the personal lives of executives, over 75 percent of the coaches found themselves assisting executives with personal issues.

Others also recognized the inadequacy of psychology and the various treatment interventions based on psychology to assist people to improve their lives. The chart created by Vikki Brock and reproduced here in Figure 2 illustrates the pioneers in coaching who emerged from the field of psychology, and have contributed greatly to the growth of personal coaching.

The Influence of Psychology on Personal Coaching Pioneers



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Personal Coaching has Grown Rapidly

Thomas Leonard traveled extensively coaching, speaking, and training wherever he could. He captured the imagination of many people to persuade them to become joint pioneers in this new process. The personal coaching industry has grown exponentially in only sixteen short years because of Thomas Leonard's vision, his energy, and more importantly because personal coaching works so well and so quickly to assist people to unravel the mysteries of themselves.

Personal coaching has evolved into a viable and recognized industry because people want to unravel the mysteries of themselves by discovering their own unique core components. Personal coaching accomplishes the exceptional goals it was designed to achieve. I do not believe that many people fully understood the universal ramifications and multiple uses of the personal coaching process. Maybe Thomas did, and that might be why he was such an outspoken advocate of personal coaching before he died in 2003 of natural causes.

One of the many extremely valuable coachable goals of the personal coaching process is to discover and attain your ideal income position. Thanks to Thomas's personal coaching process, and his personally trained coach, Thom Politico, who was my personal coach, I discovered and have been enjoying going to play every day in my own ideal income position for the past eight years as the founder and owner of The Coach Connection.

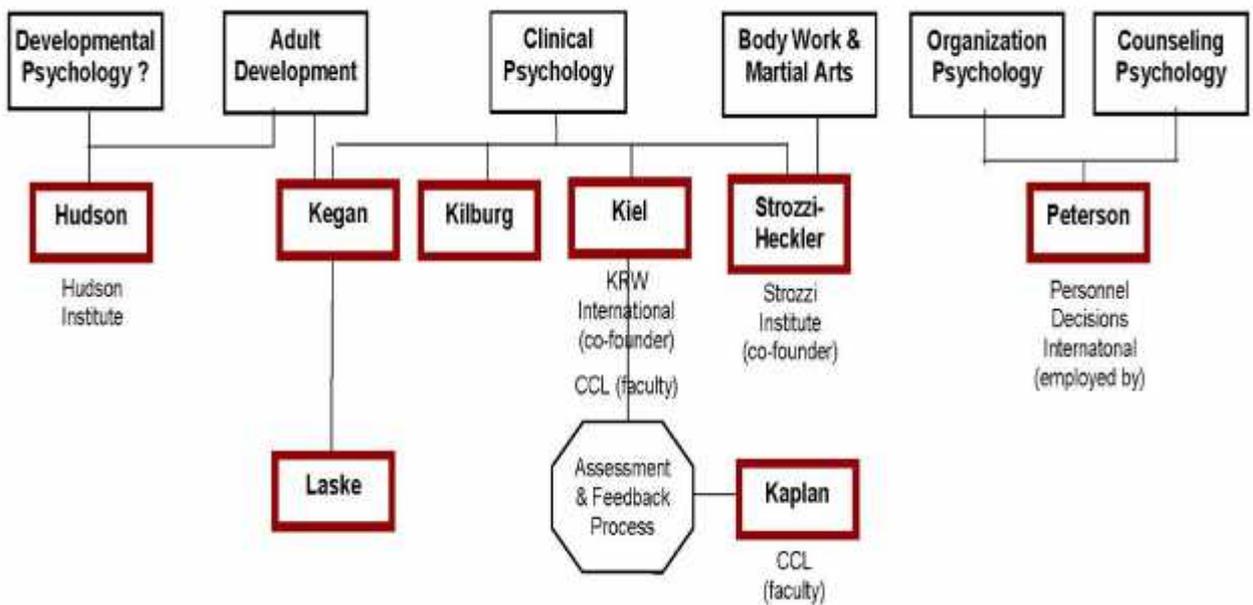
The Coaching Industry Today

Estimates of the number of people calling themselves coaches range between 30,000 to almost 80,000. The upside is that the public has a vast number of coaches to pick from to find the right coach. The challenge is that there are so many different people calling themselves coaches offering different coaching methods, styles, philosophies, ethics, backgrounds, niches, and purposes, that the public has more, not less, difficulty in finding and selecting the best coach.

The number of coach training schools has grown tremendously. According to statistics compiled by Peer Resources there are about 298 coach training schools, the majority of which sprouted up since about 1992. Vikki Brock reports that there are over 17 coaching related associations. These were created since about 1994. Yet, the coaching industry is still in the growing stage. If you consider that each of these coaching schools will produce only 50 people a year who call themselves coaches, that means that over 14,900 new coaches appear on the scene each year.

Anyone today can call himself or herself a coach. There are no rules, regulations, laws, restrictions or enforced codes. Coaches come from all walks of life with many different paths to their coaching status. The coaching community itself is also confused about how to determine what the coaching process is. According to Vikki Brock: "Inside the field there is much divergent thinking of what coaching is and whose approach is best. Outside the field there is even more confusion among clients and the public about what makes up coaching." There are countless different coaching processes, programs, structures, and philosophies, many of which stem from the disciplines illustrated in Figure 4.

The Influence of Other Disciplines on the Coaching Field



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Dr. Brock further states: "There are many definitions of coaching, some of which contradict each other based on an influence by practitioner backgrounds, theories, and models." And she further clarifies that "Most definitions assume an absence of serious mental health problems in the client and that coaching's purpose is to affect some kind of change using similar knowledge, skills, and techniques."

Personal coaching is not a process I invented, or take credit for. I would like to, but that would be wrong. Thomas Leonard and his many followers and compatriots deserve all of the credit. In fact, this coaching process found me. I was not even smart enough to seek it. There have been many different forms of coaching that grew out of this process, and there will undoubtedly be others. But I believe that since the coaching process described by Thomas has proven to me to work so well, and had worked so well for many others before I found it, that it is worth recommending.

The incredible thing about the coaching process popularized by Thomas is that it has historical roots and is widely accepted, but rarely described consistently, and even less widely understood from the client's point of view. Yet, it is so powerful and so remarkable that it has fostered a whole new way of thinking and an ever-growing industry.

My purpose in writing this article is to educate anyone who will listen about this personal coaching process so that they too will understand what it is all about from their own perspective. I'm convinced that this will help people recognize, understand, and take advantage of this remarkable human improvement process to achieve their chosen remarkable coaching goals including but not limited to discovering and obtaining their ideal income position.

Vikki Brock Reacts to this Article

(Editor's Note: Bill Dueease's summary of Vikki Brock's doctoral dissertation, prompted us to ask Vikki for her reaction. Here is what she had to say:

What a great history of personal coaching. Thank you, Bill, for the reference to my dissertation, which encompassed three years of research and over 170 interviews of global coaching influencers. When looking at the roots of coaching, what I found is that coaching was developing globally during the late 1970s and early 1980s, with the key roots being sports, leadership, psychology, and the personal development movement. The first coaching books were written about coaching by managers in business to improve employee performance.

The Werner Erhard link is very strong among the first coaches - Jinny Ditzler, on staff with est from 1974 to 1980, started the first life coach training in 1981 in the U.K. Sir John Whitmore brought Werner Erhard to the U.K. in 1974 and Tim Gallwey's Inner Game process to the U.K. in 1979. Tim Gallwey was actually Werner Erhard's tennis coach for a time. Ken Blanchard and Peter Senge were personal friends with Werner Erhard. And Thomas Leonard worked in the accounting department for Werner Erhard Associates, and hired Laura Whitworth to work there also.

As for Thomas Leonard having a hand in the development of The Coaches Training Institute (CTI), while it is true that Laura Whitworth attended his life planning courses and Thomas gave his materials to Laura and Henry Kimsey House, they did not use them for the co-active coaching model that is the basis for CTI's programs. I was fortunate to be able to interview Laura several times before she died in February 2007. What is fact is that Werner Erhard popularized personal growth and Thomas Leonard popularized coaching - both were masterful synthesizers.

If the size of the dissertation is daunting, my very readable book on the history of coaching will be published by mid-2009. Till then, the 693-page document (including appendices and references), is available at [The Foundation of Coaching's Research Repository](#).

(Vikki G. Brock, Ph.D., EMBA is a Master Certified Coach, Certified Executive Coach, and Professional Mentor Coach. She can be contacted by phone: +1 805-676-4200 or by email: coach@vikkibrock.com or through her website: www.vikkibrock.com.)



About the Author

Bill Dueease is the co-founder of [The Coach Connection](#), the number one rated service for matching coaches with clients, and ranked by Google as the top information source for life coaching for the last two years. Previously, Bill was a chairperson with the [International Coach Federation](#), and a highly successful petroleum industry engineer and entrepreneur. Bill provides a newsletter, Connecting for Results, and a blog on coaching.

The Coach Connection provides a number of free coaching articles. Bill can be reached toll-free in the US or Canada at (800) 887-7214 or from other locations (239) 415-1777 or by email at bill@findyourcoach.com. This article has been adapted from the Coach Connection blog, and is reproduced here with permission of the author.

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