

choice

the magazine of professional coaching

**Breaking
the Rules!**

Is it time
for the
coaching
paradigm
to expand?

Shattering
the Myths

A Roadmap for
Rule Breaking

Is it Time to
Change Course?

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Breaking the Rules!

We all do it. It's that secret conversation where we admit to a colleague that we also give clients advice, regularly teach or train them, or even tell our own stories. How do we manage the balance between standard descriptions of coaching and what our clients are asking us for? How does an understanding of the brain help us expand what we do as coaches? How are we limiting ourselves and not offering everything we have when we refrain from these things? Why are we afraid to challenge the convention that is only 20 years old? Join us as we explore expanding the coaching paradigm.



Let's Break the Rules

The future of coaching and human development



By Ann Betz, CPCCC, PCC, CNTC

I love coaching. I've been a coach for over 15 years and have seen countless transformations in that time (not the least of which is my own). I've taught coaching for a large coach training organization and now teach advanced coaches the intricacies of neuroscience and consciousness. I believe in coaching down to my toes.

And yet, one day in 2015, as my business partner and I were sitting on a flight to Minneapolis and musing about what was next for us, she asked me, "If you were going to create a beginning coaching program of your own, what would you create?" and I found myself responding without thinking, "I wouldn't create a *coaching* program."

"Why not?" she asked me, both curious and a little aghast. (And honestly, I had even surprised myself with the comment.)

So I thought about why this had popped out of my mouth, and realized it was because, for me, the arc of coaching – as currently defined and understood – was coming to an end.

How did I know this? From innumerable conversations and observations of students and colleagues who were actively frustrated by, and often breaking, the rules we are supposed to follow. And when enough people break the rules, doesn't that mean the rules may be out of touch and out of date? Especially if by breaking the rules they are achieving powerful, transformative results?

Facilitating human growth is an ever-evolving profession, with each new innovation building on the last, often seeming radical and edgy from the perspective of the existing paradigm. Coaching as we know it in 2017 is an evolution from many streams of influence, but not the be-all and end-all of human development. In fact, believing that anything in this arena is the final and ultimate word smacks of hubris. All we can ever say is this is what we know now. And my partner and I have come to believe that it is time for the next evolution, moving us to a broader and more inclusive understanding of the many ways we need to break the rules of classic coaching in order to provide the best possible human development space and conversation for our clients.

And yet, it's important to acknowledge where the rules came from, and why they have been deemed important up until now.

The Critical Premise of Coaching

One of the most magical things I learned early on in coaching is the principle that people are naturally creative, resourceful, and whole. This profoundly respectful way of working with people tends to help them find the true, deep, resonant answers that were always and ever inside themselves.

Contrast this with traditional consulting, mentoring or advising, where the client is told what they "should" do based on the experience – and sometimes the bias – of the consultant/advisor. Standing on this premise, as coaches, we're really not "supposed" to do these things:

1. Give advice. We know from both experience and neuroscience that being *told* has a vastly different impact on the brain than being *asked*. One tends to either shut us down – or at a minimum impair true creativity – and the other opens us up and even may catalyze the creation of new neural networks.
2. Reference our own personal experience. Coaching is about the client, not the coach. For some people, this may be the only place in their lives they have 30-60 minutes to simply talk about themselves and be deeply heard. And so, we've learned to refrain from telling our own stories or chiming in with "Me too!"

The "Rules"

As coaches, are we breaking the rules if we:

1. Give our clients advice
2. Tell stories/provide examples from our own lives
3. Teach our clients/share our own expertise
4. Tell our clients what to do
5. Use non-coaching tools (such as Tarot, astrology, numerology, dream interpretation, etc.)

Note: In this article, I address the conditions needed to break the rules for the first three points, but our belief is that #4 and #5 are also possible and useful when similar conditions are in place.

3. Teach or share our own expertise. Again, unlike consulting or mentoring where we need experience and expertise in what the client is facing, traditional coaching (with its focus on helping the client find the answers within) relies more on curiosity than knowledge.

The Future of Human Development

But what about when you *are* an expert? What about when you *know* some things that might help, about leadership, marketing, spiritual development, or in my case, neuroscience? What about when you *have* some sound, non-biased advice? Or when you have a personal story that could help provide a new perspective?

Coaching says just keep asking the client; it's not your job to teach, advise, or tell stories. So coaches often find themselves either holding back what they may legitimately have to offer or awkwardly saying, "well, let me take my coach hat off for a minute ..."

Except that there are more and more masterful coaches – or, as we would now say, masterful human developers – who have figured out how to seamlessly do it all, staying in co-creative relationship and keeping their clients' brains in a state of powerful openness and receptivity, even while offering an expanded range of input. This, we believe, is the future of human development, as well as the future of coaching.

Not What, but How

The key can be found not in the *what*, but rather in the *how*. It's my personal belief that we moved away from things like advice, stories and teaching not because they are intrinsically bad or wrong, but because people didn't know how to implement them effectively. And done badly, any of the three can easily have a negative impact.

We've been exploring the necessary conditions for expanding

Relationship, Respect & Restraint

The 3 Rs in practice

Think about a time when someone gave you advice and one or more of the following happened:

- They were not in relationship with you. They either didn't really know you or they didn't take the time to check in and get connected.
- They either didn't seem to respect you and/or you did not respect them in terms of the advice they were offering (e.g. the single aunt who gives advice about parenting).
- They showed no restraint. You simply mentioned something and they jumped right in without finding out if you wanted advice or what sort of advice would be helpful.

When this happened, how did you feel? Did you take the advice? (In our experience, most people don't.)

into advice, stories and teaching, and have concluded that they are possible to the degree that the brain is in a "towards" state; that is, open, flexible, non-defensive and positively cued to the other person. We call this Activation, and have found that a) the tools of professional coaching do a fabulous job of creating this condition, and b) practicing what we call the Critical Rs will put the person in a state where advice, stories and teaching are welcomed and useful.

The Critical Rs

We have found that there are three Rs of advising, which we call the Critical Rs: Relationship, Respect and Restraint.

Relationship. In the context of human development, we see this as being connected to the other person; investing time and interest beyond the topic/issue to understand the broader context of the other person's life; and ensuring that the other person understands that you have their best interests at heart.

Respect. You respect the other person's inherent creativity and resourcefulness *and* establish credibility that a) you have useful advice to give and b) advice is not being offered to bolster your own ego.

Restraint. You make sure the other person's brain is in a receptive mode, which occurs through a process of activation when you listen, are curious, demonstrate warmth and openness, and simply wait to jump in until you know more about what is really going on and what the other person wants and needs.

When it comes to teaching and storytelling, the first three

Rs remain critical, while two additional Rs also become relevant. The first is the idea of Just Right. In this case, you communicate stories and learning points by providing enough information to make sense without so much that it overwhelms and/or bores the other person.

The second is Relevancy. This means making sure all of the information and stories shared connect directly to the key issue the other person is sharing, and work to involve the other person while telling stories or teaching critical points.

Where Does this Leave us in 2017?

We are facing a critical juncture in coaching. More organizations are discovering the power of both using professional coaches and training their managers and leaders in coaching skills. But coaching in this space needs to be integrated with the things we've been exploring in this article.

Also, we have met many coaches, leaders, consultants, counselors and therapists who, like us, are feeling the constraints of our current systems, and are longing for a new conversation in the arena of human awareness. We don't want to throw away or reject the brilliance of coaching, but



It is time for the next evolution, moving us to a broader and more inclusive understanding of the many ways we need to break the rules of classic coaching.

we do want to dance out far beyond the limits and expectations of existing models, free to explore much more widely the powerful and paradoxical nature of growth and development. Thus by breaking the rules, we are in essence creating a new set of rules and guidelines for best practices.

As I mentioned at the beginning, human development has always been an ever-emergent field, building on what has been discovered, even as new possibilities come into being. It's time for the next innovation.

NOTES:

Coaching With Compassion: Inspiring Health, Well-Being, and Development in Organizations, Richard E. Boyatzis, Melvin L. Smith, 'Alim J. Beveridge. SAGE Journals, 2012