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# choice

the magazine of professional coaching

## Impact!

How coaching  
is making a  
difference

Coaching for  
Rapid Impact

Gardening  
for Growth

Impacts from  
Coaching  
TED Fellows

# IMPACT!

This informative issue looks at where and how coaching is making a difference. How are we measuring impact? What is the return on investment (ROI) of coaching? How can we market the value of coaching to individuals and organizations? We explore these questions and examine some case studies showing the benefits and impact of coaching in the real world.



# Coaching Life

How coaching changes the coach



By Ann Betz, PCC, CPCS, CNTC

**M**y son called me from college the other day. He wanted to talk about his sophomore year schedule, and we spent a good hour and a half looking at his options, discussing whether he should pursue a double major, the pros and cons of doing a junior year abroad, which professors he had grown to respect, and more. In the course of the conversation, he had an ‘aha’ moment where he realized that he is happiest when he is academically challenged in a subject that intrigues him.

When we were saying goodbye, he said “Thanks, mom. It really helps to have someone to talk this through with. And you know, I never saw before that I really prefer working hard over just having fun. That was very useful.” High praise from him, and a peak mom moment indeed!



## It's not something we talk about a lot in the coaching world, but being a coach changes you, and generally for the better.

And I have coaching to thank for it.

I've been a coach since my son was four years old. When I first started out, I wanted to coach *everyone*. It felt like having a shiny new magic wand and (like many beginning coaches) I drove enough people crazy ("stop *coaching* me!") that I learned not to officially "coach" unless I had a clear agreement and designed alliance. But still, the more I coached my clients, the more *coachlike* I became, even when off-duty. In the process, I also became a better daughter, sister, friend, partner and mom. In effect, you could say I engage in a fair amount of stealth coaching by using the skills and tools of my profession in day-to-day life, because frankly, I don't know any other way to be.

It's not something we talk about a lot in the coaching world, but being a coach changes you, and generally for the better. From simply learning skills and tools for more effective communication, to possibly even rewiring our own brains, the benefits and rewards of being a coach are so much more than financial or even the satisfaction of knowing we made a difference in our client's lives.

Below are a few of the lessons of coaching, and how they can show up in day-to-day life:

### 1. See the best in everyone

A common view in coaching – and an International Coach Federation (ICF)

core competency – is to see the client as fully able and capable. I trained at the Coaches Training Institute (CTI), and this is one of the cornerstones of the Co-Active model. As we call it: "people are naturally creative, resourceful and whole." When we do this in a coaching relationship, we help the client come to their own realizations and find their own answers.

In our daily lives, this is actually a radical way of seeing people. In most cultures we are generally taught that people are flawed, sinful and damaged, in need of fixing or changing. We are trained to spot the problem and solve it. At best, this leads to a desire to be overly helpful and can lead to taking on other people's problems as our own; at worst, it can lead to damaging judgment, leaving people feeling they can never measure up or be good enough to fit in.

For many (hopefully most) of us as coaches, the idea that people are whole and capable becomes a fundamental view of *all* people, not just those we are being paid to coach, and thus we begin to see our roles as parents, siblings, managers, etc. vastly differently. We look for the resourcefulness within the people in our lives, and take ourselves off the hook for fixing or solving the problems around us. (It's important to note that we do this while remaining loving, connected, concerned and supportive.)

### 2. don't Judge

Part of the ethic of our profession is to remain as non-judgmental and non-attached as possible. People tell us the most intimate and amazing things, often things they have never discussed with anyone. Yes, they do this partially because we hold confidentiality as sacred in the coaching relationship, but it's also because we are trained to be curious and non-judgmental.

My ex-husband was a criminal defense attorney, and he was taught that in cross-examination, you never ask a question you already know the answer to. In coaching, it's the opposite. We're trained to focus on ques-

**Just like lifting weights in the gym helps us build arm strength, listening to our clients all day builds our capacity to hear.**

tions we don't know the answer to – and the best questions are often ones the client doesn't know the answer to, either!

True curiosity, by its very nature, is non-judgmental, and by practicing this as coaches, we bring it more and more to everyone around us. As a coach for over 14 years, I have learned that it's hard to be human sometimes. We've all screwed up, and we're all doing the best we can given

where we are. My job isn't to judge or condemn, but to be curious so that my client can more fully understand themselves.

The people in our lives can sense that we're going to listen to them, if not completely without judgment (which is certainly much harder when you're involved in the situation yourself), then with a fair amount less than the rest of the world. And thus, we are sought-after confidants, because very few people honestly resonate with being judged even though this is how much of the world interacts.

### 3. Listen & Pay attention

As coaches, we are trained – perhaps above everything else – to really *listen*. Not just to wait our turn to talk, but to actually pay attention to what the other person is both saying and not saying. (Fran Leibowitz once famously said, “The opposite of talking isn't listening. The opposite of talking is waiting.”)

Coaching requires a heightened commitment to being present with our clients, tuning our attention to subtle changes in their tone or body language. Everything the client says or does, and every way they say or do it, is critical information. A slight flatness in their hello may contribute to shaping the direction of the entire session. Thus, it's critical that we develop our capacity to listen on many levels at once.

This sort of listening isn't something we can or would want to shut off after our workday is done. It's a way of being that becomes stronger and more dominant the more we practice. Just like lifting weights in the gym helps us build arm strength, listening to our clients all day builds our capacity to hear. And the more we can hear the subtle undertones

in the answer to, “How are you?” the more present we can be with our friends, family, and colleagues.

### The Coach's brain

All of the practice of the skills mentioned above (and many more as well) can't help but have an impact on our very being. We know that the brain has the capacity to change through a process called neuroplasticity, which, simply put, says that the more we practice something, the more neural connections associated with this thing are formed in our brain, making subsequent attempts easier and more fluid. Coaching is a whole set of positive communication

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**The idea that people are whole and capable becomes a fundamental view of all people, not just those we are being paid to coach.**

skills, formed through training and (ideally) supervision, and honed in active practice.

These skills become more available the more we practice them, and at some point can even become the dominant neural pathways in our brains. This means that even if you grew up with less than great communication in your family, and/or have a bit of a default to wanting to fix

people, lots of judgment, or not truly listening, using your coaching skills helps your brain become wired in more positive ways.

We also know that mindfulness is one of the most powerfully beneficial things we can do for our brains. The research on long-term meditators shows amazing changes to the brain's very structure, from creating a thicker corpus callosum (the connective “white matter” between our right and left hemisphere) to increasing the size of areas associated with both compassion and positivity.

I mention this because the definition of mindfulness is actually quite broad. It doesn't mean only sitting in Zen meditation, but includes any time we are actually present, aware, and paying attention in the moment. I know for myself that I can't coach *unless* I am fully present. When my mind wanders, I lose track of what my client is saying, not to mention what they are not saying and where their energy is. Thus, I have trained myself to stay very present in a coaching session, and this also spills over to day-to-day life. When I talk to people, I am present with them.

We don't have the brain scan research (yet) but I think it's possible that this practice of being right here, now, in each moment fully *with* our clients might have similar impact in our brain as meditation. It would certainly be an interesting research study!

### The impact of Coaching

Coaching is much more than a fun career; it gives us access to, and practice with, powerful communication skills and possibly even rewires our brains. The skills and tools of coaching provide a road map to being more effective as a leader, parent, sibling, friend, manager and human being. •