

Inspirational Coaching

Introduction

Is **Inspirational** Coaching just a fancy term in the proliferation of Coaching which is sweeping the world? Or is it a specific approach which has elements uniquely different from other forms of Coaching? I don't know. So ~ this paper is presented as a work in progress and intended to stimulate further discussion around Coaching and its contribution to our future.

I doubt whether we have exclusive global use of the words 'Inspirational Coaching', but let me start off by explaining how we came to use the term in the first place.

When we first worked as Coaches, people would tell us that the experience of being coached had been an 'inspiration' to them. To honour these early clients, we coined the phrase 'inspirational coaching' and created a company of that name.

Initially, the coaching process we used, called achievement coaching, was adopted from other sources. We started by using many of the essential and now well-known coaching tools from the work of people such as Paul Kalinaukas and John Whitmore.

Three years on I am just beginning to understand the power of affirmation, that is stating and verbalising something and having it come true. Now I realise that as soon as we chose the term 'inspirational coaching', we created a future reality for ourselves and the process we were to develop. Today, our coaching process, beliefs and philosophies are based on what we have so far come to understand about 'inspiration'.

As I remind myself of the dictionary definitions of 'inspiration', I realise that our coaching work invokes the full context of the word in all its meanings.

In the Collins Dictionary, I found the following meanings for 'inspire':

<p><i>“To exert a stimulating or beneficial effect upon, animate or invigorate”</i></p>	<p>On one level coaching is <i>inspirational</i> just because it feels good.</p>
<p><i>“To arouse (with a particular emotion or to a particular action)”</i></p>	<p>On this level coaching is <i>inspirational</i> because it does surface emotions and because it moves people to action.</p>
<p><i>“To prompt, instigate or give rise to...”</i></p>	<p>Coaching on this level is <i>inspirational</i> because it acts as a catalyst to something else like learning or change.</p>
<p><i>“To guide or arouse by divine influence or inspiration”</i></p>	<p>At this level Coaching is <i>inspirational</i> because often the Coach finds questions or ways of doing things which come from their intuition but which you trust are the right thing for the client ~ as you are being guided to do so from somewhere.</p>
<p><i>“to breathe into or upon”</i></p>	<p>Ultimately, Coaching is <i>inspirational</i> because it can be seen to breathe new life into people, organisations and the way things happen</p>

Inspirational Coaching can impact a client at one or all of these levels. Somehow it creates an environment which can take the client beyond their current ways of learning, knowing or being. A true Inspirational Coach is someone who can create, hold and trust this environment for his or her client.

The Oxford Dictionary definitions of ‘inspiration’, also seem to encompass our experiences as Inspirational Coaches:

“ Inspiration = A supposed creative force or influence on poets, artists, musicians, etc”.

Inspirational Coaching extends this force to other professions across the corporate world. Why after all should such a

creative force or influence be the exclusive domain of the Arts world? The corporate world is crying out for people to unleash exactly the type of brilliance and creativity it takes to create great works of art. As Inspirational Coaches, we use music, painting and creative writing within the coaching experience to invoke the inspirational force we believe lies within each person.

“ Inspiration = A sudden brilliant, creative or timely idea “

This definition is simple and current. In a corporate world, desperate for brilliance and creativity, Coaching creates the time and the space for new ideas to come to the fore. A good Inspirational Coach will help the client convert ideas to action. As Inspirational Coaches we might describe this form of *inspiration* as the ‘lightbulb’ moment ~ that moment when we see someone’s face light up, their shoulders lift, their smile radiate with the excitement of having reached a point of learning, realisation, or action that they feel will make a difference. By the above dictionary definition such moments **are** inspiration in action.

There are many definitions of Coaching itself. As an emerging and growing field, such definitions will continue to flourish

and grow. For the purposes of this paper I would like to propose that we open our minds beyond the basic concept that coaching is:

“unlocking a person’s potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them”

(Coaching for Performance – John Whitmore)

Rather, I would invite you to consider that ‘Inspirational Coaching’ takes us beyond our current levels of reality, to explore new ways of being, to find our true selves and to create new ways of living for the future and that, yes, there **is** a force or influence involved in the process, beyond what we currently know or can logically describe. Thank you for joining me in exploring these concepts further.

INSPIRATIONAL COACHING – THE PROCESS

Inspirational Coaching is based on the belief that within each person lies an inner strength, an inner core that we don’t access or use to it’s full potential ~ in fact, we don’t even know what it’s full potential may be.

That core is who we really are. It's probably simple and uncomplicated, but our life experiences and our programming from that experience has made it complicated to find. We have lost the ability to connect to and work from the strength that sits within us.

I heard Oriah Mountain Dreamer, author of 'The Invitation' sum this up in a recent conference speech. She said:

'Why do I try so hard **NOT** to be the person I **really** am?'

Somewhere along our life's path we forget who we really are and we spend our lives trying to be something which we think is expected of us ~ whether by our parents, our siblings, our friends, our teachers, our employers, our communities, our governments, our society ~ whoever. So long as we are trying to be what everyone else seeks of us, we are not being our true selves.

The fundamental belief of an Inspirational Coach is not only that people have potential within them beyond what they realise, but that when you access that inner core it brings you a strength, peace, focus, energy (whatever we want to call it) to make choices about how you live your life. If we can learn to really be true

to our inner self, we can see the world as a place where we have made choices to be or not to be a certain way. Acknowledging those choices brings us to a place of acceptance on how life is, and how we show up in it.

No one other than ourselves has responsibility for the choices we make. My Coach summed this up beautifully by equipping me with the following daily mantra:

"I am 100% responsible for what I have or don't have in my life at this moment"

This is a wonderful distinction which brings me to a place of self-awareness, responsibility and acceptance, from which I can make further choices. If I want anything ~ anything at all ~ to be different in my life I have to make another choice on how I perceive, interpret, experience or respond to something (including myself).

In order to make another choice I have to somehow access my inner core, my inner strength. I have to truly listen to it and trust it. From this place of inner choice I free myself from judgement ~ there is no right or wrong ~ only a choice I've made for which I'll open a path to new choices.

In order to access this choice, I have to first know what patterns I use to see the world. My perceptions, beliefs, values, judgements.

This is where an Inspirational Coach comes in ~ by helping me listen to myself in order to identify these patterns. When I start to identify my patterns, my Coach helps me acknowledge them by reflecting them back to me in a safe and non-judgemental environment. When I can acknowledge my patterns, I am on the path to accepting them and can start to make a choice on whether to stay with them or to move through them. Again my Coach helps me to explore how I might do this.

With the aid of my Coach I can start to explore what other choices I might make – how else might I choose to see the world, how else might I choose to show up or respond to the world? What else might I choose to experience in the world in this moment?

Once I have opened up new ways of seeing the world, my Coach again helps me to experiment or practice with these new possibilities. By focussing on what the future might be like for each choice I could make , I can start to build a picture

and really feel or almost experience what that future might be like.

As I experience a possible future, I can start to commit to creating that future ~ by making choices and finding the inner strength to implement these.

From this point my Coach helps me practise new ways of interpreting/accepting/judging/perceiving/responding to and behaving in the world around me.

As I start to make different choices on how I relate to the world around me, so I impact on how others see the world. If they experience me as an angry person, then I create anger in and around them as well. If they experience me as a calm person, they experience calm in and around themselves.

In this way, I create a different world. I realise, that what I thought was the world before has already changed. If I had not opened myself up to new choices, I might have continued to believe the world could only be as I previously created it.

Without an Inspirational Coach, I believe I would not have been able to go beyond my current experience or interpretation of the world. Through Coaching, what I

begin to see is that there is a world beyond what I know. My Coach, is like an extension of myself:

- ☯ It's like I have another pair of eyes to see myself with.
- ☯ It's like I have another pair of ears to listen to and hear myself – not only the surface stuff but the stuff within me as well.
- ☯ It's like I have another voice which can help me express things I might not otherwise express, in language I didn't even know I could use.
- ☯ It's like I have a part of my mind that I don't normally use – that is opened up to new ideas and possibilities.
- ☯ It's maybe even like I have a part of my core ~ my spirit, my soul ~ which allows me to feel, experience, understand things I normally keep hidden.
- ☯ It's like I access an inner direction to explore pathways I have not explored before.
- ☯ It's like another part of my engine which gives me extra power, energy,

and clarity to move towards a future I know I can chose.

My Coach, therefore, provides the inspiration to take me on a journey of discovery and renewal. It's a continual journey, like a spiral which I constantly travel in, taking me to deeper levels of knowing and to higher levels of possibility.

With hindsight I can see why our early clients called our coaching experiences an 'inspiration'. We helped them become more aware, helped them accept their current reality, helped them make choices and helped them renew themselves. These are the four key steps in the process of Inspirational Coaching.

This is our first attempt to describe these steps. We know they are not linear and that the journey can be started from any point. We also know that the journey is ongoing, that the further you travel it, the more you discover and the more possibilities open up, so you are likely to want to continue to explore it.

The four steps can be summarised as:

Awareness:

My Inspirational Coach helps me turn up the volume, increase my awareness of my current reality and how I choose to show up in the world. I become more aware of how I perceive things/people, respond to things/people, judge things/people, and make assumptions about things/people, experience things/people.

Acceptance:

Having increased my awareness, I identify what I am prepared to accept about myself and how I show up in the world. My Coach will help me to widen my boundaries of acceptance, to not be judgmental of myself or of others, to accept different ways of seeing things and to identify what helps or stops me from accepting certain things.

Choice:

When I reach a state of acceptance, I can start to explore the choices or possibilities for creating a different world for others and myself. My Coach will challenge me to think beyond what I currently know is possible, to create new opportunities for creating my world, to

overcome the blockages or fears which might normally stop me and to find the courage to make new choices. My Coach becomes a filter to help me really acknowledge and sharpen up on my choices, how I perceive them, and what level of belief or commitment they carry for me. When I make a choice my Coach will help me explore my commitment and turn this into an action plan by using a well known coaching process, such as the GROW model.

Renewal

By making a choice and turning it into a commitment to action, I feel renewed in that specific part of my life. I have reached a point where I am going to do/experience/perceive/feel/respond differently to something. This can apply to small immediate changes in my life or greater, longer-term changes.

But the work of my Inspirational Coach does not end here. A good Coach will help me integrate this renewal process into other situations or circumstances so that I can adopt a new pattern in how I respond to the world. My Coach will ensure that I reflect on the learning that has taken place, celebrate my ability to change/learn and further strengthen my

ability to use and implement this new choice again.

INSPIRATIONAL COACHING – THE COACH'S PURPOSE

Whether Coaching is an inspirational experience or not depends on the beliefs, values and guiding principles of the Inspirational Coach him or herself. This is what distinguishes what is a way of life for a true Inspirational Coach, from those who see Coaching as merely another tool in their management or leadership toolkit.

An Inspirational Coach will be on their own journey of discovery, will be open to new forms of learning and will be exploring their own sense of purpose and sources of inspiration. Only from this type of learning journey can an Inspirational Coach, truly serve as an inspiration to others.

An Inspirational Coach will be travelling constantly on the spiral of Awareness, Acceptance, Choice and Renewal and by virtue of doing so, will be able to guide and serve others on their journey.

This brings an additional level to the spiral whereby the Inspirational Coach himself or herself becomes an integral

part of the spiral. Each time you Coach someone or a group, you hold high levels of your own self-awareness, you challenge yourself on what you are accepting or not accepting, you make choices about how you respond, experience and show up with your clients and at the end of an inspirational coaching session you inevitably feel some level of renewal.

On another level, you realise that perhaps you become inspiration in its highest context i.e. guiding or arousing by divine influence. Have you as a Coach ever experienced that at times you **are** an instrument of that divine influence?

For example, there are times when I have coached different people within a period of days and found that the same theme will emerge in their very separate coaching sessions. I have often wondered why this should be so. As yet I have no real conclusions on whether this happens because I am holding a particular theme in my mind or whether there is a reason beyond my current knowing for that message being part of each separate coaching session ~ as if it is the theme of the week for different people to tune into!!

There are also the times when I am driving home from a Coaching session and the lightbulb goes on in my own head! I realise that the very theme on which I was coaching someone, has a message for me as well. An insight or a learning that I had been missing. At such times I wonder who the coaching session is really for and marvel at how it can serve both me and my client at the same time.

These experiences lead me to believe that there is some greater force or influence involved and that we are all connected in some way. My mind does not currently have the ability to fully articulate, understand or express this. However, I have made a choice to stay open to these possibilities and as I choose to stay open, I find that I create the space for new learning. Gradually things come to take on new meanings and new perspectives for me ~ which of course brings me full circle to the realisation that this is what I am helping my clients to do as well.

Only three years ago I would not have been open to such possibilities. Today I find myself sitting comfortably with them, exploring them, bringing them into conversations in all different ways,

reading books about them and attending conferences and seminars to learn more.

Another key element of inspirational coaching, which I am continually learning about is that of 'Awareness'. I looked that up in the dictionary as well and found that the first definition of 'Aware' in the Oxford Dictionary is 'conscious'.

I realise there is a link between Inspirational Coaching and the greater universal shifts in consciousness that I have been reading about.

If we accept that there is currently a universal shift in consciousness taking place, then each time one individual becomes more aware (or conscious) of something in themselves, in their energy, in their way of being, then that moment is contributing to the over universal shifts. Especially if we know that by one person making a choice to show up differently in the world, it impacts and helps shifts take place in others.

In the limited and very elementary studying I have done so far on universal consciousness, I learn that one way to describe a shift in consciousness is to say that our vibrational energy changes. I am just starting to grasp that we currently exist on one vibrational energy plane and

that other planes are accessible to us ~ that we are really all energy ~ a concept which stretches me, although I explore it with regular Reiki sessions.

Anyway the point here is that if shifts in consciousness are about changes in vibrational energy, then coaching on an inspirational level works directly on the vibrational energy field. Coaching **is** listening, listening happens because sound vibrates and is picked up by our ear. So the more Coaching takes place from a place of true and improved listening, the more we work on and use vibrational energy and ultimately help change these vibrational fields around us, thereby changing our level of consciousness.

This gives me a clear way to describe the difference between Coaching and other forms of advice, training or perhaps mentoring. And also a context for the key shift that needs to take place in our leadership style. Inspirational Coaching is about listening...not just about doing it, but about being it....not feeling you need to talk, to speak, to espouse about your own experience or expertise...and the quicker current managers and leaders really understand that, the quicker they will start to shift their own energy fields and those of the people around them.

If I stretch my thinking a little further and accept that not only are we all made up of energy, but that we are all the **same** energy, I come to know that inspiration is really about how my energy impacts on/affects, exemplifies a way of being to others. As an Inspirational Coach I therefore assume a responsibility to serve others by being a role model of positive energy and vibration in the world, such that others can feel and experience this shift to new perspectives, learning and knowing.

Perhaps in this context, Inspirational Coaching is very distinct from the general gamut of coaching which is sweeping the world. I suspect we have to continue our journeys of learning and discovery to find out if this is the case.

Aileen Gibb and Paddy O'Sullivan
IC International
Fyvie, Scotland
agibb@ic.premiernet.co.uk
www.destinationcoach.com

