CHAPTER ONE

What Exactly Is Coaching?

“An unexamined life is not worth living.”
—Socrates

AN INTERNAL CONVEYANCE

INTERNATIONAL COACHING FEDERATION (ICF) defines coaching as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.”¹

It is believed that the word “coach” was first used in the 1500s to refer to a particular kind of carriage (like a stagecoach).² It is traced to the Hungarian word kocsi meaning “carriage” after the village where it was first made.³ Consequently, “the root meaning of the verb ‘to coach’ was to convey a valuable person from where he or she was to where he or she wanted to be.”⁴ Much of coaching still involves this conveying of a client from place A to B. However, in coaching, the conveyance occurs first and foremost internally.

Coaching has its roots in positive psychology. However, it is completely distinct from clinical psychology. Therapy is a medical model based

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¹www.coachfederation.org
⁴Brock, Sourcebook of Coaching History.
on the paradigm of pathology—i.e., diagnosing, treating, and curing a dysfunction, a phobia, a disorder, an imbalance, a trauma, etc. Coaching, by contrast, has its genesis in the human potential movement. It is a “wellness” model that is interested in self-actualization. It is not about fixing or solving what is “wrong” with the client. In fact, coaching starts with the premise that the client is “naturally creative, resourceful and whole.”

What do Kobe Bryant, Tiger Woods, Serena and Venus Williams, and Tom Brady have in common? They all have coaches. They are all coachable. Undeniably, they are already high functioning. They are already so good at what they do. Yet, they are still humble enough to be receptive to feedback and improving. They are willing to take a look at any blind spots in order to be the best at what they do.

Unlike therapy, which is more “past oriented,” the focal point of any coaching conversation is in the “now.” Coaching is interested in moving forward, creating your life from the inside out, taking personal responsibility, claiming the power to actively choose your life the way you want it. It is about self-awareness and self-discovery. It is about understanding who you are in the world and how your day-to-day life resonates with who you are. Coaching takes the position that at every given moment, irrespective of the past, the client has a proactive hand in creating his or her future.

There are three coaching principles (and different schools may have different techniques): fulfillment, balance, and process. The principle of fulfillment recognizes that the degree by which a person is honoring his or her values in life is the degree to which he or she is living a fulfilling life. In a fulfillment-style coaching session, the coach might work with the client to mine for the nuggets of gold that are the client’s essence—values, purpose, vision for himself or herself, and his or her life. The most basic of fulfillment coaching questions include

- What do you want?
- What is important to you about that?
- What is stopping you?
- What is in the way of getting what you want?

With this awareness, clients can tailor their lives to suit specific values, goals, and purpose, rather than living a cookie-cutter lifestyle.

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