



A History of Coaching

A Personal Review by Paul Hemphill

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1. Summary

Coaching as a profession emerged from the world of sports into the world of business in the early 1980s. In its 30 year history it has grown like a snowball rolling down a hillside by acquiring concepts and skills from a wide range of other disciplines including management consultancy, psychology, psychotherapy, linguistics, anthropology and meditation. As a result, the emerging profession has many different sub-groups including business coaches, NLP coaches, CBT coaches and many others, linked by a common thread of seeking to help their clients become more self aware and self responsible, and to assist them to set SMART goals for their future actions. The process of professionalization is still ongoing and involves improved accreditation and steps towards adopting a common code of conduct.

2. Introduction

In this article I attempt (and hopefully succeed) to demonstrate that coaching does not have a linear history; in other words, it is not possible to say “first this happened, then this, then this”. Instead, coaching as we know it today is a synthesis of various strands of human thought and activity, each of which has had its own path of development, its own history. The aim of this article is to tease out these various strands that have been inter-twined over the last 30-40 years to form the practice of modern professional coaching.

At the most basic level, histories of coaching usually identify the development of sports coaching in the 1970's as the tap root of coaching today. From there, coaching first evolved to Executive and then to more general Business Coaching before beginning the journey of spreading out to “coaching for all”. Along this journey, the emerging profession has acquired considerable knowledge from other disciplines, especially from aspects of management consultancy, psychology, psychotherapy and linguistics, as well as aligning itself to more general concepts of wellbeing and inner peace. This is the same arc of development that will be presented in this article.

But before we begin, it is useful to reflect that the true history of coaching is actually as old as the dawn of man. Every time an individual has been encouraged to use their inner resources to overcome difficulties, to celebrate their successes whilst regarding setbacks as opportunities to learn, to live in the present but at the same time to set themselves stretching but achievable targets for the future – they have been coached. And as long ago as 1949, Joseph Campbell concluded that throughout history all myths and legends have told essentially the same story of a hero overcoming

apparently overwhelming obstacles whilst simultaneously discovering their inner strength and, more importantly, learning that we all have the potential to control our own version of reality (1).

3. Sports Coaching

If there is one book that could be said to have initiated today's professional coaching industry, the overwhelming consensus is that book would be "The Inner Game of Tennis" by American author Timothy Gallwey, first published 36 years ago in 1975. Imagine that: A multi-million pound, multi-disciplinary global industry stemming from a book about tennis. How could this have happened?

Well, firstly because it is a fantastic read and marvellously illuminating even for someone with next to no interest in the sport of tennis. But more importantly because it stems from a quest by the author to understand why human beings interfere with their own ability to learn and achieve. By watching players talk to themselves on court, Gallwey identified the struggle going on between the conscious (ego) and sub-conscious mind. From there he concluded that *"it is the constant thinking activity of the ego-mind which causes interference with the natural doing process"* (2). The inner game of tennis is the game going on in our mind where our opponent is not another tennis player but a set of more elusive opponents like nervousness and self-doubt – the "limiting beliefs" that all coaching professionals seek to help their clients to overcome.

Gallwey did not "invent" sports coaching. Indeed coaching as a word to describe helping athletes towards success can be traced back to a first use at Oxford University in 1831 where the word was already being used as slang for a tutor who "carries" a student through an exam (3). Gallwey was not even the first sports coach to look beyond the technical skills of his coachees. For example, US basketball coach John Wooden first developed his "Pyramid of Success" principles in 1948, including concepts of co-operation, self control and confidence (4).

What Gallwey did do was to transform the concept of sports coaching to a process that was primarily concerned with *"unlocking people's potential to maximise their own performance"* (5) accompanied by a belief that this is actually more important than acquiring technical skills.

4. Business & Executive Coaching and the GROW model

Slowly, as Gallwey's ideas started to take hold in the sports world, he and others began to see that they had equal validity in the world of business. Gallwey himself published a book titled "The Inner Game of Work" as well as forming an association with John Whitmore, an English sports coach who became his UK representative. Whitmore was also interested in coaching in the business field and

following a number of years of experience and development he wrote “Coaching for Performance” in 1992, one of the great pioneering books of modern coaching.

“Coaching for Performance” introduced the world to the concept of GROW: Goal, Reality, Options, Way Forward as a basic structure for all good coaching conversations. GROW remains the predominant coaching model for most coaching schools and training organisations. But although other coaching models have been developed, such as Curly Martin’s I-CAN-DO (6), the GROW model has become so well established that it is difficult to envisage a time when it will be replaced as the model of choice for most professional coaches.

Although the GROW model is most closely associated with Whitmore, he was not its originator. This honour is claimed by Graham Alexander (7), one of the founders of business and executive coaching in Europe who began his coaching practice – The Alexander Corporation – in 1986.

In its early days, professional coaching outside sports was almost entirely the preserve of business directors and senior executives, paid for by their company. But through the 1990s, as more coaches became trained, the availability of coaching spread outside the Boardroom into the general population, aided by media interest and the occasional celebrity endorsement. Significant landmarks included the first coaching accreditation by the International Coach Federation in 1998, and the publication of the first edition of “Co-Active Coaching” by Laura Whitworth et al, also in 1998.

As the professional coaching snowball started to roll, so it acquired a host of complementary influences, skills and techniques – with histories that often predated the emergence of the coaching profession. These are the subject of the next four sections of this article.

5. Management by Objectives

The delivery of coaching to senior executives by external “experts” was inevitably seen by companies in the 1980s as an extension to the rapidly expanding field of management and business consultancy. To be proficient and credible, coaches therefore had to have a working knowledge of key management terms, theories and business models (as they still do today); and to utilise appropriate elements in their own work.

The history of management consultancy and management theory is such a wide and extensive topic than it is not possible to do it justice here. But it is worth highlighting two major developments that have had a particularly strong influence on coaching as a profession.

The first is the theory of “Management by Objectives”, first proposed by Peter Drucker in his massively influential 1954 book “The Practice of Management” which pre-dated the introduction of coaching into business by almost 30 years. Five major themes of Peter Drucker’s work will still be immediately recognisable and relevant to all business coaches today. He stated that:

- To succeed, organisations and individuals need clear goals
- Involving employees in the process of goal setting increases their job satisfaction and their contribution to the organisation
- Frequent reviews and interactions between managers and staff help to maintain good relationships and can solve many problems
- Staff have a higher commitment to goals they set for themselves than those imposed on them by others
- A key role of management is to ensure that staff objectives are linked to the organisation’s overall goals.

Although Drucker’s work is not credited, the importance of goal setting is one of the central themes of Whitmore’s “Coaching for Performance” – as we have seen in the GROW model, and it has remained so for all coaches today. But what are the features of a good goal? This problem was best resolved by three other management consultants (George Duran, Arthur Miller and James Cunningham) who first proposed the SMART acronym for business goals in 1981 (8). In other words, that goals should be: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-framed. Whilst initially proposed as a management tool, the concept that effective goals and objectives should be SMART has become all pervasive and is a guiding principle across the whole business spectrum from advertising and marketing to production and cost control. And now, professional life coaches have taken the concept far beyond the world of work to be equally valid for all goals in a person’s life.

6. Neuro-Linguistic Programming

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (or NLP) emerged as a discipline through the work of two Americans from the University of California in the early 1970s: John Grindler, a psychology student with a particular interest in psychotherapy and Richard Bandler, a professor of linguistics. They were also supported by Gregory Bateson, a British anthropologist.

The origins of NLP were a series of observations on the behaviours of exceptional people and how these might differ from the average person. The observations were codified with the intention that it should be possible for anyone to learn these behaviours and so become exceptional too – or at least produce exceptional results. The observations were both neurological (relating to the senses of

taste, touch, smell, sound and vision) and linguistic (relating to language). The term “programming” relates to how the observed actions can be arranged and reproduced to produce results.

Because it is based on continuing observation, the nature of NLP means that it will never stand still as a set of practices. It will always grow and generate new ideas, new techniques and new therapies. Some of these techniques have little or nothing to do with coaching. In fact, almost the opposite. For example, whilst some people learn about NLP in order to develop their communication skills and so to help their clients or staff become the best they can possibly be, others learn NLP simply to improve the ways in which they can influence other people to do what they want them to do. For example, many sales people are taught certain NLP techniques (even if they are not labelled as such) to help them persuade more customers to make a purchase, whether or not that purchase is in the customer’s best interests.

NLP was and remains a quite distinct discipline from coaching. But because it is essentially about communication, there are major areas of overlap that have been adopted by many coaching professionals over the last 30 years. These include techniques to help build rapport between coach and client, to help the client “reframe” situations they currently regard as negative, and to help both coach and client to understand the potentially positive and negative affects of key elements of language such as presuppositions and generalisations.

Despite this, not all professional coaches rely on NLP; and still today many important coaching textbooks (such as Whitworth’s “Co-Active Coaching”) do not refer to it at all. But for others, such as Ian McDermott, the two disciplines have become so inter-linked that they actually describe themselves as an NLP Coach (9).

7. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Emotional Intelligence

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) has an even longer history than NLP. In essence, it is a therapeutic approach to help patients with psychiatric problems such as depression, anxiety and personality disorders. But although this is a world away from most life coaching situations, the core understanding that CBT provides on the workings of the human mind has had an undoubted and massive influence on the development of the coaching profession.

The modern roots of CBT can be traced back to the emergence of behavioural therapy in the early 20th century, cognitive therapy in the 1960s, and the subsequent merging of the two.

Unlike NLP, CBT should only be delivered by a trained psychotherapist. It is therefore relatively unusual to find CBT specifically mentioned in coaching books or training programmes. However, the following three key insights of CBT (10) are central to the thinking of most professional coaches, whether or not the coach knows about their origin:

- Reality is in the mind of the individual. Adverse events do occur but how we think and respond to those events can increase our difficulties in dealing with them. The viewpoint we choose determines our reaction
- Negative or limiting beliefs about ourselves inhibit our ability to achieve; and no matter how we acquire our negative beliefs, we continue to reinforce and strengthen those beliefs until we take active steps towards addressing them.
- The best route to overcoming our limiting beliefs and bringing about emotional change (improving how we feel) is not by concentrating on our feelings but through cognitive change (how we think) and behavioural change (how we act).

CBT has not just influenced the theoretical basis of coaching, many of the tools and techniques that coaches suggest to their clients have their origins in CBT. These include: Keeping a diary of events and associated feelings; questioning assumptions; evaluating unhelpful or unrealistic beliefs; trying out new ways of behaving and reacting, including using affirmations and visualisations; and various relaxation and mindfulness techniques (11). A good coach will always seek to elicit the best way forward from the client, rather than be as directional as a therapist might be, but the overall goal can be very similar in both cases.

If CBT – with its focus on overcoming anxiety – can be said to lie towards one end of the psychology spectrum, the concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) is definitely at the other, more positive end of that spectrum. The term EI was first proposed by Wayne Payne as recently as 1985 but the concept has its roots in the 1930s when psychologist Edward Thorndyke described the concept of “Social Intelligence” as the ability to get on with other people. The four factors of EI have more recently been defined as the abilities to a) perceive emotions; b) reason with emotions; c) understand emotions; and d) manage emotions (12).

Can a person improve his or her Emotional Intelligence? Most coaches would agree that this is not only possible but is a core objective of coaching. In fact, developing your EI requires many of the same coaching skills first identified in Whitmore’s “Coaching for Performance”. For example, in his 1995 book “Emotional Intelligence” American psychologist Daniel Goleman identified the following

five key skills of EI, which should all be immediately familiar to any coaching practitioner today.

Goleman stated that anyone can improve their EI by:

- Raising their self awareness and taking an honest look at themselves
- Taking responsibility for and controlling their emotions and impulses
- Motivating themselves to succeed and relishing a challenge
- Recognising the feelings of others, even when those feelings may not be obvious
- Building and maintaining successful relationships, helping others to develop and shine

8. Wellbeing and Mindfulness

Once it was taken out of its original business and executive setting, it was not surprising that life coaching began to be offered to the general public alongside or even in combination with other complementary / alternative therapies associated with a person's general wellbeing. Some of these therapies – notably hypnotherapy – have nothing at all to do with coaching, yet they may be offered by the same person. Others have combined coaching with various forms of counselling, careers advice, personality profiling, home de-cluttering, Reiki (hand placing therapy) and many more.

The complementary therapy which is perhaps closest in spirit to life coaching is meditation, and in particular, mindfulness. Mindfulness is the term given to both a form of meditation, based on Buddhist traditions (13); and to a more general concept of living in the moment with meditation as a key tool towards achieving this goal. In 2004 a group of 11 clinical psychologists (mostly from the University of Toronto), led by Scott Bishop, published what has become the standard definition of mindfulness in a psychological context. They stated that mindfulness has two key components (14):

- The self-regulation of attention so that it is focussed on the immediate experience, to allow for improved recognition of mental events in the present moment; and
- Adopting an orientation towards your experiences in the present moment of curiosity, openness and acceptance

To a coach, the qualities of self-regulation, attention, curiosity, openness and acceptance are remarkably similar to those frequently identified as the core skills of coaching. Mindfulness can therefore be seen as an ideal support system to help coaches to become better at coaching; and to help clients live their lives more productively through being better equipped to self-manage themselves beyond the coaching experience. The already well established link between mindfulness and coaching is therefore likely to grow stronger and stronger in the years ahead.

9. Coaching Today: The Profession of Coaching

As we have seen, in its short 30 year history from the time it emerged from the confines of sport, professional life and business coaching has gathered a remarkably diverse set of principles and ideas from many different disciplines. This process is unlikely to slow down in the immediate future; and the areas most likely to influence the next stage of the development of coaching are the subject of Part 2 of this thesis. But before we move on, we should not forget to record another important aspect of the development of coaching, namely its growing professionalism.

The first step towards professionalism is definition: It is impossible for a new profession to emerge without first establishing what it is; and how it differs from the other professions that it has drawn its ideas from. So what is the purpose of coaching?

The fact that there is no easy answer to that question, no one definition that all current practitioners and coach training establishments can yet agree on is in part a sign that it is still an emerging profession, rather than a mature one. For example, compare these various principles of coaching:

Noble-Manhattan's Four Pillars of Coaching	John Whitmore's Nature of Coaching	Laura Whitworth's Four Cornerstones	Curly Martin's Coaching Defined
1. The coach is non-directional	1. Building the client's awareness	1. Client is naturally creative and whole	1. Should be focussed entirely on results
2. The coach is non-judgemental	2. Building the client's responsibility (for their thoughts and actions)	2. Agenda comes from client	2. Involves resolving conflict between desires and values / beliefs
3. The client has the answer	3. Building the client's self belief	3. Coach dances in the moment	3. About empowering the client to act
4. Involves intuition by the coach		4. Addresses the client's whole life	

There are no glaring discrepancies between these sets of principles; and to some extent they can all be viewed as complementary. But that is very far from being able to say that they identify the same set of priorities for coaches, or even that any of them would give a complete outsider a clear view of how coaching differs from other disciplines. And there is a significant underlying tension between those who stress that it is a major priority for the coach to be completely non-directional and those who stress that producing results (in the form of agreed actions) is actually more important. The need to resolve this tension is a key issue for many coaching organisations and practitioners.

My own definition of the purpose of coaching tries to draw on all the above, whilst reflecting my own experience of coaching; namely that it should be:

1. Client-Centric: Not about the coach sharing life stories or giving advice
2. Future-Focussed: Starts in the present, looking to the future; not about resolving past traumas
3. Action-Orientated: Must result in SMART goals and action; supported by increased self-belief
4. Enjoyable: Too often overlooked, I think that unless the coaching process is enjoyable for both coach and client it will not be effective

In the quest for professionalism it is not only important to define the purpose of coaching but also to define the qualities of a good coach (such as high-level listening, good questioning skills, curiosity, intuition, being non-judgemental, having emotional intelligence and good motivation skills). But ideally these two definitions should not be confused with one another, as has often been the case.

If defining coaching is the first step towards professionalism, the second is accreditation, based on qualification and experience. Accreditation brings public recognition and increased confidence in the profession, together with shared standards and a community of interest for coaches. There have been great strides made towards accreditation since the first accreditation system was introduced by the International Coaching Federation (ICF) in 1998. However, there are now so many accreditation bodies, often with almost identical names, that they present a bewildering list to both coaches and clients. As well as the ICF, that list currently includes the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), the International Institute of Coaching (IIC), the International Association of Coaching (IAC), the Association for Coaching (AC), the International Coaching Association (ICA), and an increasing number of Coaching Psychology groups such as the Society for Coaching Psychology (SCP) and the Special Group in Coaching Psychology of the British Psychological Society (SGCP). Does this matter? My own interpretation is that, like the issue of the definition of coaching, the large number of accreditation bodies is essentially a sign of the newness and immaturity of the profession. Inevitably, over time, some of the smaller associations will become financially unsustainable and there will be mergers between others to leave one or two dominant players who will become the ones that are most recognised by business clients and the general public.

The final step towards professionalism is the acceptance of common standards in terms of ethics (such as confidentiality and honesty), indemnity insurance, continuing professional development and an independent complaints procedure. All the major accreditation bodies listed above have their own published Code of Ethics which their members are required to abide to. And whilst these codes have very different formats there is a remarkable and reassuring commonality of purpose between them. The process of moving towards a common Code of Ethics took a significant step forward in July 2011 when in a joint initiative aimed at self-regulation for the industry the ICF and EMCC filed a common Code of Conduct with the European Union as the benchmark standard for the

coaching and mentoring industry. Other coaching organisations, including the AC, have already publicly announced their support in principle for this common European Code of Conduct.

So although coaches may not all agree with one another on the precise nature of coaching, or on the most appropriate type of accreditation, at least there is widespread agreement on how coaches should conduct themselves – and that serving their client interests with honesty and integrity should always be their most important priority.

10. Notes and References

- (1) Joseph's Campbell's 1949 book "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" is a comprehensive review of the stories to be found in all mythology and religion. The following quotation is typical of its conclusions: "The happy ending of the fairy tale, the myth, and the divine comedy of the soul is to be read, not as a contradiction, but as a transcendence of the universal tragedy of man. The objective word remains what is was, but because of a shift of emphasis within the subject is beheld, as though transformed"
- (2) Quotation from "The Inner Game of Tennis" by Timothy Gallwey, published by Pan Books
- (3) From the online Etymology Dictionary, www.etymonline.com
- (4) John Wooden's guiding philosophy behind his "Pyramid of Success" model in 1948 was that "Success comes from knowing that you did your best to become the best you are capable of being" – a philosophy which still underpins most coaching today.
- (5) Quotation from "Coaching for Performance" by John Whitmore, published by Nicholas Brealey
- (6) Curly Martin's I-CAN-DO model stands for "Investigate, Current life situation, Aims, Number of alternatives, Date to achieve aims, Outcome indicators", as outlined in Chapter 7 of "The Life Coaching Handbook", published by Crown House Publishing.
- (7) "The GROW model developed in the 1980's from my work with senior executives": Quoted by Graham Alexander in "Excellence in Coaching", edited by Jonathan Passmore.
- (8) The term SMART Goals was first used in 1981 in an article by these three consultants that appeared in "Management Review", Volume 70, issue 11. The article was titled: "There's a SMART way to write management's goals and objectives".
- (9) Ian McDermott is the founder of International Training Seminars (ITS) which blends training in both NLP and coaching. He is also the author of a book titled "The NLP Coach"
- (10) The 3 key insights of CBT have been identified by Michael Neenan, an accredited cognitive-behavioural therapist, in his essay "Cognitive Behavioural Coaching", contained in "Excellence in Coaching" edited by Jonathan Passmore and published by Kogan Page.
- (11) CBT techniques summarised from the Wikipedia entry on the subject: <http://en.wikipedia.org>
- (12) History and Definitions of Emotional Intelligence from: <http://psychology.about.com>
- (13) It is worth noting that the current Western practice of mindfulness with its emphasis on non-judgementalism is seen by some Buddhists as being quite different from the mindfulness practiced by Buddha, which clearly involved the meditator noticing and distinguishing between the wholesome and the unwholesome.
- (14) Definition from "Mindfulness: A Proposed Operational Definition", published in "Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice", Volume 11, issue 3 (2004)

11. Bibliography

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- “The History of Coaching” written and published by Results Coaching Systems, downloadable from www.resultscoaches.com
- “History of Coaching” written and published by Performance Coaching International, downloadable from www.performancecoachinginternational.com

“The Hero with a Thousand Faces” by Joseph Campbell, published by New World Library

“The Inner Game of Tennis” by Timothy Gallwey, published by Pan Books in association with Jonathan Cape

“Excellence in Coaching: The Industry Guide” edited by Jonathan Passmore, published by Kogan Page, especially the following essays:

- “What is Coaching?” by Frank Bresser and Carol Wilson
- “Behavioural Coaching: The GROW model” by Graham Alexander
- “Cognitive Behavioural Coaching” by Michael Neenam
- “NLP Coaching” by Ian McDermott

“The Practice of Management” by Peter Drucker, published by Butterworth-Heinemann

“Coaching for Performance: GROWing human potential and purpose” by John Whitmore, published by Nicholas Brealey – especially Chapter 1, What is Coaching? Chapter 7, Goal Setting; and Chapter 23, Emotional Intelligence

“The Life Coaching Handbook” by Curly Martin, published by Crown House Publishing – especially Chapter 8, the History and Development of Neuro-Linguistic Programming

“Coaching with NLP” by Joseph O’Connor & Andrea Lages, published by Element (Harper Collins)

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