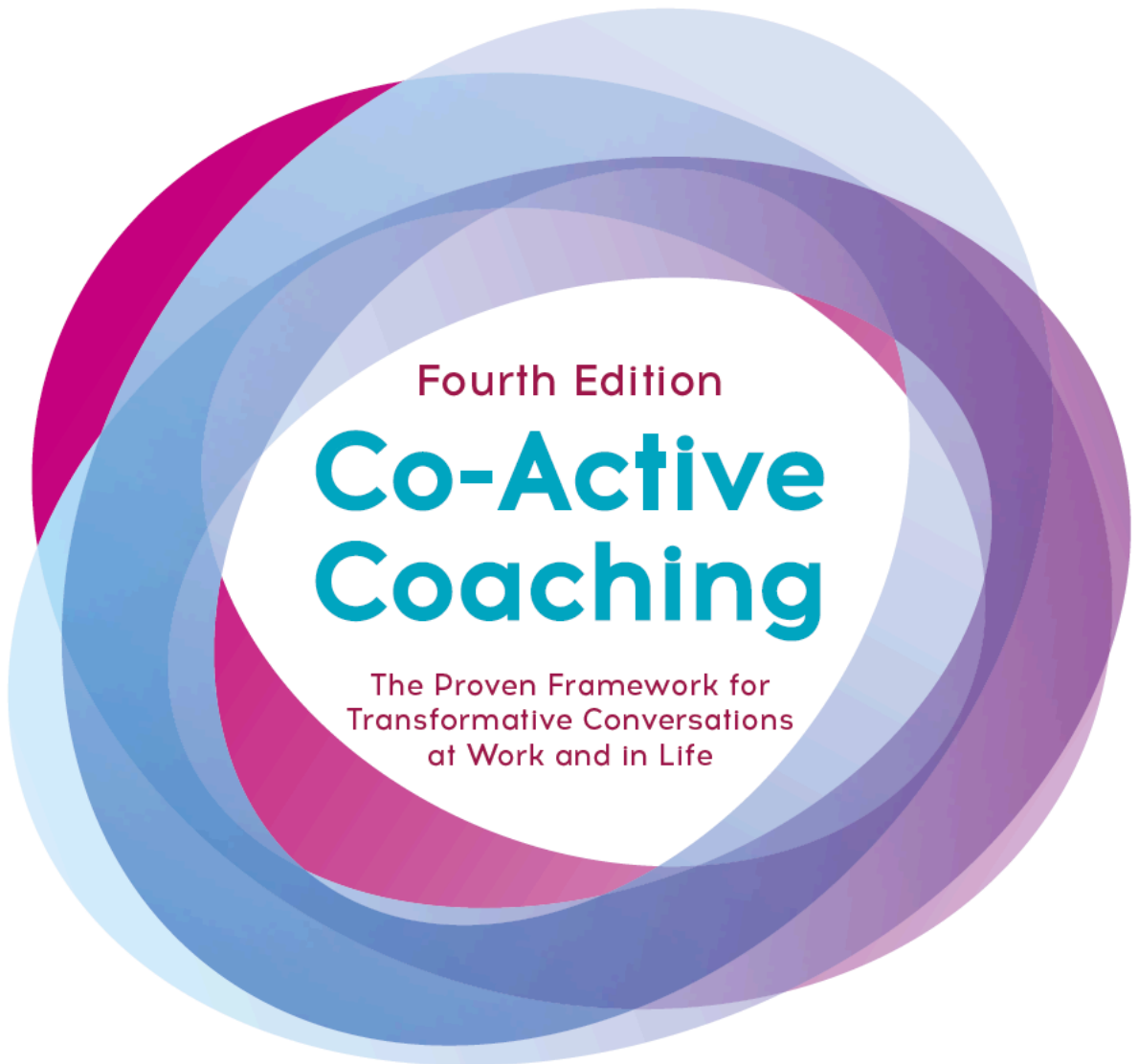


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"The bible of coaching guides."

—STEPHEN R. COVEY, Author, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*



Henry Kimsey-House, Karen Kimsey-House,
Phillip Sandahl, Laura Whitworth

Praise for *Co-Active Coaching*, Fourth Edition

“With its fourth updated edition, *Co-Active Coaching* remains the bible of coaching guides. Written with a powerful, distinctive approach, no other book gives you the tools, the skills, and the fundamentals needed to succeed in these delicate relationships.”

—Stephen R. Covey, Author, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and *The Leader in Me*

“In *Co-Active Coaching*, the dynamic Kimsey-House duo, along with Phillip Sandahl, have elevated coaching from an instructional tool to an art form! Seldom have I seen such a clear road map for how to ‘overcome actions that sabotage desires, plans and dreams.’ Collaboration, cooperation, coalition—all necessary components of a successful working relationship. As a gym coach leads his trainee to a higher state of physical health and wellbeing, *Co-Active Coaching* provides business coaches with a toolkit for helping their clients achieve professional and personal success. *Co-Active Coaching* should be required reading for every manager or employee who wants to succeed in the workplace.”

—Marshall Goldsmith, Two Million-Selling Author, *New York Times* Bestsellers *Triggers*, *MOJO* and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*

“*Co-Active Coaching* exudes the catalytic power to transform your organization and your life. Read it, savor it, and practice it to become a purpose-filled leader of life! ”

—Kevin Cashman, Best-Selling Author, *Leadership from the Inside Out* and *The Pause Principle*

“I applaud the new edition of this definitive text on transformational coaching. The authors and the visionary network they lead provide an effective methodology to work with change at personal and organizational levels. This is a must-read for professionals who value the process of discovery, awareness, and choice that empowers people to find their own inner wisdom and to act in service to make a better world for all.”

—Lynne Twist, Author, *The Soul of Money*, Founder, Soul of Money Institute, and Co-Founder, The Pachamama Alliance

"*Co-Active Coaching* insightfully reveals how to unlock a person's potential and enlighten their past, present, and future. It's a must-read for all self-empowered senior executives."

—Michael Cheah, Former President, Xian-Janssen Pharmaceutical, China
(A Johnson & Johnson Group of Companies)

"Transformational change—in ourselves or in the teams, organizations, and companies we lead—is ultimately all about relationships. The fourth edition of *Co-Active Coaching*, by the eloquent and compassionate founders of the Co-Active Training Institute, will give you the tools, skills, strategies, and ethical frameworks to achieve the powerful goals of this work: changing lives and changing the world."

—Celeste Schenck, President, The American University of Paris

"Coaching basics are an essential skill set for any manager or leader who is interested in developing other people, so I use this material in most of the MBA courses I teach. Without fail, it engages the hearts and minds of people who care about acquiring meaningful and effective skills they can immediately put to use."

—Heidi Brooks, PhD, Director, Yale School of Management Mentoring Program,
Lecturer, Yale School of Management, and Clinical Assistant Professor, Yale School
of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry

"*Co-Active Coaching*, Fourth Edition is a must read for any leader who wants to personally perform higher and take their team to a higher level of performance, regardless of culture. Having lived and worked in the Middle East for the past two decades, this book transcends culture, religion and ethnicity and connects to who we are as human beings."

—Kevin Craig - Founder of Craig Consultants and Co-Founder of Grip Arabia.
Co-Author of *Polar Bears and Penguins*. High Performance, Executive and Leadership
Co-Active Coach, Kingdom of Bahrain

"The principles offered in *Co-Active Coaching* have fostered a journey that has genuinely shifted our organizational culture. Nowhere is this clearer than with job satisfaction and retention. My people love coming to work every day and they drive each other to be an even better version of themselves on behalf of our organizational mission. Together, we work to infuse Co-Active methodologies throughout Colorado's Child Welfare System with great success!"

—Kasey Matz, Director, Colorado Child Welfare Training System

"Our company, AFCC Automotive Fuel Cell Cooperation, embarked upon our CTI Co-Active inspired coaching journey, creating an extraordinary coaching culture. Using the models and tools outlined in this book, we utilize coaching discussions in many aspects of our business and employ Co-Active CTI-based principles across our company. Our journey culminated when AFCC was awarded the British Columbia Prism award, followed by the ICF Global Prism award in 2017!"

—Jim Boerger, Director of Operations

"*Co-Active Coaching* has already touched thousands of Japanese hearts with its first three editions. I am utterly convinced that the content of this book transcends the cultural boundaries because it speaks to something that we universally share as human beings. Now that its fourth edition is out, I can only feel excited when I imagine how many more hearts will be touched around the globe!"

—Hide Enemoto, Founder, CTI Japan

"Schouten & Nelissen is a proud partner of CTI, and we feel privileged to spread this wonderful and important work throughout the world. *Co-Active Coaching* has not only changed the lives of many, it has also touched the hearts of all coaches in our communities in the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland and China."

—Marcel van Bronswijk, Board President, Schouten Global

"As an R&D manager in today's high-tech companies, I was facing an ever-increasing demand for emotional intelligence and support for employee's development. *Co-Active Coaching* has unlocked the gifts of true listening and empathy, turning me into a better person and a better manager. This book an excellent companion for any manager who wishes to follow the path of co-active coaching for personal and professional growth."

—Adi Sapir, VP of Research and Development, Israeli high tech company

CO-ACTIVE COACHING

The proven framework for transformative
conversations at work and in life

FOURTH EDITION

Henry Kimsey-House

Karen Kimsey-House

Phillip Sandahl

and

Laura Whitworth



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Preface to the Fourth Edition

On one hand, the title of the book says everything you need to know in terms of what this book is about: co-active coaching. After 20 years and three editions we still emphasize *coaching*, which is our heritage, our expertise, and our learning laboratory, but now we also highlight what it means to be *co-active*, and it is that expanded emphasis that is the fundamental reason for the fourth edition. We will look especially at how being *co-active* applies to—and empowers—conversations that don't fit a traditional coaching form. It's a shift in focus based on an awareness of how fundamentally conversations are changing and why an understanding of what it means to be in a “*co-active*” conversation is so important and so fitting in the world of work today.

In simple terms, *coaching* describes what we *do*. This book presents a robust model for coaching; principles, methodologies, and contexts for coaching; and practical skills for coaching. In other words, it's about how to do coaching effectively. We have been pioneers in the field of coaching and have trained tens of thousands of co-active coaches around the world.

Co-active is about the nature of the coaching *relationship*. It involves how the coach and the coachee work together—the alliance—for the sake of the coachee's agenda. That underlying co-active relationship has been featured in previous editions and is essential to an understanding of what makes this coaching approach unique and transformative. The key word there is *underlying*.

As we considered revisions for this edition, we realized that the nature of the environment in which coaching takes place—or where informal

coach-like conversations take place—needs to have more visibility. What *co-active* contributes is the container for effective conversation, and that container is as important as the coaching conversation itself. Given the changing nature of the world we live and work in, it is clear there is an urgent need to highlight this fundamental aspect of the work. The ground conditions necessary for sustainable and transformative change in all coaching relationships, whether formal or informal, come from the act of consciously creating *co-active* relationships: relationships that are collaborative, cooperative, co-created, active, and engaged and that yield action steps and learning. Consequently, this book focuses on the context for effective coaching: creating the container.

The fact that a coaching approach has been adapted to conversations beyond the scope of the professional coach and coachee isn't new. We made that observation years ago in the second edition, where we noted how the basic skills and mind-set of co-active coaching have been applied to conversations that aren't in a structured coaching format: the private, one-on-one conversation between a trained coach and a coachee. For example, we considered the skills of coaching applied by teachers working with students; healthcare staff working with patients; and managers, supervisors, and team leaders learning how to adapt the fundamentals of coaching to empower and support others who were not "coachees" but who participated in relationships that provided a fitting opportunity for a coach-like conversation.

What has shifted subtly over time is that the very nature of conversation has changed. Step outside the world of coaching and you will see the evidence. Take a glance at your phone—something that didn't exist when this book was first published. (The first iPhone and the second edition of *Co-Active Coaching* both appeared in 2007.) A great deal of what's possible in communication today would have qualified as science fiction when the first edition of this book was published. On a cultural and relationship level, what's possible would have been dismissed as "not in our lifetime," and yet here we are.

Today it is easy to communicate with colleagues, family, and friends instantly across the globe. Technology has had an enormous impact on how we can communicate and with whom. And yet the lightning speed and range of connections available to us all pose their own issues. We can function more quickly, but can we connect as deeply as we need to? More

than ever, the co-active skills of deep listening, shared commitment, and empowered learning are critical.

As you look for changes in conversations, also listen to the content. The norms for what we talk about and who is included in the conversation have evolved, opened up. This shift reflects a world more visibly diverse and distributed and yet more closely connected. It's also a world moving and shifting at an accelerated rate. We don't really notice because we're in it, just as we do not notice we are on a globe spinning at 900 miles an hour. Topics of conversation that would have seemed impossible or taboo a decade ago are now commonplace.

Given those conditions, it makes sense that coaching—with its inherent strengths for effective conversation—grew in a parallel way. Since the first edition, we have witnessed the dramatic spread of coaching globally: both the formal training and impact of professional coaches and the informal growth of the fundamentals of effective coaching conversations. Today the *co-active* part of our title is more important and more valuable than ever before.

Organizations have come to understand that effective performance depends on effective relationships. That awareness is changing how business gets done and how conversations move business forward. For leaders and managers, the ability to interact with employees by using a “coach approach” is now widely regarded as a core competency, an essential skill set. More and more, businesses see coaching as an invaluable tool in the development of talent, both in the formal coaching relationships and in the informal coaching roles that leaders and managers play with the people they lead.

Since the publication of the first edition, we have observed, learned, and adapted our work to needs in the profession of coaching and the environments where coaching takes place. At the time of the third edition, we saw a key role for coaching in a world going through fundamental realignment. The structure of organizations was changing from vertical and hierarchical (top down) to horizontal, dispersed, matrixed. We saw *Co-Active Coaching* as the means to have more effective change conversations, an approach that led to the book's subtitle.

As it turns out, what we observed happening in organizations was a reflection of what was happening in global culture. This fourth edition weaves that awareness into the discussion of what it means to create

a co-active environment that supports open and transformative conversation, whether the situation involves a formal coaching relationship or important, informal conversations in leadership roles or between colleagues.

Over the years we have seen the evolution of our work and how it has influenced and been adapted as a leadership skill set and, perhaps more important, a leadership mind-set. The relationship infrastructure for effective organizational performance requires the skills and mind-set for a world that is increasingly reverberating with change.

Our goal is not for everyone to become coaches but to understand and be able to apply the fundamentals of an empowering coaching container. This fourth edition of *Co-Active Coaching* provides a new way to be in relationship while being in conversation—a way to understand and apply basic understanding of how these skills can support more effective results, transformative change, and healthier relationships both locally and globally.

This book is absolutely a continuation of our work with our roots in the fundamentals of one-on-one coaching. It also reflects our understanding that there is more to that impact than the coaching form itself. It explores the compelling way that being in relationship shows up in conversation and how conversation is more than words.

We believe this fourth edition of *Co-Active Coaching* meets the evolving needs of professional coaches, leaders in organizations, and all those who value effective relationship conversations. There is a way to create that container—a conscious framework in which empowered conversations can take place. Let's begin.

Acknowledgments

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to so many people who have supported, encouraged, and championed this work—far too many to name, some we have never met. They represent all of the coaches and coachees who have embarked on a coaching journey; their lives and work are a living acknowledgment and a powerful motivation to keep this material current and meaningful.

Coaching training played an enormous role in spreading the power and possibility of coaching as a profession and became its own learning laboratory for what works in coaching. The faculty and staff of the Co-Active Training Institute have been at the forefront of the mission to prepare new coaches, maintain high professional standards, and keep the co-active method thriving. Their commitment to the essence and the particulars has helped us continuously refine what we present, and their contribution shows in this fourth edition.

We have seen coaching spread around the globe in the years since the first edition was published. Clearly there is a hunger in the world that is pulling coaching into organizations, relationships, and individual lives—something that transcends all of the usual boundaries. We want to especially acknowledge those courageous pioneers at the forefront of the global efforts. It would not happen without the vision and initiative of determined people willing to take on the challenge of language and culture for the sake of coaching.

To the thousands of coaching students we have trained, to our own coachees, and, yes, our own coaches, we are thankful beyond words. To all of the committed organizations, for their vision and courage to take a stand for human potential and for their dedication to creating co-active

cultures we offer thanks as well. And finally, to the coachees who are and have always been our most important teachers, this acknowledgment is for you. You are the reason we do this work.

For Laura Whitworth

And finally, a very special acknowledgment for the life, pioneering work, and indomitable spirit of Laura Whitworth, one of the three original founders of CTI with Karen and Henry Kimsey-House. Laura was a visionary and one of earliest people to call herself a coach. She helped launch the profession and was a fierce advocate for the transformative potential of the co-active way. Her impact reverberates throughout this book.

Henry and Karen Kimsey-House
Phillip Sandahl

Introduction

Welcome to our *co-active* world—a world devoted to creating transformative conversations. We have our roots in professional coaching, so this is a book about a model, principles, contexts, and skills of coaching. The book represents more than 25 years of experience training people in how to be effective coaches through the Co-Active Training Institute (CTI), using the model and approach of co-active coaching. Today, CTI is the largest in-person coach training organization in the world, delivering courses in North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.

This book describes the model in detail, defines the skills and techniques of co-active coaching, and offers sample coaching conversations and practical exercises all designed to help you understand and practice coaching—or have conversations that are based on co-active coaching fundamentals.

It's the second, broader application of co-active coaching that is behind this fourth edition. We were pioneers in the early development of coaching as a profession and have contributed to the vision, practice, and credibility of coaching as a professional competency. At the same time, more and more as the years progressed we have witnessed the essence of this work expand beyond the private dialogue between one professionally trained coach and one coachee. This book shines a brighter light on those important but informal coaching-influenced conversations.

Co-active coaching as a form is a particular way to be in conversation. It offers a unique way to listen, explore, raise awareness, make choices—in fact, take risks—and, always, to build on what was learned along the way to inform the next choice, the next step, and the next learning opportunity.

What we teach professional coaches is being adapted for conversations initiated by teachers, healthcare workers, and parents; more than anywhere else, what we teach is becoming an essential leadership competency for executives, managers, and supervisors.

We are not abandoning our roots. This book continues to be the most required or recommended book on the subject of coaching for business schools, college and university classes, and training programs worldwide. What has been added are more examples of coach-like conversations—examples of the power inherent in a dedication to the underlying principles of being in a *co-active* conversation.

Getting to the Core of Co-Active

This book is about the nature of a coaching relationship—specifically, a co-active relationship. We look at the nature of a co-active conversation and at what makes this so different from other conversations—whether the conversation is between a professional coach and coachee, or between a senior manager and that person's direct report. The heart of that conversation is the same when we look through the lens of the co-active way.

Here's the difference. In our view, coaching is not about solving problems, although problems will be solved. It is not primarily about improving performance, attaining goals, or achieving results, although all of that will certainly happen over time in an effective co-active coaching relationship. We believe that coaching is chiefly about discovery, awareness, and choice. It is a way of effectively empowering people to find their own answers, encouraging and supporting them on the path as they continue to make important choices.

Now imagine you're a team leader in a conversation with one of the team about the status of a mission-critical project. There are many ways to have that conversation. One way—a traditional way for a team leader—would be to ask for a report, analyze the situation, and then provide work direction. That might still be the way the conversation could go.

Here's a different way—a way that is more co-active, collaborative. For the team leader it involves empowering the team member (who may be much closer to the actual issues on a day-to-day basis), possibly brainstorming alternative action steps, and agreeing on a course of action. In this way the nature of the relationship shifts; the context for the

conversation is more inclusive and more empowering. This is not meant to imply that one way is inherently better than the other. It is an invitation to see there is a choice and each has a different impact. There is, in fact, a broader palette, a wider range of leadership responses available.

In this fast-paced world of work, the pressure is on to create more engaged, more proactive, and more empowered employees. Waiting for a higher authority or escalating decision making impedes teams and organizations that need the agility to respond to often chaotic and complex choices. Creating and supporting a co-active way of working together delivers on the imperative and creates a culture of resilience and resourcefulness.

A co-active conversation has inherent ground rules regarding certain qualities that must be present: respect, openness, compassion, empathy, and a rigorous commitment to speaking the truth. There are certain assumptions underlying the conversation as well. We assume strength and capability, not weakness, helplessness, or dependence. We assume a deep desire to give the best and achieve potential. A co-active conversation has certain beliefs built into it: that every situation has possibilities and that people really do have the power of choice.

This is a way of being in relationship and being in conversation that shifts the focal point of the conversation from who has rank to what is possible. It shifts the conversation from simply analyzing and problem solving to working together more effectively and learning to be more resourceful so that future issues are actually easier to address because the relationship is resilient and creative.

This way of communicating is finding root not only in formal coaching relationships but in the workplace as a leadership style, and in teams and families as well. It works because it taps into a human need for collaborative, co-active conversation, which is so different from the usual authoritarian, superior/inferior experience based on roles and entrenched positions. In this growing awareness of “We are in this together,” the conversation shifts to a place of common purpose searching for possibilities.

We see this every day in the work we do. Co-active coaching has taken root around the world, transcending historical cultural barriers because it connects at a deeply human level—at a place of longing for meaningful connection. From a global perspective we see this as part of an evolving human consciousness. We believe co-active conversations are

both an example of this shift in human consciousness and an instrument to create it.

This unique style of co-active communication is visible in a variety of ways. You can see it in how a coach (or a person in a coaching role) listens: not only to the words but also to what is behind the words and even to the spaces between the words. You can see it in leaders who put as much value on openly listening as they do taking a stand for a point of view. Leaders who truly listen as coaches tune in to the nuances of voice, emotion, and energy; they listen for what is being said and what is not being said. They listen to the very best in others, even when the others can't hear it in themselves.

It's no coincidence that *active* is built into the name and the title for this book. Whether we're describing a co-active coaching relationship or a less formal conversation between colleagues at work, we focus attention on accountability. We value it not as a test or from a nagging, policing perspective but as an opportunity to harvest all the learning from what happened or didn't happen. That shift from judgment to learning is at the heart of a co-active conversation.

This emphasis on the combination of relationship and action is elegantly captured in the words for this form: it is co-active. It combines both being and doing: being collaborative, cooperating, working together on a mutual mission—and actively moving forward to a vision or goal.

With this book, you will learn new ways to work with others: how to discover and promote their mission, purpose, and specific agenda. You'll find effective ways to rigorously hold others to account in the spirit and commitment of learning. From a one-on-one coaching perspective, you'll discover a co-active approach to values, goal setting, life balance, and self-management, and you'll learn how it can apply in leadership roles as well.

You'll also learn strategies for addressing the self-limiting behavior that often shows up most strongly just when people need the courage to take risks for the sake of change or when it feels like there is a great deal at stake professionally for team members or leaders. These proven strategies help people stay on track and overcome actions that sabotage desires, plans, and dreams.

This book emphasizes information and exercises for professional coaches, yet the skills and insights it offers can be applied in almost any relationship—at work, with family and friends, on teams, in volunteer

and community settings—because coaching skills and the nature of the relationship are not limited to professional coaching sessions. We recognize that the essence of coaching is now an adapted communication style growing beyond the skill set of professional coaches.

How the Book Is Structured

Part 1 presents an overview of the co-active coaching model. The first chapter starts with the four cornerstones that form the foundation on which the model is built. Together they form an interrelated net in which powerful conversations can occur. We go on to build the model with the introduction of the five contexts of co-active coaching: listening, intuition, curiosity, forwarding action and deepening learning, and self-management. We look at how these five show up in informal conversations as well.

The chapter also describes the three principles—fulfillment, balance, and process—that together form the coachee's focus at the heart of the model. Part 1 also explains how to design an effective working relationship between coach and coachee (what we call the “designed alliance”) and how that practice can build trust in any working relationship.

Part 2 describes each of the five contexts in detail and presents descriptions and examples of the coaching skills in action. Here we provide sample coaching conversations as well as exercises that bring the skills to life. You'll find sample conversations from both perspectives: the professional coach and workplace examples.

Part 3 covers the three core principles: fulfillment, balance, and process. Each of the three principles provides a gateway for meaningful change for coaches, including employees who are working in informal coaching relationships with managers and leaders. Examples of coaching conversations in each chapter illustrate how the principle unfolds in actual practice. We also explore how the three principles are always in the background of any important leadership conversation.

Part 4 integrates the content that precedes it and provides a vision for coaching—especially co-active conversation—for the future. In a way, this final section resembles the completion of any coaching session: pulling the pieces together, then moving into action and the next steps on the journey.

In a way there is also a “part 5” if you include the Co-Active Online Toolkit (coactive.com/toolkit). With each edition of *Co-Active Coaching* we

have included extensive coaching tools you can use and adapt for work with your coachees. Starting with the third edition, those tools were made available online where it was easy to add and update materials. Since the third edition that online toolkit has grown extensively and now includes audio and video elements as well. In the book you will find references to the online toolkit with suggestions for accessing specific tools.

In summary, this fourth edition offers a deeper understanding of the nature of an effective co-active relationship and provides the skills necessary to create and support one. The book provides a systematic structure reinforced with real-life examples and practical exercises for developing your coaching abilities. It is a book for those who want to expand their knowledge and develop their capacities as professional coaches and for those who wish simply to add a “co-active way” to important conversations using this unique, inclusive, and proven method we call *co-active coaching*.

Co-Active Fundamentals

From day one, coaching focuses on the coachee. People participate in or seek out coaching because they want things to be different. They are looking for change or they have important goals to reach. They may be motivated to write a book, to start a business, to make a leap up the career ladder; to have a healthier body. They come to coaching in order to be more effective or more satisfied in life and work; they come to develop new skills to help navigate life's changes.

Sometimes people want more from life: more peace of mind, more security, more impact in their work. And sometimes they want less: less confusion, less stress, less financial pressure. In general, they come to coaching because they want a better quality of life—more fulfillment, better balance—or a different process for accomplishing their desires. Whatever the individual reason, it all starts with a stirring of motivation within the coachee.

Part I explains what the coach brings to this interaction and shows what the process looks like from a co-active perspective. In this part of the book, we outline the elements and convey a sense of how they fit together in a comprehensive model. In later chapters, we expand on these major components to provide more depth and offer examples from coaching conversations.

In these first two chapters, you will also see how the fundamentals of co-active coaching apply to those informal conversations at work and

even at home. While it's true that not every conversation we have with another person fits the definition of a co-active conversation opportunity, the awareness of these fundamentals provides insight into those conversations. Sometimes what first appears as a mundane—even trivial—exchange taps into something much more important, deeper, with meaning that wasn't anticipated by either party.

No doubt at some time in your life you've experienced this. The direction of a conversation becomes suddenly more personal, vulnerable perhaps, definitely not planned. By understanding the fundamentals of co-active coaching, you will be better prepared to see the opportunity in these situations and engage more effectively—not as a counselor or problem solver, but in a co-active way that courageously enters the conversation more as a companion on an unexpected journey. In a way, that describes the fundamental nature of every coaching conversation: being present in the moment, open to what shows up, even if we started with a plan.

There is a subtext to every conversation. That subtext is made up of assumptions, expectations, and unspoken agreements. It's also made up of relationship qualities that include individual status, values, and beliefs—all melding together in a conversation that may be about something very ordinary. It's easy to ignore the subtext in favor of focusing on the conversation on the surface; we're more familiar with that option and it's more comfortable, but it can miss the opportunity for a deeper conversation. It is that deeper conversation that builds relationship, trust, and empowered results. An understanding of the co-active model and its fundamentals will help equip you to have more awareness, and it will allow you to bring a wider range of competence to any conversation.

These first two chapters will give you, either as coach or in your leadership role, insight into dimensions of the conversation that are not so visible but have enormous impact on results and the ongoing relationship.

The Co-Active Model

The term *co-active* refers to the fundamental nature of a coaching relationship in which the coach and coachee are active collaborators. In co-active coaching, this is a relationship—in fact an alliance—between two equals for the purpose of meeting the coachee’s needs. The term itself brings together the essential human qualities of being and doing:

- Who we are
- Who we are in relationship
- Who we are being and want to be
- How we are actively creating
- What we are doing—or in some cases *not* doing—to achieve the results we want in life and work

Coach and coachee are in this together, “co-operating” as coachees take action.

Four Cornerstones

The four cornerstones represent the fundamental beliefs of a co-active way of being in relationship and conversation at the deepest level. We take a stand for these as essential to the impact that is possible in coaching and any coach-like conversation. The co-active coaching model rests on these four declarations. They form a container that holds the co-active conversation. In fact, the cornerstones make it possible to have a truly

co-active conversation. In order for engaged and empowered relationship to exist—the “co” in co-active—and in order for life-giving action on the part of the coachee to manifest, these four create the necessary structure.

People are Naturally Creative, Resourceful, and Whole

We start with this assertion: people are, by their very nature, naturally creative, resourceful, and whole. They are capable: capable of finding answers, capable of choosing, capable of taking action, capable of recovering when things don't go as planned, and, especially, capable of learning. This capacity is wired into all human beings no matter their circumstances. In the co-active model, it is more than a belief; it is a stand we take.

The alternative is a belief that people are fragile and dependent. With that belief, the coach's job would be to guide the coachee to the safest possible outcome. You can feel the difference. When we take a stand for other people's natural creativity and resourcefulness, we become champions on their behalf, not worried hand holders. As coaches, when we assume that others are resourceful and creative, we become curious and open to possibilities. We enter into a process of discovering with the coachee, not dictating. We expect to be amazed.

The key here is *naturally*. Yes, of course there are times when the circumstances feel overwhelming, when even the most resilient human beings feel that the mountain is too high, the road to cross too wide, the effort simply not in their power. Circumstances and that inner sabotaging voice that says “Why bother?” or “You don't have what it takes” can leave anyone feeling much less than creative or resourceful, and just a fraction of whatever whole is. On those days more perhaps than on any others, it is our place as coaches, our gift to see the true, natural selves who were and are still capable. We remind them of their own inner light and help them find it again—because it is there. Naturally.

Focus on the Whole Person

For people who want to be helpful, including most new coaches or people in a coaching role, the question that's often foremost on their minds is “What's the problem to solve?” It's a question that comes from the best of intentions: a desire to understand and provide valuable assistance so that

a troublesome problem can be handled quickly and efficiently. There is urgency in the air, and we want to be helpful.

Leaders and managers—even those who truly value coaching as an essential and valuable contribution to their role—still easily fall into this trap. Under enormous pressure to get results and get results *now*, the first task they take on is to identify the problem to be solved. This urge is perfectly understandable, and of course solving problems is important. But leaders manage people, not just problems. Developing talent and creating a more resourceful and effective organization creates sustainable results, long after the presenting problem is solved. Even under organizational stress, this whole-person mind-set sees opportunity not to be overlooked.

When a coach is sitting across from a coachee (even by telephone), the coach is not sitting across from a problem to be solved; the coach is sitting across from a person. This person does have a problem to solve—a change to make, a dream to fulfill, a task to accomplish, a goal to reach. All of that is true. But this person is more than the problem at hand—or the goal, the dream, the task. This is a whole person: heart, mind, body, and spirit. And this issue, whatever it is, is not neatly isolated. It is inexorably entwined in the coachee's whole life.

Maybe the word *focus* is a little misleading. This cornerstone is certainly not a hard, tight, concentrated focus on the whole person. It is more of a soft or broad focus, an attentive focus that includes the whole person and the whole life, listening on many levels. Too often in our eagerness to be helpful we access only the place between our ears. We use the mind to probe and understand and then create logical, pragmatic solutions.

Analysis and logic are worthy and useful attributes, but they are not the whole story. Sometimes a “correct” solution can have emotional consequences that are just as important; sometimes what the mind says yes to, the spirit feels at a loss with. We are not suggesting that a coach should be focusing on coaching heart, mind, body, and spirit as independent elements, but a coach or anyone in a co-active conversation ought to be tuned in to the influences that are present in these different dimensions.

It was not so many years ago that talking about emotions was taboo, especially in the workplace. Today, courses in developing mastery in emotional intelligence are commonplace, thanks to the groundbreaking work of Daniel Goleman. In a similar way, awareness of body language

and the exceptional work of somatic practitioners has paved the way to a much better and more widespread conversation about the role of body in communication.

Surely the most sensitive of these dimensions is spirit. *Spirit* is the most elusive term to define, coming by many different names and different expressions, but it is present with every human being. In coaching, *spirit* is not limited to a form of spirituality and certainly not to a religion. But there is a spirit dimension that influences human choices. At the core, it includes the sense of living according to values, or a calling, or a power greater than ourselves. Sometimes it is intuition, a feeling in our gut, and sometimes it is a conviction that we know we must live by. It is a spirit dimension that transcends this one decision; in fact, we only know it is spirit because it feels transcendent.

Obviously, a focus on the whole person also means that as coaches we are aware of all the ways the issue or topic before us is interwoven in this person's life. There is a vast ecology of people and priorities that are interconnected with whatever is the current subject of conversation. It is also entirely possible for the coach and coachee to limit the conversation to a single, narrow subject while at the same time having an antenna for the possibility of connecting this single issue to a broader or deeper conversation. The ability to take the conversation into any area that the coachee finds compelling doesn't mean the coach insists on declaring the destination and going there. Again, the key is increased awareness, because no topic exists in isolation. A decision in one area of life inevitably ripples through all areas of life. An exciting career move may be very fulfilling—and it may affect health, family relationships, free time, and geography. A coach can work effectively with a coachee on a very narrow topic, but in the co-active way there is a larger picture also at play, and that is the whole person.

Dance in This Moment

A conversation is a powerful and dynamic interchange between people. It's natural to pay attention to the content of the conversation—the words, the positions, the ideas—that's often what is most “visible” and easiest to respond to. And yet, as important as the words and content are, there is much more going on in every moment. Every conversation creates tone,

mood, nuance. There is as much information, sometimes more in *how* the words are said versus the words chosen; sometimes there is more information in what is *not* said than what is said.

For the coach this becomes an exercise in listening intently at many levels, and of course, choosing when and how to respond, to intervene. The information about what to say or ask does not come from a script. It comes in the moment, in *THIS* moment, and then the next moment. To “dance in this moment” is to be very present to what is happening right now and respond to that stimulus, not to a master plan.

To “dance” is to respond from a co-active core meaning both “co” as in collaborative, and active, moving the dance forward. In a truly co-active conversation there are moments when the coach leads the dance, moments when the coachee leads the dance, and moments when it is not clear at all who is leading and who is following.

All three states of the dance are natural; the third, the point where it seems to lose leader/follower designation, is a rare state of connection. It is a place of tuned in to each other and a place, frankly, of vulnerability—a willingness, built on extraordinary trust, to go with the flow of the conversation. It does feel like an exquisite dance to the music, both partners in tune with the tempo, tone, and steps. This agility is all for the sake of the coachee’s learning and discovery.

Evoke Transformation

Coach and coachee meet in this co-active conversation for a common purpose: the coachee’s full life. The topic of the coaching will likely be something quite specific—a fraction of the coachee’s life that the coachee is focused on. But if we follow that leaf to the branch and move from the branch to the trunk of the tree and its roots, there is always a deeper connection possible. The goal of the coaching in one session might be clarity and action around a project. The motivation for the coaching could be a new job or promotion, improved fitness, or execution on a business plan. In fact, coachees may have their attention only on the specific goal for that specific topic. The coach, on the other hand, sees the tree and the larger, fully connected life. Coaches in this model hold a vision that sees the topic as an expression of something even more valuable to the coachee. This action at hand is the means to a higher

end; it should lead to a life fully lived in whatever area the coachee finds important.

There is a yearning for the very best, the full potential that the coachee can experience. And when that connection ignites between today's goal and life's potential, it is transformative. Now the report, or the job interview, or the 5K race are more than a checked box on a to-do list. They are expressions of inner conviction. The accomplishment is a message about who the coachee can be. There is a shift from the satisfaction of "ahh" to the breakthrough awareness of "aha"—a new strength, a renewed capacity—like finding muscles they didn't know they had or had forgotten they had.

And part of that "aha"—the deeper awareness—is the knowledge that the coachees have an expanded capacity to reach their potential. What they learned from this one experience they naturally apply in others.

This is why we boldly take a stand for evoking transformation as a cornerstone of this co-active model. We see this as a yearning on the part of coaches for all that is possible for coachees, including learning or recovering the inner strength and resourcefulness to evolve, grow, expand from this one area of focus into many avenues of life. Coaches play a key role, by holding a vision of what is possible and by their commitment to transformative experience. Coachees still choose the topic, the action, and the results they want. But by taking a stand for the greatest possible impact from even the smallest action, coaches encourage—and ultimately evoke—transformation.

You don't need to be a professional coach to see how these four cornerstones apply to almost any important conversation. Think about a conversation you recently had at work with a colleague or a conversation you've had with a son or daughter. No doubt you were busy focusing on resolving a particular issue. But think again, with the advantage of hindsight, how the conversation might have turned if you were conscious of the four cornerstones.

How does the quality of the conversation change when you start with a belief that your coworker, son, or daughter is naturally creative, resourceful, and whole? Capable? It's possible the conversation might change from giving advice to being curious: asking more questions and inviting the resourcefulness of that other person. Think about how your awareness shifts when you see the connection between what might seem

like ordinary daily business and how this one issue is interconnected with that person's life in ways you probably won't ever know. Those ripples may not be visible in the moment, but they are real.

The ability to dance with whatever shows up is certainly a leadership competency; in today's world of business, great agility is essential. Without necessarily having a name for it, effective leaders display that quality in their work with others every day. Even the fourth cornerstone, "Evoke Transformation," can be a resonant field in which the conversation takes place. That brief conversation has the potential to affirm that colleague, son, or daughter in ways that reverberate long after the presenting issue has been handled.

Of course, this awareness of the depth that is possible by understanding the four cornerstones is not a suggestion that every conversation is meant to be a formal coaching conversation; you will often leave your coach's hat on the rack. Your children, spouse, and employees will be grateful if you do. The central point is to raise your awareness so you can be more effective in any of those roles simply by appreciating the possibilities in any conversation.

The Heart of the Model

From the perspective of a trained coach working with a coachee, we start with a clear commitment: the ongoing relationship between coach and coachee exists only to address the goals of the coachee. So naturally, the coachee's life is the focus at the center of the diagram in figure 1.

There are two ways to think about this. One way is to see the action of the day as part of the big picture for the coachee's life. People make dozens, even hundreds, of decisions every day to do or not do certain things. The choices we make during the day, no matter how trivial they may seem, contribute to creating a life that is more (or less) fulfilling. The decisions we make move us toward or away from better balance in our lives. The choices contribute to a more effective life process or to a process that is less effective. And so at one level, the coachee's action is always wrapped in these three core principles—fulfillment, balance, and process—which we will explore in more depth shortly. They are principles because they are fundamental to the liveliness of life. In the same way that oxygen, fuel,

and heat are necessary for fire, these three principles combine to create an ignited life—perhaps “Life” with a capital “L.”

The second way is to look at the specific issues the coachee chooses to work with during the coaching sessions. Coachees bring all sorts of agenda items to their coaching. This issue of the day, or week, or month is about life today with an everyday “I” for “life.” Yet, whatever the specific issue, there is a way to link it to the larger, more fulfilling Life—a link to Life-giving balance or better process.

Fulfillment

The coachee’s definition of fulfillment is always intensely personal. It may include, especially at first, outward measures of success: a great job or promotion, enough money, a certain lifestyle or personal accomplishment. Eventually, the coaching will progress to a deeper definition of fulfillment. It’s not about having more. It’s not about what fills the coachee’s pockets or closets; it’s about what fills the coachee’s heart and soul.

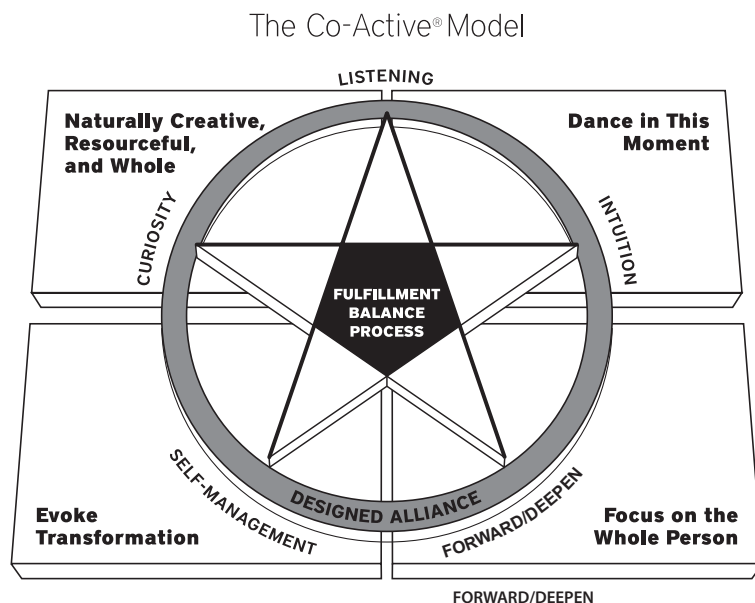


FIGURE 1 The Co-Active Coaching Model

A fulfilling life is a valued life, and coachees will have their own definitions of what they truly value. If they value risk taking, is there enough adventure in their lives? If they value family, are they shortchanging themselves by caving in to the demands of work? What are the personal values they want present in their work? Sorting out values is a way of sorting out life choices, because when the choices reflect the coachee's values, life is more satisfying and often feels effortless. Achieving a certain goal can be very fulfilling—especially as a benchmark—but most coachees find that fulfillment is not the finish line. At its deepest level, fulfillment is about finding and experiencing a life of purpose and service. It is about reaching one's full potential.

Balance

With so many responsibilities and distractions, and at today's high-speed rate of change, balance may feel like an impossible dream. It's especially elusive for most of the people who come to coaching. They tend to be dissatisfied with functioning at some minimum standard of being alive; they want more from life and want to give more back. They can be passionate about the things that matter to them, focused in their commitment, and so intense that sometimes one corner of their lives is a model of excellence while the rest is in ruins. They understand the value of balance and have probably made attempts to achieve it—with good intentions to exercise more, take time off, or reconnect with friends—and found that weeks or months passed without any change. Life is out of balance.

People often seem resigned to being out of balance, as if that's just the way life is. That's the "real world." There's only one way of looking at it, and it looks bad. Coaching for balance, however, focuses on widening the range of perspectives and, therefore, adding more choices. Ultimately, balance is about making choices: saying yes to some things and no to others. This can be challenging. Coachees often want to say yes to more in their lives without making room for it by saying no to something else. This impulse leads to an overwhelmed feeling—and lives that are out of balance.

Balance is a fluid state because life itself is dynamic. Therefore, it makes more sense to look at whether coachees are moving toward balance

or away from balance rather than to offer them “balance” as a goal to be achieved. Like the seasons of the year, balance is best viewed over the long haul. It is also a perennial issue, one that coaches will see, in some form or another, many times over in the course of a coaching relationship.

Process

We are always in process. Sometimes it looks frantic; sometimes it looks graceful. Because coaching is effective at achieving results, both coachees and coaches can get drawn into the “results” trap—focusing entirely on the destination and losing sight of the flow of the journey. In fact, process is often compared to a river. As life flows, there will be fast periods of onrushing, white-water progress as well as days of calm, steady currents. But there will also be times of drifting, being stuck in job eddies and relationship whirlpools and backsliding into treacherous swamps. There will be flooding and drought.

The coach’s job is to notice, point out, and be with coachees wherever they are in their process. The coach is there to encourage and support, provide companionship around the rocks, and escort coachees through the dark waters as well as to celebrate their skill and success at navigating the difficult passages. Coaching allows coachees to live more fully in a deeper relationship with all aspects of their lives.

Co-active coaching therefore embraces this whole picture of the coachee: fulfillment, balance, and process. These are the core principles at the heart of the coaching model. Together they create the heat and light of a Life that is fully alive.

Designed Alliance for an Empowered Coaching Environment

With the coachee in the center of the co-active coaching model (see figure 1, p. 10), we encircle the coachee and the coachee’s agenda; we name this protective circle the designed alliance. In co-active coaching, power is granted to the coaching relationship, not to the coach. Coachee and coach work together to design an effective working relationship that meets the coachee’s needs. In fact, coachees play an important role in declaring

how they want to be coached. They are involved in creating a powerful relationship that fits their working and learning styles. The relationship is tailored to the communication approach that works best for them. The process of designing the alliance is a model of the mutual responsibility of coachee and coach. Coachees learn that they are in control of the relationship and, ultimately, of the changes they make in their lives.

The Five Contexts

Visually, the coaching model illustrated in figure 1 represents a five-pointed star. Each point of the star is a context that the coach brings to the coaching. Each is a point of contact with the coachee. The coach consistently draws from these contexts in the practice of coaching. In time, and through training, the coach develops these abilities the way a musician develops musical technique. The five contexts are always in play. We present them in one order here in the book, but they are a constellation, not a sequence—essential elements of a complete coaching approach, like five spotlights that are always shining, illuminating the coachee's life.

Listening

Of course, the coach listens to the words that come from the coachee, tracking the content of the coaching conversation. But the most important listening of coaching takes place on a deeper level. It is the listening for the meaning behind the story, for the underlying process, for the theme that will deepen the learning. The coach is listening for the appearance of the coachee's vision, values, and purpose. The coach is also listening for resistance, fear, backtracking, and the voice of the saboteur, who is there to object to change, point out the coachee's shortcomings, and bring up all the reasons why this idea, whatever it is, won't work.

The coach listens at many levels simultaneously to hear where coachees are in their process, to hear where they are out of balance, and to hear their progress on the journey of fulfillment. The coach is listening for the nuance of hesitation, too, for the sour ring of something not quite true. (In chapter 3, we look in depth at three levels of listening.)

Intuition

By listening below the surface, the coach finds the place where the hard data and soft data merge. Intuition is a kind of knowing that resides in the background and is often unspoken. It remains in the background because, for many people, it's not easy to trust. Our culture doesn't validate intuition as a reliable means of drawing conclusions or making decisions, so we hesitate to say what our intuition tells us. We hold back because we don't want to appear foolish. And yet it is one of the most powerful gifts a coach brings to coaching.

As coaches, we receive a great deal of information from the coachee and then, in the moment of coaching, combine it with previous information as well as experience, not only of coaching but also of operating in the world. Add to this one more factor: information that comes from our intuition. We may not call it *intuition*. We may consider it a thought, or a hunch, or a gut feeling. Regardless of how we define it, the impulse emerges from our intuition. For most coaches, intuition is a skill that needs practice and development. It is enormously valuable because, time and again, it synthesizes more impressions and information than we could ever analyze consciously.

Curiosity

One of the fundamental tenets of co-active coaching is that coachees are capable and resourceful and have the answers. The coach's job is to ask the questions, to lead the discovery process. The context of curiosity gives a certain frame to the process of uncovering answers and drawing out insight. Curiosity is open, inviting, spacious, almost playful. And yet it is also enormously powerful. Like scientific curiosity, which explores the deepest questions of matter, life, and the universe, curiosity in coaching allows coach and coachee to enter the deepest areas of the coachee's life, side by side, simply looking, curious about what they will find.

Because the coach is not an inquisitor but is really on the coachee's side in this exploration, the coach can ask powerful questions that break through old defenses. When coachees learn to be curious about their lives, it reduces some of the pressure and lowers the risk. They become

more willing to look in the dark places and try the hard things because they are curious, too.

Forward and Deepen

The two products of the work the coachee and coach do together—action and learning—combine to create change. Because the notion of action that moves the coachee forward is so central to the purpose of coaching, we often say that one of the purposes of coaching is to “forward the action” of the coachee.

The other force at work in the human change process is learning. Learning is not simply a byproduct of action; it is an equal and complementary force. Learning generates new resourcefulness, expanded possibilities, and stronger muscles for change.

One of the common misunderstandings about coaching is that it is simply about getting things done: performing at a higher level. Because of this misunderstanding, coaching has been compared to hiring a nagging parent who will make sure your bed is made and your homework is done. In some organizations, it's the image of a schoolteacher with a ruler, poised to measure your failure and provide the punishment. But coaching is not just about getting things done; it is just as importantly about continuing to learn, especially to learn how the action is or is not contributing to the core principles. This connection between action and learning and the core principles is key. Gandhi is quoted as saying, “There is more to life than increasing its speed.” In the same way, there is more to life, at least in the co-active model, than increasing action.

Self-Management

In order to truly hold the coachee's agenda, the coach must get out of the way—not always an easy thing to do. Self-management is the coach's ability to set aside personal opinions, preferences, pride, defensiveness, and ego. The coach needs to be “over there” with the coachee, immersed in the coachee's situation and struggle, not “over here,” dealing with the coach's own thoughts, analysis, and judgments. Self-management means giving up the need to look good and be right; the light should be shining

on the coachee, not the coach. Self-management is about awareness of impact. In the course of a coaching relationship, coachees also learn about self-management in their own lives. They experience the modeling and develop their own awareness of impact insight.

The Coach's Role in the Model

The coach is a kind of change agent, entering the equation for change without knowing what the outcome will be. Goals and plans, new practices, new benchmarks, and achievements of every kind are all part of the coachee's ongoing work, facilitated by the coaching interaction. The coach is a catalyst, an important element in the process of accelerating change.

This is more than a passive role. We see coaching, especially the form presented here, as a role of service that requires commitment and presence on the part of the coach. Whether the coach is working with individual private coachees or has been hired to work with coachees inside an organization, a sense of purpose, even a higher purpose, is definitely an underlying element. In the world of co-active coaching, we would say that coaching exists to serve the coachee's higher purpose. When we aim for this higher purpose, we create the means for transformative change in coachees and, by extension, in families and organizations. The ripples of change in a coachee's higher purpose move out into the world.

To be present there, in that conversation, contributing to that change is enormously gratifying. It fulfills a sense of higher purpose in the coach's life. Making a difference—helping others to achieve their dreams and reach their potential—this is why coaches are drawn to this work.

The Co-Active Way: A Broader Application of the Model

While we have presented the co-active coaching model from the perspective of the trained coach in an intentionally designed coaching relationship, we have also described a broader application that applies to informal conversations that benefit enormously from the deeper awareness an understanding of co-active coaching brings. As a manager working with an employee about a pressing issue at hand, you are not likely to have your attention on that person's fulfilling life, life balance, or process in any

specific sense. Yet, at some level, your leadership intelligence will recognize those principles in the background even if your attention is on the details in the foreground. The most effective leaders see a whole person with potential, and they view the issue in the moment as an opportunity for development. The skills and awareness that you develop through this practice have the power to help you create new levels of empowered and effective relationships.

The Co-Active Coaching Relationship

Coaching is not so much a methodology as it is a relationship, a particular kind of relationship. Yes, there are skills to learn and a wide variety of tools available, but the real art of effective coaching comes from the coach's ability to work within the context of relationship. That's true for the professional coach in a structured coaching relationship, and it's just as true for the manager having a coaching conversation with a direct report. There will be significant differences in the form and circumstances of the conversation, but all coaching takes place in the context of intentional relationship.

Let's begin this topic of co-active relationship with how that looks for the professional coach. It starts with an awareness that every coachee is in a unique life and work situation, with unique goals and desire for change, unique abilities, unique interests, and even unique habits of self-sabotage. We can talk in very general terms about focus areas that coachees often pursue—career change, life transition, performance improvement, leadership in the workplace, health and wellness issues—but only in the broadest terms.

Add to this picture the fact that goals change over time as coachees clarify what is important, as they dig deeper into what motivates them, and as they take action and learn from the action they take. There is no “authorized universal coaching reference guide” with standardized diagnoses and

coaching solutions neatly defined. Coaching is inherently dynamic; that is one of the fundamental qualities of coaching and a reason for its power as a medium for change. Coaching is personal; coaching creates a unique, empowered relationship for change.

In co-active coaching, we also emphasize the peer relationship: that coach and coachee have equal, though different, roles. They are co-active in the relationship, so they are collaborators, working together for the benefit of the coachee.

We can picture this relationship as a triangle (see figure 2: The Coaching Power Triangle). The coach grants power to the coaching relationship. The coachee also grants power to the relationship, not to the coach. Coachees are in turn empowered by the relationship—empowered to take charge of their lives and the choices they make. In this figure, all the power of the relationship exists to serve the coachee. In fact, the co-active coach must make the shift from “I am powerful” to “the coaching relationship

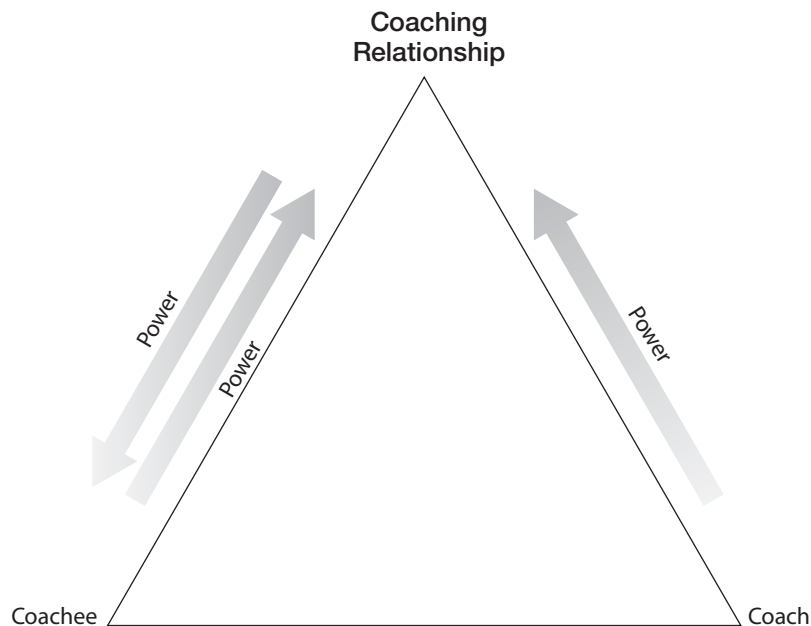


FIGURE 2 The Coaching Power Triangle

is powerful.” Powerful coaching is not about being a powerful coach; it is about the power the coachee experiences.

You can think of the coaching relationship as a recharging station where coachees tap into the source of energy they need in order to get over the hurdles in their lives. They can’t get the work done if the energy level is low. The power comes not directly from the coach, however, but from the relationship—the synergy of energy coachees bring in the form of desire and motivation, and the energy coaches bring in the form of their commitment, skills, and understanding of human change.

This energy and empowerment model takes on a third dimension when we shift to co-active coaching in the context of an informal—but still intentional—coaching relationship for team leaders, managers, and supervisors. (See figure 3: The Coaching Culture Pyramid.) Looking from the side at this model, the role of leader as coach and coachee are still visible; the important role of the organization is hidden but still provides essential structure and support, in this case, to both the leader and the coachee.

In this three-dimensional view of coaching in organizations, each of the three dimensions benefits. There is a solid base of empowerment that extends to coachee, coach, and ultimately the organization. In a coaching culture, the organization, the coach, and the coachee all grant power to



FIGURE 3 The Coaching Culture Pyramid

the relationships. When the dynamics of the relationship are empowered, coachee and coach both grow. As they grow, their capacity and ability to contribute also grows. The energy flows in three dimensions from this self-charging base of power built on a coaching commitment and what that gives relationships. It is also an image that reinforces the essential importance of the unique contributions of each role to the whole. In this case, the synergy is three-dimensional.

The Coaching Environment

At its most fundamental, a coaching interaction is a conversation between a coach and another person or—in team or relationship coaching—a coach and two or more people. But this is no ordinary, everyday conversation. An effective coaching conversation has a clear and powerful mandate that is about learning, change, and growth. This is about evoking transformation as we describe it in the four cornerstones. The presenting topic, the consideration of action, and the commitment and accountability that result are all part of the larger purpose. The environment in which the conversation takes place is crucial.

By *environment*, we mean both a physical environment and a relationship environment that is made up of ground rules, an understanding of expectations, and mutual agreements that support the coaching process. Most conversations take place in noisy environments—and that noise is more than the audible, high-decibel, cacophony in a busy environment. It includes distractions, priorities, emotions, deadlines, family matters . . . the list of noisemakers is endless. The goal for an effective coaching conversation is a relationship environment that is as clear and as quiet as possible, devoid of as much noise as can be eliminated.

In co-active coaching, we talk about two core characteristics of an effective coaching environment:

1. It is safe enough for coachees to take the risks they need to take.
2. It is a courageous place where coachees are able to approach their lives and the choices they make with motivation, creativity, and commitment.

By the way, *safe* does not necessarily mean *comfortable*. Significant change may be highly uncomfortable, and yet there are ways to ensure that the experience is safe. Like the rock climber ascending the cliff face, striving for the summit, coachees may find the process exhilarating, exhausting, and scary. But knowing that there is the equivalent of a belay team holding their rope and ensuring their safety gives them the confidence to keep climbing.

Certain qualities characterize an environment that is safe and courageous for coachees. When those conditions are in place, coachees are able to reach higher and go further because the trust and assurance that is built into the relationship is *more* than a safety net. It is a dynamic springboard of support that allows individuals to reach for what otherwise might seem unreachable. These essential environmental qualities give shape to what we have called the *container* for the coaching relationship.

Confidentiality

Making change means disturbing the familiar and well-established order of things. It may be deeply satisfying, even exciting to embark on that change, and yet it may still feel risky. Even if the coachee and the coachee's wider world of connections are completely committed to and supportive of the change, change by its nature is an unknown. If coachees are going to risk making significant change, they must be able to risk talking freely with their coach. Courageous disclosure is crucial because it leads to the discovery that is necessary for action. Without the safety and reassurance that confidentiality provides, the coaching will be tentative, and there will always be an undercurrent of wonder about what is possibly being withheld.

Coaches who work with coachees inside organizations have to deal with a more complex environment. Confidentiality between coach and coachee is still a key condition for safe and courageous conversation, but because the organization has a vested interest in the result, it usually requires some form of reporting on the coaching. Typically, it is the coachee who is the one who takes responsibility for reporting the nature of the coaching work; this allows the coachee to disclose what is most

relevant to the organization while preserving confidentiality between the coachee and the coach.

Trust

An agreement to hold the coaching conversation confidential is one key component in building trust. Trust is also built over time as both coachee and coach learn they can be counted on and the coachee learns that the relationship delivers results. Trust is built from small things like being punctual for coaching sessions and from a pattern of reliability. Because trust works both ways, it is as important for the coach as it is for the coachee. Coaches must be trustworthy in their actions.

Relationship is also built and trust expanded by coaches simply believing in their coachees. We live in a culture that, for the most part, demands that people prove themselves and demonstrate their worthiness by performing to some standard before they are accepted into the circle. The culture creates relationships in which the emphasis is on proving, explaining, and justifying. A coaching relationship built on the premise that coachees are naturally creative, resourceful, and whole and are capable of making the best choices is a relationship founded on basic trust in the coachee's capacity and integrity. Coachees see that they have a person in their lives who believes they can do what they say they can do, who believes they can be the people they say they want to be.

It is a paradox that coaches believe completely in their coachees and, at the same time, rigorously hold them accountable. But by *accountable* we do not mean a context of judgment, as in "prove it to me." Rather, as coaches we are simply asking coachees to account for their promise of action and the insight of learning. We ask, "How did it go?" and, "What did you learn?" Coachees see that the coach is really on their side, respecting their vision and their action plans but also willing to be honest and direct for their sake.

By creating a courageous container, coaches ensure that coachees feel safe enough to take risks, in fact to be vulnerable. With each act of vulnerability there is a little more breathing room built; a little more trust is added to the relationship. That additional trust makes the environment safer and allows coachees to be more courageous. When the environment

is right, it creates its own self-reinforcing system for vulnerability and growth.

Speaking the Truth

We could also call this attribute of a coaching environment “getting real.” A safe and courageous space for change must be, by definition, a place where the truth can be told. It is a place where coachees can tell the whole truth about what they have done, and not done, without becoming a worrying child to the coach as parent. The coaching environment is a place without judgment. It is a place where the coach expects the truth from the coachee because truth carries no consequence other than learning, discovery, and new insight.

Coachees expect the truth from the coach because that is the inherent promise in the coaching relationship. Coachees are often so close to their own situations, so wrapped up in their own histories and habitual patterns, that they are sometimes unable to see the truth accurately. This may be one of their reasons to seek out coaching. They rely on the coach for the acuity that sees through the chaos and fog. This should be one relationship in which coachees can count on straightforward and honest interactions.

Truth telling doesn't have to be confrontational, although it may confront. It can be handled with sharpness or softness, but it confronts the usual tacit acceptance of the coachee's explanations (or excuses). Truth telling refuses to sidestep or overlook: it boldly points out when the emperor is not wearing clothes. There is no inherent judgment in telling the truth. Coaches are merely stating what they see. Withholding the truth serves neither the coachee nor the coaching relationship.

A real relationship is not built on being nice; it's built on being real. Coaches can be careful . . . or they can care *fully* and commit to telling the truth as they see it. When the coach has the courage to tell the truth, the coachee gets a model of the art of being straight; in the process, more trust is built between coach and coachee.

Openness and Spaciousness

One of the qualities that make the coaching relationship work is spaciousness. This is a place where coachees can breathe, experiment, fantasize, and strategize without limitation. It is another world, a place of wide-eyed

dreams. It is a space in which they can vent their anger, troubles, spite, perceptions of injustice, and regrets. It is a place where failure is acknowledged as a means for learning, where curiosity and creativity replace rigid rules and historical absolutes.

For the coach, spaciousness also means complete detachment from any particular course of action or any results that coachees achieve. Coaches continue to care about their coachees (e.g., their agendas, their health, and their growth) but not the road they take to get there, the speed of travel, or the detours they might make along the way—as long as they continue to move toward the results they want. Ultimately, coaching is not about what the coach delivers but about what coachees create. A coach may propose a course of action to get the results a coachee desires. That is fine. Brainstorming is part of coaching and can make a valuable contribution to the coachee's process. But in order to preserve openness in the relationship, coaches must not be attached to whether coachees take their suggestions. The spaciousness of the relationship requires that coachees have many channels open to creative inspiration and not be restricted to the coach's good ideas, no matter how sound or grounded in experience. In this way, coachees are able to explore the widest range of possibilities.

The Designed Alliance

So far we've been talking about this relationship between coachee and coach as if it were conceptual. Actually, we believe it is important for coachee and coach to consciously and deliberately design their working relationship and continue to redesign it as necessary up through and including its completion of their work together. The designed alliance surrounds the coach and coachee in the co-active coaching model (see figure 1, p. 10) and represents the container within which coach and coachee do their work.

The form of the design will be different for different coaches and unique to each coach-coachee relationship. The conversation that creates the design focuses on the assumptions and expectations of coach and coachee. The purpose of this intentional conversation is to clarify the process and expected outcomes and provide a forum for negotiating the design of a relationship that is as powerful as possible for both coachee and coach.

In simplest terms, the design of the alliance looks at questions such as *What are the conditions that need to be in place for the two of us to work together effectively? What are the obstacles or potential obstacles? What fundamental questions need to be answered in order to get the most out of this process?* And as the coaching continues, there will be ongoing questions: *What is working and what is not? What do we need to change in order to make the coaching relationship more effective or have more impact?*

This first conversation about consciously creating an effective working relationship is just the beginning. Continuing to be open, to find new or more effective ways of working together, is an ongoing part of a co-active coaching relationship. In one way, the strength of a coachee's ability to make changes in his or her work and life is a measure of the strength in the coach-coachee relationship. And the strength of that relationship is measured by the commitment to an open, fearless, and continuous design of their alliance over time.

For leaders, managers, and supervisors, the “design” of the alliance will not be as structured, but the essence of the alliance is still important. It is certainly *not* “doing coaching” on team members or direct reports. The context for coaching in an informal organizational or leadership situation is a commitment to support and development. This commitment to development is the essence of the business case for coaching as a leadership and management competency. As a team leader you may not have a private, one-hour alignment and design of the alliance conversation with every team member. But coaching flourishes best in a culture where a coaching conversation is commonly practiced and understood for its contribution to helping everyone be more successful.

Coaching Format

Over the past decade, coaching as a practice and as a profession has taken root in a myriad of forms, and the variety of environments in which we find coaching and coaching skills being used continues to expand. Today you will find co-active coaches working from home offices and inside institutions and organizations. You will find co-active coaches coaching in prisons, hospitals, and corporate boardrooms. Some coaches work as employees within organizations, often with other job duties in addition

to coaching. Others combine coaching with consulting work in order to provide ongoing implementation support and follow-up.

Many coaches work with private, individual coachees. Some specialize in working with teams or people in relationship. Coaching today is global and cross-cultural. Coaches and coachees cover dozens of demographic categories: age, income, education, ethnic background, and job position. Many coaches specialize in a select interest or career area and focus on working with CEOs, immigrants or expatriates, artists and musicians, or parents and their teenagers.

The environment within which coaching takes place is equally varied. Many coaches work with coachees by telephone, with regularly scheduled, often weekly, appointments, although there are many variations. Some coaches and coachees prefer in-person coaching, whether at the coachee's site, at the coach's office, or off-site. Coaches may contract with coachees for a fixed period of time, such as three months, six months, or a year. Other coaches establish ongoing, open-ended relationships with coachees. Coaching takes place in paneled boardrooms, inner-city homes, and mountain retreats.

Within that framework, coaches bring their coaching training and experience and a wide variety of tools and means of assessment. The permutations of forms and environments continue, inspired by the imagination of coaches and the interests of coachees. And yet, no matter what form the coaching takes, we believe that it will be most effective when coach and coachee create a safe and courageous space for the work, when they construct a shared understanding and alignment on the purpose and value of coaching, and, especially, when they consciously design their working alliance.

Getting Started

Coaches typically begin a working relationship with an initial process that is part coachee orientation and part self-discovery work for coachees. This foundation-setting process familiarizes coachees with the coaching process, provides an opportunity to design the alliance, and begins the work of clarifying coachee issues and goals. There is no standardized form for this. With some coaches, it is a brief interview or a page or two of basic

questions, all handled in the initial coaching session. Other coaches might use several sessions, assessments of various kinds, and interviews with the coachee's coworkers, direct reports, or family members. Alternately, this discovery process might be done as visioning work at an off-site location.

In this initial work, coachees learn what to expect from coaching. It is also a time for them to clarify where they are, where they're headed, the strengths they will use to get there, and the obstacles that often interfere.

The coach typically covers these four areas:

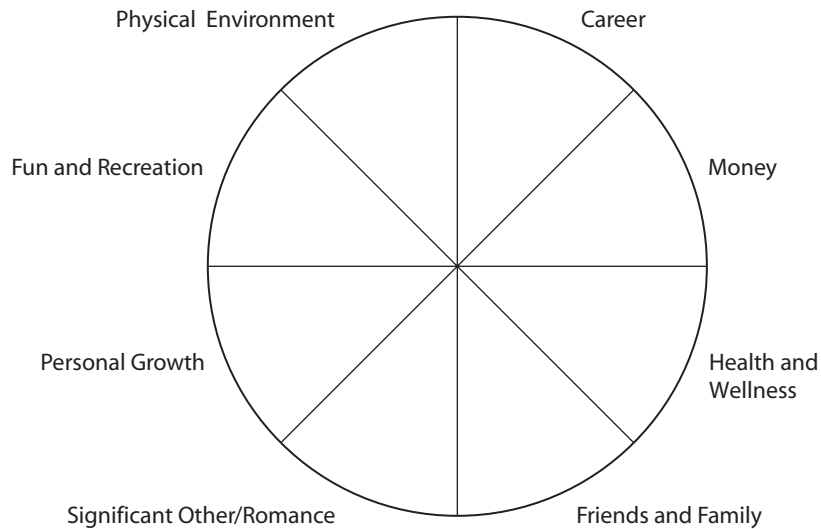
- Logistics
- You are here. Where is here?
- Designing the future
- Orientation to coaching

Logistics

One of the first, obvious elements in getting started is communication and agreement on fundamental ground rules and administrative procedures. Settling such details as appointment schedules, cancellation policy, and payment arrangements (when appropriate) is part of getting under way, but it is also key in creating relationship. Coachees will begin to set expectations of their coach and the coaching process based on the coach's handling of these administrative procedures. How coaches handle the details, especially in the area of getting agreement, sets a tone and creates a particular environment.

You Are Here. Where Is Here?

This discovery phase focuses on where coachees are today and how they got there. It's a conversation about where they are and the issues at hand, what is at stake, what moves them, what blocks them. The conversation might address such issues as life purpose or mission, values, principles, or personal beliefs. Often, the coach will make an overall assessment of satisfaction in the significant areas of the coachee's life using a tool like the Wheel of Life (see figure 4) or a version of the wheel created specifically for a coachee's situation. (See the Co-Active Online Toolkit [coactive.com/toolkit] for more information on using this and other tools for discovery.)

**FIGURE 4** The Wheel of Life

Coachees and coach might talk about previous disappointments and successes in order to get an idea of what does and doesn't work, where coachees are fulfilled, and the strategies they use to handle obstacles and derailment. In this phase, coachee and coach are beginning the process of really getting to know this person, the coachee, from the inside out: the bright places, the dark places, the effective places, and the not-so-effective places.

The coach may use assessment tools or exercises, but at the heart of the discovery process are answers to simple, powerful questions: *Where do you want to make a difference in your life? What do you value most in your relationship with others? What works for you when you are successful at making changes? Where do you usually get stuck? What motivates you? How do you deal with disappointment or failure? How are you about doing what you say you'll do?*

The answers also point very clearly to the design of the most effective coaching relationship. For example, the question *Where do you usually get stuck?* leads to a logical next question, *How would you like me to respond as your coach when you're stuck?* In that exchange, coachees experience and contribute to the design of the alliance.

Designing the Future

A third area of this initial work involves the outcomes and desires coachees bring to coaching. Here the focus is on having coachees describe what they want to change or what they want to achieve. Most coachees have one or two primary areas of focus. Chances of success are better when coachees concentrate on one or two key points of change, so part of the foundation-setting conversation is designed to clarify those key areas. These future outcomes will be the result of achieving goals, fulfilling commitments, changing habits, and bringing a compelling vision to life. The initial conversation also explores who the coachee will be in order to create that new future.

Desired Outcome and Goals

Coachees bring a desire for change to coaching. The results they have in mind may be vaguely defined or crystal clear, but in either case, coachees have not yet been able to achieve the results they want. Desired outcomes may be as specific as a particular goal, or coachees may want to move toward a certain state of being, such as “balanced,” “living well with a life-threatening illness,” or “more fulfilled with my work.”

Part of the initial process will be devoted to clarifying outcomes and, in many cases, refining broadly stated desires into specific goals: What will happen? By when? And how will coachees know they have achieved the results they want? Coach and coachee work together to clarify the goals as well as develop strategies for achieving them. Just as important to achieving results is putting new practices in place. Eliminating life-draining habits while implementing sustaining, life-giving practices is another important focus of the coaching process.

Compelling Vision

We can be pushed down the road by deadlines and expectations and to-do lists. We can be driven by the desire for money or accomplishment or by the promises we make. Or we can be pulled down the road by the gravitational force of a compelling vision, like water running downhill. You can feel the difference between these two forces: pushed or driven on one hand, or pulled irresistibly on the other. Discovering what draws

us has the power to overcome the bonds of lethargy and fear. Finding the compelling vision can take any goal, action, or outcome and invest it with new power. An important element in the initial discovery work with coachees is uncovering or igniting this vision.

Who You Need to Be

The classic definition of *crazy* is to continue to do things the same way and expect different results. The truth is, if nothing changes, nothing changes. Very often, something new on the outside, like a new outcome, includes the creation of something new on the inside. In order to achieve the results they want, coachees very likely will need to change attitudes, paradigms, or underlying beliefs. The beginning of a new coaching relationship is an ideal time to peel back the accumulated layers of identity and old roles to uncover the authentic person within.

Orientation to Coaching

Another outcome for the foundation-setting process is to orient the coachee to coaching. Even coachees who have worked with a coach before could use the opportunity to talk through assumptions and concerns and openly share expectations of coaching and each other. In this way both coach and coachee take a stand on behalf of the coaching relationship. A clear, forthright conversation helps reinforce frank, unrestrained, and hence co-active groundwork.

Homeostasis

Part of the orientation to coaching ought to include a few words about homeostasis, a natural, often subconscious resistance to change. “Old habits die hard,” as the saying goes. So do old beliefs and old ways of relating to others. Particularly in the middle of change, when the old way is undone and the new way is not yet embedded, there is a strong pull back to the familiar, the known, even if it didn’t get coachees the results they wanted.

Change requires the expenditure of energy, and continuing the process of change requires sustaining energy. Some change will be easy; other

change will not be so easy. There will often be a tendency, or a temptation at least, to backslide. It's better for coachees to be aware and prepared, so that if the temptation appears, it does not feel like they are failing. Homeostasis, the natural tendency to keep things just as they are, is also inherent in the system.

Every individual, whether a private coachee or an organizational coachee, lives within a system, and the system itself often contributes to the resistance to change. Those surrounding the coachee may not want change; perhaps they weren't consulted about it and yet will be affected. Again, an awareness of the system's gripping power to hold on to things the way they are can help coachees as they move through changes.

The Neuroscience of Coaching

The impact of coaching shows up in change—that's the clearest evidence that coaching works. We see new behavior. To the outward and visible change, over the last few years there has been a growing understanding of what happens internally in mind-set, attitude and process that supports change in a coaching relationship. There is solid science behind why coaching works.

Coaching activates the imagination and enlists the power of curiosity. The neuroscience research reinforces what coaches have known from experience: where the attention goes, energy flows. And that energy is generative. It actually creates new neural pathways—new attitudes, new beliefs, new expectations, and, over time, new results that are sustainable because they are built on those neural pathways.

Coaching creates bonding, deepening trust and commitment through relationship. Coachees are empowered by that interaction—especially in the co-active way because it is designed to be an empowering relationship for change. The brain chemistry reinforces the impact that caring relationship creates.

Neuroscience examines the interrelationship between the two hemispheres of the brain—the interaction of creativity and cognition—both are necessary for an effective coaching outcome: a combination of clear plans and proactive imagination. Transformative coaching is the natural, very human result of thoughtful consideration and emotional stirring and commitment.

There is much more to the science than we have room for here, but it is a fascinating and emerging field that confirms experience and provides insight into the power of change.¹

The Bigger Picture

In order for coaching to work, there must be commitment on the part of the coachee to exploring, changing, learning, taking risks, persevering even when it is difficult, and investing the time and energy. Coachees must be willing to go beyond their comfort zones and step into the unknown for the sake of change. Without this commitment, coaching drifts and devolves into chitchat or to-do lists that often don't get done. Fortunately, most coachees are energized and willing when they start. This is the perfect time for coachees to clarify and declare their commitment.

Coaches, in turn, need to be clear about their commitment to their coachees. It is a commitment to dig deeply and courageously, to listen intently to the words spoken and those unspoken. Coaching with this level of commitment can be exciting and inspiring. It will not be trivial. The coach who is committed to coachees and their ultimate goals is willing to challenge, incite, motivate, encourage, and sometimes insist that coachees take charge. This is the cornerstone of evoking transformation in action.

When coaches bring 100 percent of their effort and expertise and match the coachee's commitment with their own, it makes theirs a truly co-active relationship. This mutual commitment and the designed alliance between coachee and coach create the safe and courageous space in which coachees can do the important work of their lives.

A Co-Active Way for Leaders

As we said at the beginning of this chapter, the coaching form will look different if you are practicing coaching concepts and tools as a team leader, manager, or supervisor. The form of the relationship will be less structured and more informal. The topic of the coaching conversation will arise naturally from the business and work at hand. The subject will

¹ For more information about neuroscience and coaching, check out these sites: beabovetheleadership.com and neuroscienceforcoaches.com.

still be very important, but it will more likely be focused on short-term outcomes than on long-term personal goals.

There is a clear business purpose for coaching. It goes way beyond resolving the presenting issue, and it includes the development of employees, particularly leaders, managers, and supervisors. Each coaching conversation, whether formal or informal, benefits both coachee and coach, and as we saw in the pyramid (figure 3), it benefits the organization as well.

In fact, in an organizational setting, the ultimate benefit is the creation of a co-active culture that permeates and empowers all relationships. Not every conversation is an opportunity to coach, but every conversation is an opportunity to experience the power of being held in a co-active relationship. The culture becomes an environment that is safe and courageous—a container where there is a clear expectation of openness, trust, and support for all people to reach higher.

There is a way to create that culture and to engage in powerful coaching interaction for coach and coachee. In part 2 we provide the contexts that define the co-active way in action. In the next five chapters, we address the question *How do we do that?*

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