

The Coaching Practice

Alan's career as a coach started ten years ago, long before the current enthusiastic recognition of coaching as an important business and personal discipline.

Alan brings to coaching more than thirty years of unusually varied life experience — as a Vietnam veteran, an antiwar activist, a political and community organizer, and a highly regarded author and lecturer to the dental profession. Those life experiences became the building blocks for his work as a coach.

Alan's pamphlet on the essentials of an effective staff meeting is now in its second edition and widely adopted in business settings—most recently by a department of the Food and Drug Administration. It grew out of his twice-weekly meetings with his entire staff, which actively created a system for building relationships that has been key to the growth of his dental practice. The dramatic effectiveness of this work led Alan into a rigorous study of coaching as a profession, and his eventual certification.

This intense commitment to the teaching of successful business and interpersonal techniques, as well as his long community and political activism, have made Alan a leader in the designing and facilitating of group leadership and team development programs.

What is “Coaching” — And Do I Really Need It?

Something is awry. At some level one feels incomplete. As vague as it is disquieting, this incompleteness is frequently without a rational foundation. The measures of success — money, things, and even relationships — are often there. Still, something is missing.

Coaching is right for you if you are looking for someone to help you be who you are — to strip away the impediments and blockages between you and a more fulfilling life. Coaching is an experience you seek out because you — or your organization — want to become more competent at an activity you value. It is driven by results you can verify and that are considered excellent by any reasonable viewer — results as recognizable as a checkmate in chess or a home run in baseball.

Coaching is rigorous and systematic. Your coach will help you fashion a language and a set of practices for changing how you function in your world. By stimulating and augmenting your energy and intent, your coach will guide you to become an excellent performer over the long term, in ways that are both self-correcting and self-generating. As partners, you will navigate your future growth and development, especially in the area where you want to improve.

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

The science of coaching relies on five principles, as established by James Flaherty in the seminal book, *COACHING: Evoking Excellence in Others*.

- Relationship is the cornerstone. Coach and client must share, and monitor, your commitment to improve your performance.
- Coaching is pragmatic. Your coach uses constant feedback to measure progress toward the outcomes you've agreed upon.
- There are two tracks to coaching, yours and your coach's. By constantly monitoring both tracks, you and your coach are able to avoid rigid proscriptions and make crucial, intelligent adjustments. Breakdowns can occur in your commitment or competence — or your coach's. Learning needs to take place for both of you simultaneously. A coach is not a “life” expert and there are no “right” answers, only questions that reveal new possibilities.
- When you begin to work with a coach, it is always true that you are already in the middle of something — commitments, projects, concerns. Coaching acknowledges this starting point and the context it creates for your work together.
- Your coach is not a mechanic, nor is the client a machine. At all times, the coach's heart, intellect, and creativity must be engaged to the fullest.

THE COACHING PROCESS

Although it rarely unfolds in the simple, one-way direction outlined here, the following provides a good snapshot of the building blocks of coaching.

Opening

An opening, or opportunity, has to occur for coaching. This might be work-related (e.g., a performance review) or personal (e.g., a health or family crisis), but it is something that is challenging your status quo.

Relationship

Your coach needs to establish a committed, open, and fair relationship with you. The cornerstones need to be mutual trust, mutual respect, and freedom of expression. This doesn't mean "becoming a good listener" but actually being a good listener. The commitment and intention of the coach is the difference.

Assessment

Your coach uses several different assessment models to understand your level of competence, the structures you use to interpret the world, and the set of relationships, projects, and practices that comprise your life today.

Enrollment

This is the point at which you and your coach are both ready to commit explicitly to specific outcomes. At this stage, dialogue between you needs to be open and active, exploring both the possibilities and the potential breakdowns that might occur.

Coaching Conversations

Coaching begins. There are several levels to coaching interventions, ranging from a single session to a complex series of sessions and practice exercises.

Essentially, your coach's job is to provide you with new language and practices. These will (1) help you alter the way you interpret the world and (2) allow you to examine action in light of intention, which will give you both the freedom and the structure to bring about new outcomes.