

The History of Coaching and the Need for Accreditation

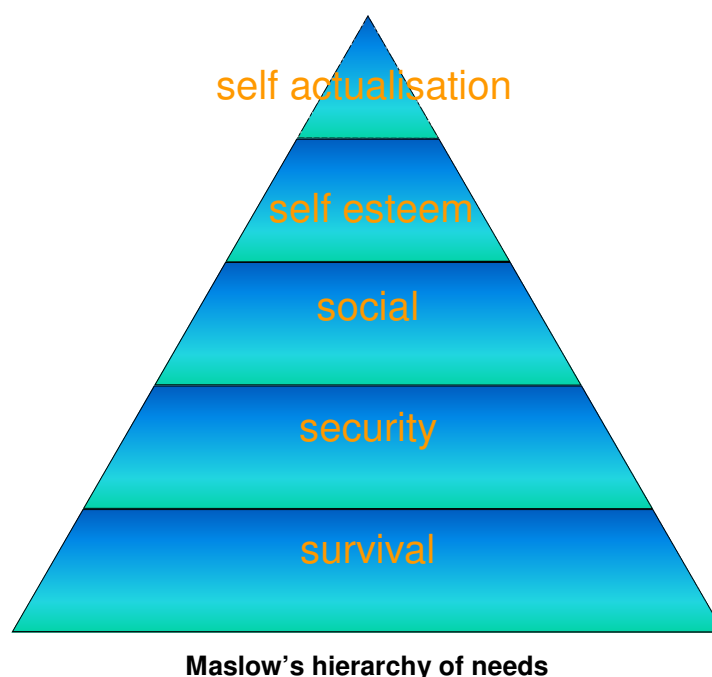
- **Tracing the development of coaching since the psychology of Freud and Jung, through Maslow, Perlz, Gestalt Therapy, Solution Focused Brief Therapy, Gallwey and Whitmore.**
- **Identifying the need for accreditation and unified standards.**

The principles of coaching have been identified for thousands of years, as far back as in the works of Socrates, who famously wrote:

"I cannot teach anybody anything - I can only make them think".

The twentieth century saw rapid developments in the field of psychology and, towards the end of it, the foundations of modern coaching emerged. Until the 1940s, psychology focussed on identifying problems and fixing what was wrong, notably through the work of Freud and Jung. A major shift then occurred through the work of psychologists such as Abraham Maslow and Fritz Perlz.

Maslow's widely publicised Hierarchy of Needs depicted the stages through which people have to pass in order to reach what Maslow called self actualisation; meaning the fulfilment of the best that a person could be in terms of his or her own unique potential:



Maslow chose to study exemplary people such as Albert Einstein rather than mentally ill or neurotic people, writing that:

"The study of crippled, stunted, immature, and unhealthy specimens can yield only a cripple psychology and a cripple philosophy."

The difference between this approach and what went before is that Maslow looked at what was right about human beings rather than what was wrong. In this lies one of the key principles of coaching: **focus on the solution, not the problem.**

Perlz's Gestalt therapy focused on creating awareness in people. Its principles were:

- Live now, stay in the present.
- Live here, be with the present.
- Stop imagining, experience reality.
- Stop unnecessary thinking.
- Express, rather than manipulating, explaining, justifying, or judging.
- Give in to unpleasantness; do not restrict your awareness.
- Accept no "should" or "ought", other than your own.
- Take full responsibility for your own actions, feelings and thoughts.
- Surrender to being who you are right now.

There-in lie the two principles of '**Awareness**' and '**Responsibility**', later identified by Sir John Whitmore as the essence of good coaching.

During the 1980s Solution Focused Brief Therapy was developed through collaboration between a number of psychologists including Steve de Shazer and Milton Erickson. As its name infers, SFBT encouraged people to look to the future and take action, rather than analysing and remaining limited by the past. SFBT's methodology is illustrated by its 'miracle question', of which there exist many variations:

"Suppose our meeting is over, you go home, do whatever you planned to do for the rest of the day. And then, some time in the evening, you get tired and go to sleep. And in the middle of the night, when you are fast asleep, a miracle happens and all the problems that brought you here today are solved just like that. But since the miracle happened over night nobody is telling you that the miracle happened. When you wake up the next morning, how are you going to start discovering that the miracle happened? ... What else are you going to notice? ... What else?"

Earlier than this, during the 1970s, a sports instructor called Tim Gallwey made some ground-breaking discoveries about how people learn. Gallwey was no ordinary tennis coach; he had a deep interest in psychology and spiritual matters and followed an Indian guru. Through these explorations, he discovered the principle of self directed learning. Applying this to the simple task of playing tennis, Gallwey found that if he asked people what they noticed about their physical reactions when they attempted to return the ball, they performed better than when he told them how to hit it. Like a child learning to walk, they learned their own best technique through experiential practise and self-awareness.

Gallwey discovered that if asked to watch the ball, his students would become tense and anxious, with baggage from past failure and fear of not being good enough, and that these doubts would limit their ability to perform. On the other hand, when he asked to count how many times the ball spun as it came over the net, or by how many centimetres it cleared the net, they would relax, focus and encounter much greater success in hitting the ball. Neither of these ball measuring criteria mattered in terms of performance, but the awareness and focus that the questions created made the difference.

In this simple discovery lies the root of coaches' exploration of 'current reality'. In coaching terms, the equivalent questions to those about the spinning of the ball are:

- 'How important is this to you?'
- 'What impact is this having on you?'
- 'How do you feel about this?'
- 'Where in your body do you experience the anxiety?'

And what might be termed 'future reality':

- 'How would you like it to be?'
- 'Imagine you have achieved that; what do you see, hear, feel?'

The 'reality' is the part that is missing from normal human conversation. We tend to go straight from the past into making rash decisions about what to do next:

- 'He said I wasn't up to the job. So I said I was still new to it. And you won't believe what he said next...'
- 'So what are you going to do about it?'
- 'I'm going to resign!'

This exchange highlights the pitfall of applying solution focus without the awareness brought about by exploring the current reality. All of the anger and confusion of the past is carried straight through to the decision making process. Through the insertion of some reality questions in between, decisions can be made from a place of awareness and perspective instead; the heat is taken out of the situation.

Another significant idea of Gallwey's is that the real opponent is not the one on the other side of the net, but the self-limiting entity inside each player. He called these theories 'The Inner Game' and has written many books on the subject.

Possibly Gallwey's major contribution was to introduce the concept of 'directionality' (identifying a goal) into contemporary psychological thinking, creating the key coaching principle of **solution focus**.

Many other psychologists, coaches, practitioners, disciplines and movements have become involved in the processes and theories incorporated in coaching. Space does not permit a full exploration of these, but the scene was set in the early 1990s when Sir John Whitmore penned what is now regarded as the bible of coaching, '*Coaching for Performance*', a remarkably fluid and readable book which has been translated into 17 languages. John discovered Gallwey's methods while on a spiritual and psychological quest in the US during the 1970s. A former motor racing champion, John adopted Gallwey's work and set up Inner Game schools for skiing and tennis. Then, with a number of other pioneers including Olympic gold medallist David Hemery MBE and Olympic Gold hockey coach David Whittaker OBE, he introduced coaching to corporate executives in order to improve their performance.

The underlying principles of performance coaching are summed up by this quote from '*Coaching for Performance*':

The essence of good coaching is awareness and responsibility

Before and since, many professions and disciplines have contributed to coaching and there are different methodologies and schools of thought. However, all are committed to the underlying principles of **awareness, responsibility** and **solution focus**.

The results have been so astounding that coaching has spread by reputation over the last twenty years and during the last five has entered the public vernacular; hence a bandwagon has been created and this is when alarm bells start to ring. Here we have a profession which sometimes takes people through deep-seated psychological change, yet it is unregulated, has no universal set of standards, no established trade magazine and no single authoritative body. Every novice who wishes either to hire a coach or become one has to research the field from scratch and available information is growing at a bewildering rate; Google returns nearly two and a half million entries for the term 'life coaching' and over six million for 'executive coaching'.

The established, independent and non-profit making bodies in the coaching profession/industry are the UK's Association for Coaching, The European Mentoring and Coaching Council and the long established US body, the International Federation of Coaching. Each has developed its own principles, standards, ethics, competencies and accreditation procedures and collaborates openly with the others.

The approach we take regarding coach accreditation at the Association for Coaching is experienced and competency based: applicants have to demonstrate 250 hours of coaching, 30 hours per year of continuing professional development and that they are in regular coach mentoring or supervision. They must obtain references from a variety of sources and present a coaching philosophy and a case history which will be measured against the AC competencies.

The UK government is showing signs of introducing regulation for the industry and has commissioned the research company ENTO to identify its standards. The less our industry regulates itself, the more it is likely to have regulation imposed from outside; it is therefore essential that we demonstrate that we are able to set and maintain standards, and that all the coaching bodies can co-operate together, before we are subjected to the whims of government mandarins with little or no understanding of coaching.

I am happy to say that at this point in time the coaching bodies, through the hard work of significant numbers of expert and experienced coaches, are constantly raising the bar on our standards and ethics as a profession and as an industry and making significant headway towards a unified approach.

References:

Maslow (1954): 'Motivation and Personality' features the Hierarchy of Needs and the quote "*The study of crippled, stunted, immature, and unhealthy specimens can yield only a cripple psychology and a cripple philosophy.*"

Perls (or Perls): 'Ego, Hunger and Aggression' (1942), 'Gestalt Therapy' (1965)

Richard D. Gross: 'Psychology, The Science of Mind and Behaviour' 2nd Edition 1999

S.de Shazer: 'Clues; Investigating Solutions in Brief Therapy'.

Tim Gallwey: www.theinnergame.com

Sir John Whitmore: 1992 and 2002. 'Coaching For Performance' www.performanceconsultants.com.

Contact details:

Performance Coach Training Ltd
01932 702657
www.performancecoachtraining.com

Biog

Professional speaker, writer and broadcaster Carol Wilson is Head of Accreditation and Honorary Vice President at the Association for Coaching. She experienced the value of a coaching culture at first hand while working at board level with Richard Branson at Virgin and became the first woman in the world to found a successful record company.

Carol is now MD of Performance Coach Training Ltd, a joint venture with Sir John Whitmore's Performance Consultants International Ltd, advising and implementing strategies for organisations to transform their cultures.

She speaks at conferences about the coaching culture at Virgin and Branson's leadership style, is the author of 'Best Practice in Performance Coaching', featuring Forewords by Sir John Whitmore and Sir Richard Branson, and was nominated for the AC Awards 'Influence in Coaching' and 'Impact in Coaching'