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the magazine of professional coaching

**Breaking
the Rules!**

Is it time
for the
coaching
paradigm
to expand?

Shattering
the Myths

A Roadmap for
Rule Breaking

Is it Time to
Change Course?

VOLUME 15 • NUMBER 3
CHOICE-ONLINE.COM

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Breaking the Rules!



We all do it. It's that secret conversation where we admit to a colleague that we also give clients advice, regularly teach or train them, or even tell our own stories. How do we manage the balance between standard descriptions of coaching and what our clients are asking us for? How does an understanding of the brain help us expand what we do as coaches? How are we limiting ourselves and not offering everything we have when we refrain from these things? Why are we afraid to challenge the convention that is only 20 years old? Join us as we explore expanding the coaching paradigm.

REAL Coaching

Overcoming co-active confusion

By David Buck, MBA, MCC

I attended an International Coach Federation (ICF) training event last year to learn the new framework for assessing coaching for the Professional Certified Coach (PCC) designation. The instructor made this statement: “Points off for non-coaching behavior like giving advice.”

In U.S. pop culture today, we would call this an “alternative fact,” meaning a statement of agenda put forth as a fact that bears little resemblance to reality. In this case, everyone knows that real professional coaches give advice! So why would the ICF instructor say such a thing?

Her statement reveals just how far off course the ICF has zigged from its original charter as a Coach Federation. At this point the “C” in ICF should now stand for “Co-Active,” not Coach, which has thrown the coaching profession into total confusion.

In this article I will explain how the ICF has “zigged” off track, how the world has zagged in a different direction and the REAL coaching and REAL coaches that the ICF should represent and certify.

The ICF Zigged

Twenty years ago I sat in a hotel ballroom with a few hundred people. The energy was electrifying with the power of our shared dream. It was the first ICF conference and together we dreamed that everyone in the world would have a coach; that professional coaches would be revered and admired in their communities for the contribution they were making to humanity.

At the conference, Cheryl Richardson made a big announcement that the folks in the “Co-Active Crew” (my term) and their association were going to merge with the ICF, which at

that time was mostly folks from Coach U. Over the next few years, through a powerful combination of passion and politics, the ICF essentially became a mouthpiece for the Co-Active Model and mindset.

This is a big problem for one major reason: the Co-Active Model is NOT a coaching model.

Here is a quote from the introduction of *Co-Active Coaching* Edition #3: “Coaching is not about ... improving performance, attaining goals or achieving results.”

Wait! What? No, that’s 100 percent wrong. That is EXACTLY what coaching is about.

The co-active model is a conversation model and if you were going to map it onto a profession it would be client-centered counseling, which is not at all like real professional coaching.

An Analogy

What the ICF has done is this: They have invited the best athletes in the world to a 16-Day yoga festival and called it the Olympic Games. Spokesperson: “We have the best athletes here. We are not going to have any contests, no medals and no countries. We are going to do yoga.”

Wait! If you take out the contests, medals and countries, it is NOT the Olympic Games anymore.

Imagine 80,000 people are gathered in the stadium. Announcer: “Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Olympic Games. We have the 30 fastest sprinters in the world here. They are going to do the downward dog for 10 minutes. Then we will pass out participation certificates. Then together we will all sing, ‘We are the world.’”

This is a problem. You can’t take out the essential elements of something and still call it that same thing. That is just wrong.

Billions of humans know what the Olympic Games are. And because Olympic stories feature the coaches almost as



much as the athletes, they know what coaching is as well. And it is not co-active conversation.

The ICF and the Co-Active Crew have created utter confusion by attempting to “re-educate” people about what coaching is. They make false assertions like: “coaches only ask questions, they don’t make suggestions or give advice.”

**To simplify: Coaching = Olympic Games;
Co-Active Conversation = Yoga.**

Co-active conversation is beautiful. It is important. It is valuable. So is yoga. But calling co-active conversation “coaching” is just as crazy and confusing as calling a yoga festival for athletes the Olympic Games.

Now let’s push the analogy a bit further ...

If you went to a REAL Olympic Games and walked around the Olympic Village, you would see a LOT of athletes doing

Yoga! It helps them improve their focus and flexibility, which in turn helps them improve their athletic performance. Similarly, coaches can learn co-active conversation to help them be better coaches. But that does not make co-active conversation the same as coaching.

Another example: If you were going to evaluate athletes for a track team, you would NOT gather them together, watch them do downward dog for 10 minutes and then choose your team. If you did that, you would have a very bad track team!

Similarly, what the ICF has done is establish the ability to produce a co-active conversation as the standard by which coaches are evaluated for certification. As a result we have a very bad coaching team. Note: the ICF states that its certification is based on the coach’s ability to demonstrate the 10 Core Competencies. BUT in practice what they actually do is evaluate a co-active interpretation of the Core Competencies.

The ZAG

While we have not yet fulfilled our BIG dream of coaching becoming a revered profession, we still can if we make a course correction toward what the people of the world want from a coach. This is more possible now than ever before because the human framework for life has evolved dramatically over the past 10 years.

People see life as either a sport or performance art. WOW. This is awesome because these are the fields from which Real Coaching emerged.

Real Coaching is a profound personal relationship wherein the coach guides the player through perceptive observations and life-changing conversations in pursuit of playing better for results.

The centerpiece of coaching – the yin-yang of the relationship – is obser-



vation-conversation. To coach someone you have to observe them playing. Do a roleplay together. Watch a video of them leading a meeting. Listen to an audio of them in a conversation. If you are only talking and not observing, you are

counseling, NOT coaching.

The game of life – as a sport or performance art – is played by relating and creating. The coach and player co-create ways of being and doing to explore, observe and then talk about.

After observing, the conversation can take many forms including: asking questions, offering feedback, making suggestions, teaching skills and sharing new perspectives. Sometimes the coach will demonstrate something

for the player to observe.

This is profound because what performers want more than anything is to be seen and known by someone who appreciates what they are doing AND can help them do it better!

The foundation of the coaching partnership is shared purpose, permission and presence. These are essential to ensure that the questions, suggestions, etc. are experienced as the guidance of a peer rather than the direction of a superior.

The intent of the coaching relationship is the player learning, making breakthroughs in becoming and creating new results. This is what performers deeply desire.

The coach must navigate the spectrum between support and challenge and between expertise and judgment-free awareness to provide what the player needs.

While I love co-active conversation, I signed up to be a part of a Coach Federation, not a Co-active Conversation Federation.

Let's certify REAL coaching. Let's accredit the schools that teach REAL coaching. If we do this, REAL coaches can be among the most sought-after professionals in the world.

Let the games begin!

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