

## Coaching: The Training Of The Future?

by Leon Conrad.

**When do you train and when do you coach? What are the advantages of the latter? And is there any cross-over between the two? Leon Conrad has some answers...but only after he's asked a few more questions.**

What's the difference between coaching and training? What does coaching have to offer trainers and trainees? Is coaching just another new fad, the current 'flavour of the month' high on the menu of training choices?

Coaching is seeing a resurgence, but its beginnings go back to the same ancient Greek cultural roots as mentoring. And in that same world, wherever athletes were trained for games or contests, you would find a coach.

Throughout history, coaching has acquired an enviable status, with a reputation of almost magical proportions. It grew to be seen to differ from training. It was the tool used to enable an athlete to be able to run that extra mile, finish that extra second earlier, achieve the unthinkable, do the unimaginable. In short, to win and win splendidly.

In a business world where winning is the order of the day, and training strategies are drawn from sporting arenas and battlefields, training and coaching remain two separate fields of activity.

- Training helps people to acquire new skills or abilities
- Coaching helps them to improve performance.

That distinction seems outdated to me. It smacks of the old-world view that separated language acquisition and fluency. Surely, we have outgrown the days in which language was taught by the book, with strict, formal grammar and vocabulary lessons forming the only foundations for learning a language? And only when this stage was completed would there have been a progression to a rather too formal, stilted conversational style.

Today, most language lessons contain a balance between grammar, vocabulary and conversation within a background cultural framework. In some enlightened institutions, there is even exposure to features of spoken language use within the cultures in which it is spoken.

Old methods of assessment are dying out fast. In a world in which funding bodies are asking museums and galleries to assess the quality of the visitors' experience, and people visiting them are expecting more and more, it is not surprising to find that people are starting to want a bit extra in the business world too.

People who attend courses increasingly want to be stimulated and challenged. A course in underwater knitting might be exactly what they want, but it still has to be an interesting experience. They wouldn't expect to have to go to the trouble of putting on their wetsuits for anything less.

Nowadays, assessment through post-course evaluation questionnaires is not enough to justify running a course again. Important as they are, companies don't see knowledge acquisition or client satisfaction as adequate means of assessing training anymore. The quality of the way in which that knowledge is used is becoming a much more important criterion for assessment.

In this environment, both companies and trainers are turning to coaching to provide a way of revitalising the training experience and enhance performance. This trend has crept in under

various disguises, from performance reviews, to mentoring, and within training programmes themselves, with varying results. It is my view that coaching as a separate adjunct to training is unlikely to provide the solutions companies need to compete viably in the business world today. What is needed is a greater integration between the two within all relevant spheres of activity.

In my own work as a vocal coach and voice-centred communications skills consultant, I straddle two worlds. In one, I work with opera and musical theatre performers who are accomplished performers, in command of the skills they need to do the job. In an age-old tradition, I help the, to perform to their best ability, while being true to themselves, and to the wishes of the composers, librettists and lyricists whose works they will be performing. In the business world, I work with professionals who wish to enhance their communication skills in order to achieve specific goals and results. Do I coach or train? I find it difficult to analyse where one starts and the other begins. Sometimes singers need technical help to achieve their aims, which demands a trainer's approach. Sometimes businessmen or women need to be coached into performing at their best. I just do what needs to be done.

A Zen parable epitomises what I believe about coaching and training being interlinked by using a metaphor of a vessel to contain grain, where grain is natural talent, and the vessel is the skill that allows it to be made manifest.

*Skill creates the vessel to be filled  
But until the vessel is filled, its purpose is not fulfilled.  
And until the vessel is created it has no purpose to fulfil.  
If the grain for the vessel grows before the vessel,  
It has no containment,  
It spills and disperses.  
A vessel without grain is barren;  
Grain without its vessel is scattered,  
And feeds neither mind nor body.  
As the grain grows mysteriously,  
The vessel is prepared.  
The vessel-maker's skill sings the song of the growing grain.  
The grain, filed full of earth and sky,  
Thrusts up to its fulfilment.  
When the grain is ready,  
The vessel must be ready.  
The vessel-maker must not lag behind.*

An integrated approach to training and coaching can only work if trainers are prepared to go on a voyage from the old world to the new by undergoing the metamorphosis from trainer to coach within themselves.

I believe this has been achieved, that as long as the dynamics of the relationship between coach and champion performer are sound, then any means used to achieve a mutually desirable goal will be valid. Any restrictions will be dictated by the dynamics of the coaching relationship.

Here are some questions that are useful in starting think like a coach, rather than a trainer.

- Am I seeing the people I'm coaching as champion performers?
- Am I totally dedicated to them as people, rather than just getting them to achieve particular results?
- Am I totally there for them, or for the company's or my own agenda?
- Can I stand in my champion's shoes, experiencing their problems as they see them, without imposing my own interpretation, experience or values onto theirs, yet still being able to acknowledge the differences between their views and mine?
- Do I totally relinquish my right to coach these champions for them to use, demand or relinquish as they see fit?

I avoid using 'don't' commands in coaching. I prefer to reframe the urge to give advice (trainer mode) into questions (coach mode) – for example, 'Why did you chose to do x?'; 'What made you decide to do x that way?'.

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Training and coaching are different activities. However, their integration is a powerful force for achieving results in today's business world. I hope to see more of this integration in the years ahead.

#### **FROM TRAINER TO COACH**

- **Giving a review**

'That was good' or 'That was bad' are subjective reviews of a performance. Neither is particularly helpful to a champion.

- **Giving feedback**

'The specific things that worked for me were...' and 'The specific thing that didn't work for me were...'. An honest, detailed, insightful appraisal of a performance is more helpful to a champion than a review. The champion will sometimes need to check out feedback with other people or coaches before he or she acts on a coach's suggestions.

- **Coaching**

The secret of coaching is to be able to comment on a performance in such a way that the champion sees possibilities that he or she previously was unable to see. Apposite comments that will help the champion achieve his or her full potential, transcend his or her current limitations and make a shift in performance quality are the key here.

- **Redirection**

An exploration of ways in which the champion might be able to bridge a gap in performance which has been highlighted as a result of coaching.

- **Principles**

A consistent, integrated relationship between the coach's principles and behaviour and a moral stance are excellent foundations for a sound coaching relationship.

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