

Chapter 1

From Intake to Intervention: the Outlines of a Profession

The discipline of coaching is currently enjoying a resurgence of interest in the form of new and diverse initiatives on the part of government, industry and consultancies. A potential risk, however, is that the label of ‘coach’, which already has precious little statutory or professional protection, will be further eroded. What exactly does the word ‘coaching’ stand for in the twenty-first century; and what is needed to give coaching the support that its intensive and widespread practice demands, and that can make the discipline an independent and clearly delimited profession?

1.1 Coaching: a new trend?

The term *coaching* may appear fashionable but it has a long history behind it. In Chapter 2 I will look at the history of the word coaching. It is important to realise here that inspiring coaching conversations have been passed down from classical times¹, in the dialogues of Plato, Cicero’s conversations in Tusculum, and Seneca’s letters to Lucilius for example. The first coach appears in Homer’s *Odyssey*, where the goddess Pallas Athena assumes the form of Mentor in order to assist adventurous mortals. There is currently a growing interest in this age-old tradition of work-related learning that relies primarily on one-to-one conversations. In those conversations, the coach is focused on facilitating the coachees’ learning and development and tries to take care that the coachees take care of themselves. The aim of coaching is to improve the coachees’ performance by discussing their relationship to certain experiences and issues.

¹See Chapter 11 section 11.2.1 for a reading of the *Odyssey* with special attention to the mentoring in that work, and Chapter 11, section 11.2.2 for a discussion of Plato’s *Meno*.

The coach's intention is to encourage reflection by the coachee, to release hidden strengths and to overcome or eliminate obstacles to further development. The focus is on such topics as:

- how the coachee works with others and makes sense of organisational life;
- how the coachee acts in specific situations, such as those involving managing, negotiating, giving advice or exerting influence;
- how the coachee handles difficult situations, such as with colleagues and clients;
- how the coachee forms judgments and makes decisions.

These topics are linked not only to the coachee's professional role and the content of the specialist area but also to the person of the coachee and the knowledge and skills at their disposal, the way in which they think and act. Because there is a personal component, it is important for coachees to become aware of their own actions and to consider alternatives. The coach helps in this respect, in the first instance mainly by clarifying the problem. There is often a link between the person who has an issue and the nature of that issue. For example, a given question can be very difficult for one individual to address, while someone else barely registers it or is able to resolve it without difficulty. The degree to which a problem affects us, makes us insecure, causes sleepless nights or intrigues us, says something about the problem, of course, but also something about the person who perceives and 'owns' the problem. I distinguish the following possible relationships between 'problem owner' and 'problem':

- 1 Some problems are 'objective' or technical in nature. For example, if someone is having trouble with certain software packages, this might relate to resistance to information technology, but usually has more to do with a lack of knowledge or skill. Sometimes, therefore, there is simply a need to acquire knowledge or learn a particular skill. *Expert advice* can provide a solution here.
- 2 Sometimes, however, acquiring knowledge or learning new behaviour is not enough. There are underlying patterns which suggest that, though this specific problem may be solved, the same problem (possibly in a different form) will reappear the next day. Here it is important to consider not the incident, but the work context and the patterns that led to the incident. This is not always easy, because a feature of such patterns is that they often go unrecognised by the person concerned. Many people have a tendency to define

problems as separate from themselves: ‘It’s not my fault; it’s the work environment; it’s my colleagues’. *Coaching* can provide a solution here.

- 3 Sometimes issues and problems are so personal that a thorough exploration within the context of work and professional experience is insufficient. An individual’s abilities and limitations underlie the problems at hand. A characteristic aspect of such problems is that they are experienced as much privately as they are at work. *Therapy* can provide a solution here.

A *coaching conversation* therefore centres partly on personal performance, but always in the context of practice. In my experience, the scope of coaching issues is more or less as follows:

- 1 Issues where content is at the centre will often relate to unexpected experiences, for example in drafting proposals and giving advice. These are often put forward in terms of ‘what’ questions: ‘What kind of system should I use here?’.
- 2 Issues where the actions of the issue holder and the way in which he or she handles a problem are central, are often put forward in terms of ‘how’ questions: ‘Will you, as my coach, help me to decide how to do this, or how to tackle this issue?’.
- 3 Issues where the very person raising the issue is at the centre are often put forward in terms of ‘what’ questions too: ‘What kind of assignments suit me?’ or ‘What is it about me that makes me

<p>1. Issues where content and specialist knowledge are at the centre, where the focus is on applying them in specific, difficult situations.</p> <p>‘What’ questions</p>	<p>2. Issues with a content element, but where the actions of the coachee and the way in which she handles the content are central.</p> <p>‘How’ questions</p>	<p>3. Issues where the personal characteristics of the coachee are central.</p> <p>‘Who’ questions</p>
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Range of coaching issues

Figure 1.1

come up against this time and again?”. As these are more personal ‘what’ issues, they can also be put forward as ‘who’ questions, along the lines of ‘Who am I, and what type of work is suitable for me?’.

In coaching, a number of different levels are present simultaneously. The focus is often not only on the technical or organisational issue raised, and on ways of dealing with it, but also on the personal dynamic and emotional undercurrents at the root of such issues. The coach is constantly having to choose which of these levels to pursue, or at which level to make a contribution. In making that choice, the coach determines to a large extent how the conversation will continue. The importance of choosing the ‘right’ level of intervention therefore often becomes clear only in retrospect.

Various traditional forms of coaching, such as mentoring, individual consultation and counselling, are often differentiated by the level at which they tend to intervene, as is also demonstrated by the overview of the scope of coaching conversations given in Figure 1.2.

The role of coach was previously assumed largely by managers and external coaches, and we are now seeing an increase in the training and use of *internal coaches*. Coaching has become an instrument for enabling organisational renewal from within.

1.2 Developing a coaching relationship

The *first impressions* that people gain of each other have a significant impact on the course of the subsequent coaching. First impressions can, after all, be strong and persistent. They can tell you a lot about the underlying themes, but can also be deceptive. A particularly positive or negative first impression often indicates that something is going on that might obstruct an open, exploratory approach. It is worthwhile registering a number of things consciously right at the outset, such as:

- Are both parties on time, or does one arrive early or late?
- Do they shake hands? What does the handshake feel like? Do they look at each other?
- What associations does this person have for you? Who do they remind you of?

The scope of coaching		
Type of issues	Level of intervention	Forms of one-to-one learning
Issues of expertise, e.g. knowledge-related or technical	Surface interventions	
Issues around working methods, time management, focus on results	1 'What'	
Issues related to communication and working relationships with others	5 'How'	
Issues around feelings and perceptions with respect to others (inter-personal)	10 'Who'	
Issues around personal motives, conflicts and internal resistance (intra-personal)	Deep interventions	

Figure 1.2 The scope of coaching.

- How do the two parties get on? What body language do you notice?
- Do you use first names? Do you break the ice, or give a formal introduction?

There is no single correct answer to these questions, but it seems important to consider them as experience shows that ‘minor’ impressions at the start can have major consequences later on. The start of a coaching relationship is often dominated by the *needs* of both coachee and coach, and by their degree of openness about those needs. The coachee often needs help, and is quite possibly hoping for a specific *type* of help and a specific approach from the coach. In a sense, such a coachee supplies the problem and the solution right at the outset!

The coach clearly needs a coachee in order to be a coach. In a wider sense, a coach often has a need to be helpful to someone and to consolidate that helpfulness. It helps to be aware of the existence of such needs, their translation into specific wishes or their concealment using diversionary tactics, right from the start. Managing them explicitly and in a productive way can then commence, if necessary, right at the start of the coaching relationship.

It is advisable for you, as the coach, to enter into and build up the relationship as *consciously* as possible. To that end, it may be useful to investigate for yourself – patiently and almost a little suspiciously – how the coachee arrived at the issue in question, and what role you are seen to play in handling the issue and therefore in the life of the coachee. The following thought experiment may be useful in this connection²:

- 1 What does this coachee actually want? To get away from something, or to achieve something? To explore something, or to arm against something?
- 2 How has the coachee arrived at this wish? What else might the issue relate to? What does it point to? What might be hidden behind the issue? What is the history of the wish or issue and what attempts have already been made to address it?
- 3 Why coaching? What has led to this request? What does the coachee expect from it? What recommendations is she following, and from whom?
- 4 And why me? What expectations does this coachee have of me – what prejudices, perhaps – what assumptions about my method? What is the coachee hoping for?
- 5 What feelings does this coachee prompt in me? Do I think we get on? What do I think of the quality of our contact? What is the coachee appealing to in me? Can I and do I want to offer that? What is my own interest? And what am I hoping for myself?
- 6 What approach is the coachee requesting? What approach do I think myself is best? Does the coachee have sufficient strength to handle my preferred approach?
- 7 What does this mean for our relationship? How is it going to develop? How am I to enter into that relationship? How can I show in my behaviour what kind of relationship I envisage? How can I adopt my own choice of coaching approach from our very first meeting?

Once the coaching has started, many types of coach/coachee relationship can develop, often geared very specifically to the interaction between this particular coach and this particular coachee. All of these

²Appendix F contains an intake checklist for the coach, based on this thought-experiment.

productive coaching relationships are examples of *working alliances*³, and they probably replicate previous helpful relationships in the life of coach and coachee. By quickly creating a strong working alliance, the coach attempts from the outset to make use of the coachee's previous experience of helping conversations. The following typical forms of working alliance can be differentiated:

- 1 The *guild master/freeman* relationship, in which the coachee presents practical issues, and the coach becomes deeply involved in those issues and says something meaningful about them. This relationship is often seen between mentor and mentee, or in supervision.
- 2 The *doctor/patient* relationship, in which the coachee discloses all, revealing uncertainties and emotions as completely as possible; the coach interprets the problems and outlines possible solutions. This relationship often arises with more emotional themes and issues.
- 3 The *midwife/mother* relationship, in which the coach anticipates the coachee's problems and seeks to provide strength to tackle them. This relationship is characteristic of a concerned and caring coach.
- 4 The *peer review* relationship, in which coach and coachee look together at the coachee's day-to-day practice and subject it to as independent an examination as possible. They 'dot the i's' together and take a critical look at the coachee's approaches and plans. This relationship often arises in a coaching assignment geared towards finding out something new.
- 5 The *old boys* relationship, in which the coachee seeks out the coach as a *sparring partner* in order to exchange experiences and try out ideas. The coachee often rehearses certain approaches and conversations with the coach. This relationship often arises in the coaching of senior managers.

In my day-to-day practice I see various mixtures of these typical relationships. A strong coaching relationship may evolve from one to another, depending on changes in the nature of the themes.

³Freud (1913) distinguished between positive and friendly aspects of the helping relationship and neurotic aspects of the same relationship, whereby the former work together with the therapist to do something about the latter. The term 'working alliance' comes from Greenson (1965).

Take care that coaching relationships do not deteriorate unnoticed into 'ordinary' significant relationships, like that of a courting couple, rival scientists, a rich uncle and favourite nephew, or a parent and dependent child. The coaching relationship comes into everyone's life after many other important relationships have already been entered into. Almost inevitably, the coaching relationship comes to resemble one or more of its predecessors. This is not a problem in itself, as long as it does not happen completely unnoticed, and it does not undermine the essence of the coaching relationship (as bounded and for the benefit of the coachee).

As long as the coach continues to reflect – patiently and almost suspiciously! – on the nature of the relationship and is not led astray into non-coaching interventions, any resemblance to other, earlier relationships can only be enriching and instructive. Forces that exert an influence in all other relationships, such as the quest for inclusion, control, or affection (see Schutz, 1958), will unavoidably also come into play in this coaching relationship – and there is an increased opportunity to learn about them here.

1.3 The organisation coach

Coaching of individuals is also coaching of an organisation, because the coachee's organisation is present in and through every coachee. This is the main difference between coaching and psychotherapy: coaching is work- and organisation-oriented, while therapy is more remote from the working organisation – the organisation being only one dominant system of which the client forms part.

The coachee is the person who translates and applies the outcome of coaching conversations in their own practice. With the aid of coaching renewed sense is made of the situation, and the coachee prepares to adapt accordingly, becoming the link between the coaching relationship and organisational practice. In fact, for the coachee, entering into a relationship with a coach means an additional adjustment and finding a new role, namely that of coachee of this coach. Because it is a role that is situated partly outside of the coachee's ordinary working practice, it offers opportunities for gaining insight and for experimenting. It is often useful to look at your coachee as a translator or messenger between coach and organisation. This is particularly helpful if it

emerges that certain actions planned during the coaching conversation are not carried out in the coachee's refractory day-to-day practice – in other words, when the coachee experiences (in the view of the coach) a 'relapse'.

The coachee attempts to develop within a role provided by the organisation, and develops as an individual and in personal roles at the same time. On the basis of life experience, the coachee brings along all sorts of (behavioural) patterns, which are visible in role-behaviour. After some time in the role, moreover, the coachee carries the organisation internally, as in a hologram or a fractal, each fragment of which still contains the entire original image (see Armstrong, 2004). In other words, the coachee reflects elements of their entire emotional experience in an organisation in every fragment of conversation. Like a fragment of the hologram, the coachee presents a complete and personal image of the organisation. Making use of this, the coach can often relate the coachee's problems and emotions to the problems and emotions prevailing within the coachee's organisation. The coach should ask him or herself regularly during coaching conversations: what sort of function do I fulfil as a coach in the coachee's organisation? This question can also be put to the coachee: what is the emotional 'value' of your role for yourself and for your organisation?

An example is the coachee who describes the way in which he was recently treated by his own organisation as 'an itch that I cannot scratch' and who, later in the coaching conversation, describes his own behaviour within the same organisation as 'disruptive but not destructive'. Here, the informal role of the organisation for this person appears to be virtually identical to the informal role of the person for the organisation, namely an itch you can't scratch, an irritation that just won't go away. Later in the conversation it emerges that the coach is increasingly tempted to start being irritating himself, thereby acting as an 'itch' for his coachee to (not be able to) scratch.

1.4 The coach's playing field

In my view, there are two main choices that a coach can make at any time in the conversation. The first is the *direction* of their contribution: exploring or guiding? The coach can choose at each moment to follow

and open up the coachee's thoughts and contributions, or to comment upon them and introduce their own thoughts and contributions. This enables the coach to influence the direction of the conversation, by deciding whether to 'lead' or to 'follow' the coachee. In the first instance the coach will *suggest* or propose something; in the second the coach will be at the service of a joint *exploration* or discovery process.

The second is the *nature* of the contribution: supporting or confronting? The coach can decide at each moment to build on and reinforce the coachee's (perceived) strengths, or else to bring up and help to overcome the coachee's (perceived) weaknesses. This enables the coach to influence the *construction* or *deconstruction* of the conversation, by deciding to *support* or *challenge* the coachee more.

Combining each of these two choices gives a basic playing field for the coach, encompassing four options. Each of these four orientations leads to a different focus on the part of the coach. In addition, each orientation has given rise to specific approaches and 'schools' of coaching, as follows (see Figure 1.3):

- 1 *Person-focused coaching* (see for example Kline, 1999). Exploring and supporting, or facilitating the coachee with encouragement and understanding. The coach attempts to explore the issue together with the coachee and contributes warmth and understanding to the conversation.

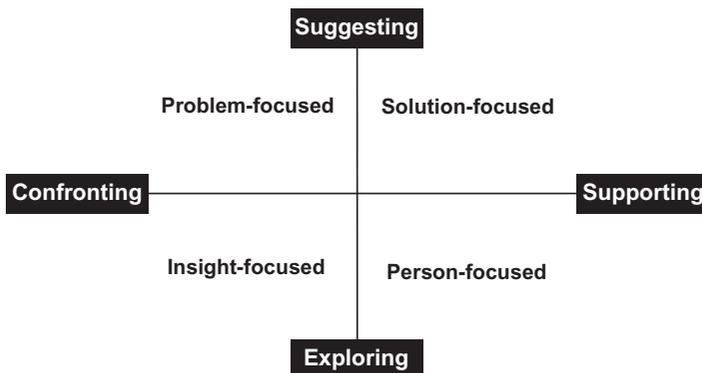


Figure 1.3 The window onto the coach: different contributions from the coach

- 2 *Insight-focused coaching* (see for example Brunning, 2006). Exploring and confronting, or facilitating the coachee at a greater distance. The coach attempts to look at what the coachee is leaving out and is not aware of, thus contributing understanding and objectivity to the conversation.
- 3 *Problem-focused coaching* (see for example Whitmore, 1992, or Skiffington & Zeus, 2003). Suggesting and confronting, or helping the coachee with suggestions and instructions. The coach attempts to offer the coachee a new framework or approach to the problems being considered, and contributes ideas and guidance to the conversation.
- 4 *Solution-focused coaching* (see for example Greene & Grant, 2003, or Pemberton, 2006). Suggesting and supporting, or helping the coachee with options and positive feedback. The coach attempts to send the coachee off on a more positive, constructive train of thought and to help with suggestions for the future.

The main coaching methodologies have a place within this playing field (for more information on these specific methodologies, see De Haan & Burger, 2005):

- 1 *Person-focused coaching* is based on the *counselling methods* as developed by Carl Rogers in particular (1961). In this approach the coach attempts to shift the coachee's attention inwards and is available primarily as an accepting and attentive listener.
- 2 *Insight-focused coaching* is based on the long tradition of psychodynamic coaching. The coach attempts, with the coachee, to understand the issue from the inside. A number of more specific insight-focused methods are:
 - a) the *analytic method* – in which the coach concentrates on the signals he is picking up, what is not being said, the conflict or ambivalence that is central to the issue, and what the coachee does with the coach.
 - b) the *organisation coach method* – in which the coach continues to concentrate on signals, omissions, conflicts, ambivalence and transference, but pays special attention to transference from the coachee's organisation.
 - c) the *ladder method* – in which the coach and coachee explore the assumptions behind the latter's issue, the reasons for those assumptions, and the underlying conflicts and emotions that led to those assumptions, and then go on to ask whether alternative assumptions are also possible.

- 3 *Problem-focused coaching* is primarily directive in nature. The coach attempts to improve the situation from the outside. Coaching approaches include:
 - a) The *GROW method* – in which the coach asks in turn about the coachee’s Goal or objective, the Reality relating to the issue, potential Options and the coachee’s Will or determination, spelling out the word GROW (see Whitmore, 1992).
 - b) The *ironic method* – in which the coach parries ambivalence and defences with irony, reflecting the irony in the issue back towards the coachee.
 - c) The *paradoxical method* – in which the coach parries ambivalence and defences with a paradoxical instruction, an assignment for the coachee that contains an unsolvable dilemma.
 - d) The *provocative method* – in which the coach consciously provokes resistance and intentionally frustrates the coachee’s thought processes (see Farrelly & Brardina, 1974).
- 4 *Solution-focused coaching* is a particular form of directive coaching, in which coach and coachee look predominantly to the future and consider times when the problem does *not* arise. The coach attempts to convert problems into positive plans and challenges.

1.5 A coach from inside or outside the organisation?

For the coaching intervention to succeed, the coach must not only consider the most suitable approach together with the coachee, but also the question of whether the coach should come from inside or outside the coachee’s work or other organisation. There are two striking differences between internal coaches and coaches from outside the organisation:

- 1 First, the internal coach is *not truly independent* with respect to the organisation. The coach has a personal role to play in it, and also has their own (emotional) experience of and connection with the organisation. This sometimes makes it difficult for the coach to ‘empty the mind’ and listen with complete objectivity to what the coachee is saying. And it also makes it more difficult for the coachee to be sure of complete confidentiality.
- 2 On the other hand, the internal coach has *more knowledge* of the organisation and therefore a clear idea of the context within which

the coachee is operating. Not every external coach is able to assess that context properly. However, knowledge of the organisation can sometimes also impede a fresh and independent assessment of the organisational context and the coachee's issues.

Besides these differences, there are other reasons why organisations choose to work with internal coaches. For example, the organisation sees coaching as an effective form of learning and wants to build up that knowledge and experience within the organisation, to enable the organisation to gain maximum benefit. In addition, organisations choose an internal coach as part of the continuing personal supervision of staff, so as to increase the effectiveness of the organisation. These are considerations of a purely practical nature. The organisation wants to have constant access to coaching expertise and not to be dependent on outsiders. Often, the organisation also wants to keep the costs of coaching under control, especially if it plans to offer coaching to wider target groups.

1.6 What works for whom?

Different coachees, issues and objectives require different approaches (see Wasylyshyn, 2003, or Roth & Fonagy, 1996). My own hunches relating to applicability, which are merely initial assumptions for a correct application of the different coaching methods, are given in the following table (Figure 1.4).

I return to applicability in Chapter 3, where I summarise what is known about the effectiveness of (different approaches in) psychotherapy. The question of when to apply which approach is very complex and depends on a range of factors (such as the person of the coach, the person of the coachee, the aim of the coaching, the nature of the coaching relationship, and the wider work context). It is doubtful that we can ever have a much better guideline than the hunches in Figure 1.4, and it is also doubtful whether we should be asking ourselves the question in this way: modern research shows that all known professional methods in psychotherapy are equally effective and that what matters more are other factors such as the personalities of coach and coachee. This topic too is revisited in Chapter 3.

<i>Method</i>	<i>When can it be used?</i>	<i>Recommended where there is/are</i>	<i>Not recommended where there is/are</i>
GROW method	broadly applicable, even to short, specific issues	high motivation, but little idea of possible ways to move forward	emotional issues, non-specific issues, double meanings
Ironic method	broadly applicable	those that ask for advice; those that do not take responsibility	low self-confidence, lack of confidence in coaching
Paradoxical method	in the case of ambiguous, internally contradictory questions to the coach	strongly ambiguous messages and unclear motivation for coaching	no strong and absolutely necessary reasons for using it
Solution-focused method	broadly applicable, especially to practical issues	discouragement, anxiety about the future	'visitors' and 'complainers', i.e. coachees not prepared to consider their own share in the problem
Counselling method	broadly applicable, especially in a longer term coaching relationship	lack of self-confidence or self-motivation	need for a critical sparring partner
Analytic method	broadly applicable, especially to multi-layered and emotional problems	'visitors' and 'complainers'	need to achieve quick results and find solutions, low self-confidence
Ladder method	multi-layered problems, including short, specific issues	willingness and ability to consider their own assumptions	non-specific issues, highly emotional issues

Figure 1.4 Application of different coaching approaches.

Summary: from intake to intervention

Coaching is a method of work-related learning that relies primarily on one-to-one conversations.

The **aim** of coaching is to increase the coachee's performance by discussing their relationship to the experiences and problems raised.

Coaching is situated somewhere between **expert advice** and **therapy**. The **scope** or **intervention level** of coaching embraces the following issues:

- 1 expert advice: issues of expertise, e.g. knowledge-related or technical;
- 2 handling of knowledge-related and technical issues;
- 3 issues around working methods, time management, focus on results;
- 4 issues related to communication and working relationships with others;
- 5 issues around feelings and perceptions with respect to others (interpersonal);
- 6 issues around personal motives, conflicts and internal resistance (intrapersonal);
- 7 therapy: purely personal issues.

A short **intake checklist** is as follows:

- 1 What does the coachee want?
- 2 Where does this wish or question come from?
- 3 Where does the idea of coaching come from?
- 4 Where does the idea of me as coach come from?
- 5 What is my response to this question?
- 6 How can I help? What do I need in order to help?
- 7 How can the coachee help himself or herself?
- 8 How are we going to work with each other?
- 9 How are we working with each other now?

In relation to the last two questions, there are five known **coach/coachee relationship patterns**:

- 1 a **guild master/freeman** relationship;
- 2 a **doctor/patient** relationship;
- 3 a **midwife/mother** relationship;
- 4 a **peer review** relationship;
- 5 an **'old boys'** relationship.

The coach's possible contributions can be presented clearly using the **window onto the coach**:

- 1 **Person-focused coaching**: observing and supporting the coachee from the coachee's perspective.
- 2 **Insight-focused coaching**: considering the coachee from an independent perspective and trying to understand the problem.
- 3 **Problem-focused coaching**: helping the coachee with an approach to the problem.
- 4 **Solution-focused coaching**: supporting the coachee in their search for solutions.