

Supporting the Future of Psychosynthesis: Coaching as a path to Self-Realization

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The Synthesis Center is nearing 40 years of psychosynthesis training. It has been a joy and a privilege to teach psychosynthesis for the bulk of my adult life. Over the last 5 years, we have made a significant turn to orienting our training to psychosynthesis coaching.

The fields of psychotherapy and mental health counseling, in the US, are tied in to insurance companies, academic based licensure, a strong bias towards pharmaceutical intervention as a first round of defense, and the general pathology based medical model that is the standard in the United States. These tendencies do not fully resonate with psychosynthesis, positive psychology, the theory of resilience or the contemplative psychologies that are emerging in the field.

Psychosynthesis, as a transpersonal psychology, does not have an easy home in the US. As a professor of graduate psychology, in a licensure track program, I have seen any orientation towards humanistic and transpersonal psychologies fade over the years. And thus, my own personal move, slowly but surely from identifying primarily as a psychotherapist (for which I am licensed) to being a life coach. Here I am freed of the bounds of insurance companies and the difficult reality of requiring a diagnosis of a mental illness in order to have insurance cover one's treatment.

The field of coaching allows a goodness of fit that may not be available in other professional orientations in the US. It also allows well-trained psychosynthesis practitioners and certified coaches to be primarily affiliated with psychosynthesis as a methodology and practice, while orienting their work towards a variety of specialty areas.

Psychosynthesis Coaching is evolving as a field that will hopefully grow into a strong organizing principle for the practice of psychosynthesis. Coaching also finds itself keeping pace with the global world, by being available across continents and through the use of electronic means, allowing both practitioners and clients to truly work as international citizens. Our trainings alone have brought in people from Canada, Italy, Poland, Mexico, Australia, the United Arab Emirates and Viet Nam.

In 2003, Grant offered a brief definition of coaching: “Life coaching can be broadly defined as a collaborative solution-focused, result-oriented and systemic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of life experience and goal attainment in the personal and/or professional life of normal, nonclinical clients” (p.254). *Nonclinical* is a key term here and one of the ethical guidelines that differentiates coaching from psychotherapy. Coaches work with people for whom psychotherapy is not necessary. In fact this is one of the Ethical Codes in Board Certified Coaching: “Ensure that clients, sponsors and colleagues understand that coaching services are not counseling, therapy or psychotherapy services.” (BCC)

One of our founding psychosynthesis educators, trained by Assagioli, brought the field of psychosynthesis coaching into our awareness at the beginning of the century, and towards the end of her long life as a psychosynthesis practitioner and teacher. Martha Crampton describes her understanding of the interface of coaching and psychosynthesis.

The emerging profession of life coaching seems destined to play a significant role in the future, providing support for relatively healthy people to realize their full potentials. It is a discipline that assigns a central role to the will, drawing on both personal and spiritual levels of this core psychological function. In contrast to psychotherapy, coaching assumes that clients have sufficient emotional integration to function in self-responsibility; at least as an ideal, and that they can use their will with some degree of effectiveness. This would imply basic levels of good will and skillful will, in psychosynthesis terminology. In this context, Assagioli’s profound insights

into the nature and functioning of the will, so far ahead of their time, will likely find a receptive audience (2000, last para).

This does not mean that our work, as coaches is not deep and transformative work. It does not assume that we will never touch the contents of the lower unconscious or work with trauma, or primal wounding or family of origin issues. It does assume that, looking at the egg diagram, the work is oriented towards the personal and transpersonal dimension and that those whose work is *primarily* the untangling of issues from the lower unconscious will be better served by psychotherapy.

The field of coaching is variously referred to as personal coaching, life coaching, wellness coaching or in business; executive, performance or career coaching, with many thematic and niche variations. Professional coaching has emerged strongly since the late 1980's but has its origins in sports coaching. What worked on the sports field clearly showed potential for working in business and individual settings. Coaching is a field that is currently unlicensed, though national and international certification is available. Coaching has found among its practitioners both counselors and psychotherapists transitioning from clinical work into coaching, and practitioners trained solely as coaches. Its application extends to a wide variety of client populations, client needs and varying services for personal, professional, and business use.

Psychosynthesis, as a holistic, transpersonal, psychological orientation has pioneered key concepts and strategies that are at the core of coaching principles. Written in 1973, Roberto Assagioli's *The Act of Will* is a defining text in psychosynthesis and clearly orients itself towards a coaching methodology. Psychosynthesis assumes a Self in each person functioning as a center of content-less awareness and will. It is through accessing awareness and engaging will, that growth and transformation are possible. Along with a comprehensive theory and methodology to support access to and training of the will, psychosynthesis theory and practice,

includes as directly relevant to coaching: the use of the full range of psychological functioning (imagination, thinking, feeling, sensation, impulse and intuition); work with subpersonalities; techniques of imagery; dialogue; journaling; personal and transpersonal orientation; goal setting; cognitive, emotional, and sensory awareness; the experience of the personal and Higher Self and a commitment to purpose, meaning and values as the path to well being. Individual coaches add to psychosynthesis theory the unique orientations that define their work, integrating the best of whole-being practices into the field of psychosynthesis coaching.

The *Call of Self*, a phrase coined in psychosynthesis long ago, is the center point of work. It is the assumption that each individual has the capacity to tune in, deeply, to a sense of life purpose. Individuals enter coaching in response to this very Call of Self, as they “hear” a need to grow, reorient, expand, heal or even reinvent their lives. Likewise families, groups, businesses and cultures at large have the potential for responding to what is truly important, creating slowly but surely healthier people, families, communities, and a sustainable global reality.

As psychosynthesis coaching has moved into the mainstream, now being practiced worldwide and as an internationally certified profession, the movement of psychosynthesis in the US (and perhaps other countries) may well be supported by this growing orientation. The hope is that psychosynthesis practitioners, who don’t have an orientation within a specific field, will be able to find that community and that identification within the field of coaching. The transformative power of psychosynthesis will perhaps blossom as fully as it should, held and sustained within the field of coaching. This is, for me, as an aging psychosynthesis teacher, the future that I see unfolding, supporting psychosynthesis in its expansion and into its continued wise and compassionate transformative potential.

Among the many unique aspects of coaching, the use of maps, homework, and a commitment to “actionable” goals stand out. Psychosynthesis offers us many

literal maps that can be actively used with clients. the egg diagram, the star or psychological functions map, the dimensions of growth map and the synthesis diagram. Maps that come from within the coaching community at large, core maps that most coaches will be familiar with include, the Smart Goals, orienting towards achievable outcomes, through the acronym SMART- specific, measurable, actionable, realistic and time-based. The Grow model (Goal, Reality, Options/obstacles, Wrap Up-or Will), and the wheel of life, the pie chart that requires observation and analysis of all aspects of life, in search of health and balance. Classic coaching maps integrated with psychosynthesis theory, practice and maps become a powerful modality.

I'll share a short life coaching case study. It is one session, done via teleconference as part of a psychosynthesis coach training session. The client, a woman and artist in her early 30's expressed the conflict between the child in herself and the desire to be successful financially. In a session that lasted just 30 minutes (a common coaching time frame), she elaborated the "inner child" that was afraid that in stepping into a professional world she would lose her creativity. The artist held within itself, the child subpersonality, from whom the original impulse towards creativity had come. Invited to go a bit deeper, using visualization and conversation, it became clear that the child was also afraid of being left behind, should the client step into the world as a full, financially successful adult. Using classic subpersonality work, the client, connected to a sense of strong purpose, acknowledged both subs, saw their gifts and needs and pulled them together with the realization that the creativity of the child would be essential for the Adult Professional. Her goal, after all was to be an Art Coach. In the visualization, the adult and child walked away hand in hand, both happy, both on the same path.

What marks this work as coaching is that we dipped into the pre-personal, or lower unconscious wounding of the child, but did not dive in. We oriented towards next steps and did so in such a way that the end of the session involved specific agreements (created by the client) for next steps in this process, not just increased

awareness. She chose to take time in her art studio to give voice, in writing, to her subpersonality process. For while she has painted, over a long time, her felt sense of subpersonalities, they have never been given voice.

Recognition, acceptance and the beginnings of coordination happened in the session. Integration will be the movement of identifying as an Art Coach and putting herself out in the world professionally. The client, invited to become more than either subpersonality, empowered her experience of purpose, meaning and values, enlivened and aligned her will and, disidentified from the distressing conflict, with a plan for moving to the next level of synthesis. Note how many pieces of psychosynthesis theory and practice were included in this brief session. Note also that the act of will is in full motion and will be tracked as coaching continues so that both coach and client, as allies, will support the forward movement that is both healing and responsive to the call for growth.

Note how Subpersonality work, the act of will, disidentification and alignment with purpose, all play in actively in this process.

To give a flavor to business coaching, listen to Roger Evans, psychosynthesis and business coach. He notes that especially in present time the pressure on executives is greatly increased by many forces within and without of the company. “These forces take the form of the need for transparency, corporate honesty and social responsibility and environmental concerns (social psychosynthesis if you will). These leaders’ values are being rigorously challenged. These are the issues that our psychosynthesis coaches are able to work with. Given the context of the self that they hold, they work at these senior levels” (p. 195). That is not to say executive or business coaching works only at senior levels, but it points to the power of psychosynthesis coaching in business. Imagine if more CEO’s and senior execs were referencing their own Self as they made business decisions! At the same time, “developmental” coaching within business is designed to meet the worker, at whatever level he or she is, looking at blocks, goals, and spiritual concerns. This allows an employee to integrate inner needs with outer demands. And as Sir John

Whitmore, a psychosynthesist, comments “Coaching is concerned with unlocking a person’s potential...” (Whitmore, 1996). How could this goal not be a gift within business and industry?

The Synthesis Center recently worked with internal coaches at a multinational pharmaceutical company. Trained as coaches, and working in that field, psychosynthesis drew these coaches into a deeper level of their work, in which a transpersonal orientation could be brought to bear, in the workplace, on the issues that came into the coach’s office.

When an international pharmaceutical company recently reached out to the Synthesis Center for psychosynthesis coach training, they were already well-trained coaches. Their company had a hugely successful internal coaching system, so that coaching was a part of the very corporate culture. Still, the coaches themselves were hunting for a deeper, more transpersonal orientation that would enrich their skills in coaching. They came away, not only with that deeper connection to the Purpose, Meaning and Values perspective in psychosynthesis coaching, but also with clear and articulated strategies for taking this into their work. Practical and applicable techniques that would help their clients connect to Self and negotiate through difficulties in the business world became the most important take home.

There is much more to say about personal and business coaching and about psychosynthesis coaching, but time is short. . Just to notice some of the subsets of coaching will indicate the vast area that we are working in. Listen to some of the many names that describe various coaching orientations: creativity coaching, health and wellness coaching, family and relationship coaching, group coaching, ADHD coaching, performance (in any field) coaching. Business subsets include: succession coaching, new leader coaching, communication coaching, team coaching and more. We are only touching the surface, but it is the surface of a field in which I hope to see psychosynthesis grow.

In closing, I want to share what a group of 10 certified psychosynthesis coaches presented at a North American Psychosynthesis Conference in 2013, as some of the core principles of psychosynthesis coaching. These 10 themes are the joint consideration of 10 psychosynthesis coaches. They speak more widely than I, as a single person, can. Enjoy their understanding of psychosynthesis coaching.

1. In psychosynthesis coaching we work from the foundation of an adult-to-adult, I-Thou relationship, lessening the power differential, without the weight of transference and countertransference. We are allies.
2. Clients come with an embedded capacity for disidentification from their story, holding and honoring primal wounding, but living with it as history. They've been there and done that work or it is work that is not being called forth in this engagement with their coach.
3. The Call of Self, as it asks clients to be true to the Higher Self, is the guiding wisdom. We learn to hear it as they do, and we stay committed to each client's deep connection to that Call.
4. Purpose, meaning and values, come forth as goals and intentions, which we help clients to define, then make manifest. Goals may be inner or outer, wide and global, or precise and articulate. All become goals that the client can monitor as they progress. Goals are actionable.
5. Our job is to support the Act of Will and the client as willer, both empowering purpose, and inviting, even requiring deliberation, to check the clarity of purpose, giving space to note subpersonality agendas, but not let them lead. We coach the client towards certainty that the voice who speaks and chooses, is speaking from the guidance of Self.
6. In service of Soulful goals, be they helping to create world peace or cleaning the house, we nourish our clients in accessing, strengthening and living through all psychological functions; thinking, feeling, bodily experience, deep desiring, imagination and intuition.

7. We show up fully present, willing and able to access our most receptive and our most assertive selves, balancing the yin and yang of presence. We are aiming for transformation. We know it is emerging for each person with whom we work.
8. We ask our clients to show up fully, but not laden with old stories and limiting beliefs as their only foundation. “Leave the basement and come into the house you are building, “ we say. “It is a beautiful house and only you can build it.”
9. They are the architects and we the consultants. They the travelers, knowing just where they need to go. We are the guides. In service of their ideal models, we consult, we ask important questions, we listen deeply, we enliven their act of will from purpose and deliberation into affirmation, choice, planning and realization (manifestation).
10. We are psychosynthesists. All of psychosynthesis is brought to bear. We are helping professionals. We are coaches. We are caring, perfectly imperfect adults, committed to the growth of individuals and the planet. We are psychosynthesis coaches.

(Conceived by Didi Firman, Jon Schottland, Carlyn Saltman, Marjorie Hope Gross, Meredith Maislen, Patricia Breen, Konnie Fox, Jean Gran, Yonti Kelly and Audrey McMorrow.

It has been my pleasure to share some of what I know about psychosynthesis coaching with you. The Center’s next major commitment is to editing a book on psychosynthesis coaching, where we, along with other psychosynthesis coaches throughout the world, will elaborate this important emerging field.

However you practice psychosynthesis in the world, my hope is that it nourishes you and helps to heal others, moving us all towards “achieving slowly and

silently, but powerfully and irresistibly— *the Supreme Synthesis*” (Assagioli, 2000, p.27) as the good Dr. Assagioli proposed.

Thank you.

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