

Empowerment of the Will through Life Coaching

by Martha Crampton, Ph.D.

Coaching and the Personal Will: Setting Goals, Priorities, and Boundaries

Coaches differ in their emphasis on personal and transpersonal will. Spiritually-based coaches tend to begin by exploring the client's values and higher purpose. This provides the context for establishing specific goals. When a person's goals express core values, passion and creativity are released. Personal will becomes aligned with carrying out the will of the higher Self.

Establishing an Agreement

A "coaching agreement" is usually drawn up which establishes the client's desired areas of focus. Some people have a specific concern such as finding a new job or dealing with a particular crisis. Others want to consider all areas of their lives, including such things as health, relationships, finances, and their environment. Having explored their core values, clients work with their coach to develop goals that express these values in the various areas of their lives. It is crucial that the goals be those of the client and that the coach avoid a parental or nagging role.

The coach assists the person to envision possibilities, expand options, establish time lines and priorities, and commit to realistic goals within a specific time frame. Each coaching session reviews the client's progress with goals established in prior sessions and new goals are created for the following week. Clients may recommit to existing goals or revise plans made at an earlier date. In the parlance of coaching, "requests" are made by the coach (often developed collaboratively with the client) for specific action steps to forward the client's goals between sessions. The client is free to accept, renegotiate, or decline a request.

Reflection on One's Goal-Setting Process

I often explore with clients how they make choices and set goals in their lives. We do this when they set goals for the period ahead and when they report on what they accomplished between sessions. It is helpful to look at what part of a person is drawn to particular choices. There is frequently a subpersonality or complex involved like the pleaser, the rebel, the driven person, the martyr, or the one who feels inadequate. Belief systems such as "I can't have what I really want" or "It's selfish to focus on my own needs" may come into play. Clients are often tempted to set goals they believe they "should" accomplish rather than goals with intrinsic value. One of the most useful interventions a coach can make is to let clients know when "should" energy is present and, on the contrary, when they light up with authentic joy and passion.

Other will problems that frequently show up are tendencies to over-commit, to give up, to lack boundaries, or to set one's sights too high or too low. Subpersonality integration may help to align a client's will behind their goals.

Inquiry About Actions Taken or Not Taken

When a client fails to accomplish goals they have chosen, wonderful opportunity for learning is present. Coaches need to protect clients from their inner critic {both the coach's and their own) at such times, cultivating an attitude of neutral observation. It is important that the coach be "in neutral" herself or himself, modeling an accepting attitude.

I find the following questions helpful in guiding the client's reflection:

External Action Taken

- What steps did you take and what were the results?
- If you did not accomplish certain goals you intended to, what was this about?

Internal Experience

- What was your experience of doing this?
- Did you feel confidence, anxiety, joy, guilt, resistance, etc.?
- What beliefs generated these feelings?
- Were all parts of you aligned behind your goals?

Processing the Experience

- How have you been processing what happened?
- Can you witness it from a neutral place without self-judgment?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What do you conclude from this experience?

Processing from a Higher Self or Wisdom Perspective

(Using a centering process, such as meditative, heart-centered, or imagery techniques, view the situation from an expanded perspective.)

- What learnings or new options does this reveal?

Next steps

- Based on the above, what next steps would you like to plan?

If the process is handled with sensitivity, it can be just as valuable to reflect on goals not achieved as to actually accomplish the goals. For example, a client who is an aspiring actress had set goal of going to three auditions. She noticed that she resisted doing this and in fact had not done so when she came to the next coaching session. In discussing this, she became aware that she envied her friends who had agents and didn't have to waste time on auditions. She realized that she really wanted an agent herself and could probably get on. She made the important shift from complaint to empowerment by clarifying what she wanted and setting her intention to achieve it. The following week she focused her will on taking steps toward finding an agent.

Setting Boundaries

Most people have difficulty in setting healthy boundaries. Even prominent coaches say that, without their own coach, they lose their way. They become side-tracked, over-committed, and over-stressed, making self-sabotaging decisions that undermine their true interests.

In our culture, it is rare indeed that a person's real Self has been acknowledged and supported. Instead, there is pressure to conform to other people's perceptions and agendas. Listening to one's own needs is not a highly encouraged skill. To the contrary, children all too frequently get the message that it is selfish to think about their own needs and presumptuous to want too much happiness or success for themselves. Not surprisingly then, as adults, we often feel on shaky ground when it comes to making decisions on our own behalf. When we lack a foundation of unconditional love in our lives, we seek to validate ourselves by pleasing, impressing, or taking care of others. A coach provides needed permission and support for people to dream big dreams and to follow through on them.

I had an interesting experience recently in helping a client set boundaries. She had been offered a job as executive director of a human service organization where she had worked as a volunteer teacher. Though she disliked administrative work, she felt she should take the job. She wanted to please the other staff members and liked the validation of a salary. I helped her listen to her real feelings about this and encouraged her to stand by what she really wanted. To her surprise, she was able to negotiate the job of her dreams doing what she loved without having to handle the administrative tasks. Through taking this stand to be true to herself, she was able to access a deeper resources within her being. She entered a period of

intense communion with her higher Self in which she felt that her steps were divinely guided. Shortly thereafter, she received what she believes is her life mission. This has unleashed an incredible passion in her that is inspiring to behold. The moral: when we set boundaries that honor our true nature, we create space for the higher Self to enter our lives.

Use of Therapeutic Techniques to Free the Will in Coaching

When clients reach an impasse in using their will, the coach needs to decide to what extent he or she is comfortable addressing therapeutic issues in a coaching context. Opinion differs within the coaching field about whether a coach should attempt to deal with emotional issues. Some prefer to avoid this area altogether. Others freely draw on a therapeutic background to help clients resolve issues that get in the way of creating desired results. There is, nonetheless, a fine line to be maintained between doing therapy and doing coaching while using therapy techniques. In contrast to psychotherapy clients who seek to alleviate pain or dysfunction, coaching clients want to go beyond the ordinary, to fulfill their highest potentials. A coach must not lose sight of this context in dealing with emotional issues.

I find that certain tools from my therapist's tool kit lend themselves well to the coaching work. Since most coaching takes place by telephone, methods used must be applicable when the client is not physically present.

In the last few years, new methods that vastly accelerate the processing and release of unhealthy patterns have entered the field of psychotherapy. Referred to as the "power therapies" or "energy psychotherapies," they produce remarkable breakthroughs in freeing the will. Within the past year, the Association for Comprehensive Energy Therapies was formed, providing an umbrella for practitioners interested in these and related methods.

The best known of the energy therapy methods is EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing). This method, widely used in trauma treatment, has the client focus on a disturbing thought, feeling, or incident, while receiving bilateral stimulation through eye movements or binaural sound. I often use this highly effective process when working with a client face to face, though it is not recommended for telephone work.

Some of the energy psychotherapy techniques are more appropriate for telephone coaching. These methods have the client gently press or tap certain points on the acupuncture meridians while focusing on the undesired thought, pattern, or emotional state. Typically, and often within a few minutes, the emotional charge on the issue dissipates, the client gains insight into the problem, and he or she is able to disidentify from the beliefs which underlie it. This process combines intention with balancing the energy system to achieve results so rapidly it sometimes appears miraculous.

The meridian-based therapies I prefer are the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) and Tapas Acupressure Technique (TAT) because of their simplicity and ease of use. I recently used EFT in a coaching session with a man employed as an art director. This individual suffered so deeply from feelings of inadequacy when making presentations that he almost quit his job. In a five-minute round of the EFT process, he saw how he created his own anxiety. He perceived how his imagination turned others into judges so that he then felt he must bend himself out of shape to accommodate them. He realized that he could view the other people, not as judges, but as team members, helping one another to solve the problem. He said, "I've chosen to put myself in a maze, but nothing stops me from walking out of it." By the end of our telephone call, his will was committed to success in that firm. He immediately felt confident in making his presentations and within the week was offered a promotion to Creative Director.

Summary

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 which 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 (1973/1999) profound insights into the nature and functioning of the will, so far ahead of their time, will likely find a receptive audience.