

CHAPTER 1 The Relationship Between Coaching and Spirituality



ASSESSMENT

Please rate yourself on the extent to which you coach with Spirit.

0 = never; 1 = rarely; 2 = sometimes; 3 = often; 4 = most of the time;
5 = almost always

To what extent do I . . .

- 0 1 2 3 4 5 believe spirituality is a natural part of who we are?
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 believe Spirit can partner with me in coaching?
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 believe that people can learn their life's purpose?
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 continually ask myself, "How can I be of service now?"
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 guide clients' awareness to the purposefulness
of circumstances?
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 believe growth can come from challenges and problems?
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 know what my life lessons are?

Coaching

My official definition of coaching, derived from the British training I received in 1987, is an inquiry process of helping people master the ability to consistently obtain the results they want in all life areas with a sense of well-being. The longer I coach, the more I realize coaching extends far beyond realms I ever imagined.

The greatest tool coaches have is the question. Questions come from a yearning to know more about ourselves, others, and the whole. The source of questions can be our intellect, our emotions, and our spiritual meaningfulness.

Intellect

Curiosity motivates intellectual inquiry; we coach because we are curious about what makes people tick, curious about why people succeed and fail, curious about human nature. Self-directed questions keep us on the leading edge of our own wisdom. We want to know, to gain more knowledge. Coaching at the intellectual level spawns conversations about strategic planning, knowledge and fact gathering, and coaching for achievement. For example: “What blocked you from obtaining that result? What might you do differently next time?”

Emotions

The emotional cousin of curiosity is deep caring, acceptance, or love. When the motivation for coaching becomes emotionally based, the question, any question, becomes a legitimate excuse to connect with another human being. Coaching questions that have their source in affect tend to center on the “being” side of experience, typically on increasing joy, peace, and happiness. For example: “How might you have experienced that situation differently? What choice would bring greater peacefulness?”

Spiritual Meaningfulness

Broader than intellectual curiosity and emotional caring is the search for meaningful connection with the whole—the transformational reason for coaching. Coaching dialogues address belonging and purposefulness—the most expansive forms of context

conceivable. Questions in this domain invite ruminations: “Why do you think these things have happened to you now? How does this relate to your highest way of contributing in the universe?”

My Definition of Coaching

This prelude leads to my unofficial and nowadays preferred definition of coaching—bringing us closer to coaching with Spirit.

When a coach takes the initiative to create a space of unconditional acceptance or love (as well as a coach, a human being, can), then, for a time period of at least four months and for as long as the coaching partnership lasts, the client can *just be* whom he or she truly is.

The Difference Between Coaching and Therapy

In the past eighty years, psychotherapy has played a vital role in helping people understand their dysfunctional and emotional selves, ready to move beyond an unhealthy past to heal psychologically destructive patterns and relationships. When one feels emotionally healthy, hopeful, and optimistic, future plans take a different shape than when one feels stuck. The natural sequence is to clean up old garbage, then build success on a new platform. Coaching picks up where traditional therapy leaves off, moving people to integrate their therapeutic insights into practical everyday living. As therapy draws to a conclusion, clients ask “Now what? Now that I have probed and cleared my past, how can I create my life with the new me?” Enter coaching!

Someone once told me the difference between therapy and coaching: Therapy takes bad things and chunks them smaller while coaching takes good things and chunks them bigger. People seeking coaching appear ready to chunk bigger.

Preparing to Coach with Spirit

Coaching with Spirit brings a different perspective to the fore. For those considering becoming coaches, take time to reflect on your answers to the following ten questions. The more you know yourself, the more effective you will be as a coach.

1. How strong is my sense of self?
2. Do I know my values?
3. How do I acknowledge myself?
4. What role does service play in my life?
5. How do I cope with stresses within relationships?
6. How much am I willing to share my vulnerabilities?
7. How strong is my sense of purposefulness?
8. To what extent do I trust?
9. How important is my growth and development?
10. How authentic am I?

Why Unconditional Acceptance Is Transformational

I have boldly claimed coaching with Spirit involves unconditional acceptance or love. Have you ever tried to accept unconditionally a client who is an incessantly loquacious talker—a “motor mouth”—burdened with the inability to stop? If yes, you may have encountered someone like my client Milena. Or have you worked with clients defeated by procrastination, intensely under pressure from all corners to “get on the stick” and take action? If so, you may have coached someone like my client Ethan.

If you fell prey to the tendency to try to help the Milenas or Ethans eliminate their unwelcome behaviors, you may have missed the boat. Garrulousness could be a sign of fear. Consider what happens when the talking stops; the connection might be severed and lost. Keep spewing utterances of any sort and your listener remains in captivity, close at hand. Chances are people in Milena’s ring of connection, such as her acquaintances, family, and colleagues, have chastised her for her annoying way of relating. Imagine instead loving her just the way she is. I did. You might witness what I call a coaching miracle. Milena began to honor moments of silence, connecting through energy instead of with her words. These short moments stretched out long enough for her boss to commend her for learning listening skills from her coach. Interestingly, I had no game plan to teach her listening skills.

Harvesting the learning from Milena and eager to carbon copy my new knowledge, I embarked on showering love on Ethan. Once again something remarkable and, from my vantage point, unexplainable occurred. In both cases, when our connection reached a level of certainty, Milena and Ethan moved into a place of choice *and* chose the op-

posite behavior. Ethan sprinted into action, causing his wife to thank me for helping him overcome procrastination. The “cave” (his garage) was finally getting cleaned out. But I did not work on helping Ethan overcome procrastination. So what catalyzed these outcomes? I believe it was unconditional acceptance.

Perhaps we experience miracles when we envelop clients with love and acceptance, respecting them just as they are, whether they choose to change or not. Encouraging someone to be at choice is more important than eradicating unwanted habits. I know my clients and I have learned and relearned that choice resides in the space of acceptance.

Spirituality

Spiritual Handicaps

Spirituality is often equated with religion. Throughout history, millions of people have been killed in the name of sundry religions trying to demonstrate superiority over one another. Not exactly evidence of one of the fundamental spiritual principles of this book: We are all connected.

Cults commit suicide to honor “spiritual” gurus. Terrorists and murderers claim that spiritual voices told them to perform heinous acts. Masses follow spiritual leaders without awareness of the personal power they relinquish. No wonder we shrink from proclaiming our spirituality publicly. I, too, experienced moments of disconnection during the widespread spiritual mania that swept the United States in the late 1980s.

A Personal Story. I invite you down memory lane to August 11, 1988, a day referred to as the Harmonic Convergence. Broadcast in the media as the day for planetary spiritual awakening, events to honor this day occurred across the globe. My son and I meandered down to the Washington Monument to see what the capital of the United States had planned. We arrived to find a circle of thirty people, all clothed in white from head to toe. As we inched closer, we alarmed someone from the inner circle, who quickly approached us and said firmly, “Don’t come any nearer. You are not wearing white.” Dumbfounded, we retreated, surprised that spirituality was defined as the color of attire. What happened to spiritual awakening and the principle of encompassment? This true story epitomizes how spirituality can be misinterpreted. No wonder many refrain from mentioning spirituality or relegate it to the back burner of their lives, only exposed on specific days when “sanctioned” religious observances occur.

This event led me to ponder what spirituality meant to me, and in time I came up with the following definition: Spirituality is the quality of evolving toward greater wholeness and integration while experiencing multilevel connections (to self, to another, and to the whole); being in the present attending to emotional, mental, and physical needs; and responding purposefully.

What aspects of spirituality bring us together instead of separate us? And what does this have to do with coaching?

Coaching and Spirituality

Spirit, our essence, is omnipresent with every coach and every client. When we coach with Spirit, we encompass all that is available. Let us refer to all that is available as Source. If we do not include Source, something is missing. Because Source is always present, what is missing in this word so__ce? You are (soURce). Coaching with Spirit suggests *you* can welcome, reveal, and understand this Spirit. When we coach with purposefulness—relegating what is not purposeful to the background; deleting attachment to results; trusting what happens is for the highest good of ourselves, our clients, and all concerned; being in the present moment, available, connected to ourselves, one another, and the whole; choosing our responses, in a state of wonder and curiosity; being of service and being grateful for all of this—then, we coach with Spirit.

Questions a Coach Asks Self While Coaching with Spirit

- How can I be of service now?
- How is this purposeful for me?
- Is this issue my “stuff” or my client’s?
- What action is for the highest good of all concerned?
- What is the best way to connect? for each of us? for both of us?

Life Purpose

The ultimate spiritual question throughout the ages has been “Who am I?” or “Why do I exist?” and this is where coaching begins. After identifying the trail of purposefulness, the next hurdle is to become aware of when one is off track and to learn how to jump back on. Some become sidetracked for moments; others veer off course for years.

Coaches assist people to recognize purposelessness, as well as help clients resume purposefulness *if* they choose that track. It is a choice! When we choose our actions, we feel empowered; when we feel as if others hold the reins, we feel victimized. Even though the victim state erodes our Spirit's solidarity, it still remains a choice. When we choose purposefully, we experience greater satisfaction, fulfillment, and meaningfulness. Coaches do not attempt to influence an outcome; we facilitate awareness to bring clients to their choices. When clients appear to create obtuse detours, seemingly far off purpose, the coach's role is to remember patiently that we all create opportunities and experiences from which to learn. Acknowledge clients for making choices, whether you agree with the choice or not.

Sometimes we become sidetracked and lured by external trappings and wrappings. I became aware of this conundrum at the impressionable age of seventeen. Seated on a luxurious boat, soaking up the sun during a college break, I leaned over to an adult whom I knew to be in an internationally prestigious and influential position and naïvely commented, "Oh, you have it all; you must be so happy." His face fell, his brows furled for an instant, and he responded, "I'd rather be a carpenter." Shocked by his reply and his willingness to share it, I bit my tongue. To this day I recall that moment whenever a client has the courage to admit that something in life is missing. We all seek meaningfulness. I have never heard anyone admit to choosing to live a life without meaning.

In *Learning from the Inside Out*, the coaching book by Bianco-Mathis, Nabors, and Roman, the authors acknowledge the role of personal purposefulness in the organizational setting: "An organization that is built on the basis of a coaching mindset is able to capture the human spirit—and it is this ingredient that aligns personal and organizational goals and results in high performance" (Bianco-Mathis, Nabors, & Roman, 2002).

Spirit as a Partner

The following examples describe when I recognized Spirit as a partner in coaching.

Example



During the first coaching meeting in which we uncover life purpose, I ask clients to recall and share times when they have experienced meaningful moments. I take notes and then studiously craft samples of life purpose statements using my notes.

Once, as I proceeded to create a statement, a magical event occurred. In real time it took but three seconds, yet I felt whisked into timelessness. Compelled to enter silence, I closed my eyes, looked up, and in the blink of an eye expressed gratitude for being allowed to do this work, affirmed that whatever happened was for the highest good of myself, my client, and all others concerned, acknowledged how blessed I felt to be part of the process enabling another person to understand connection to Source, and released any expectation of the correct answer.

Suddenly, I went mentally blank. When I opened my eyes, I began writing purely through sensation, oblivious to any cerebral processing. As different iterations emerged beneath my pen, my client grabbed his pen and created a life purpose statement that suited him to a T.

Spirit's Involvement Is an Honor. Since this incident from 1987 until the present day, the depth of increasing connection I feel with Spirit has been profound. Having had this experience thousands of times in many different coaching situations, I now feel Spirit's involvement as an honor instead of an oddity. I welcome and integrate these moments into my coaching, not just in the introductory or life purpose meeting but at any other time as well. When I feel stuck or unclear how to proceed, I deliberately close my eyes, allowing silence to speak. Answers always come when I allow space for Spirit.

Example



Helping clients to determine which career best suits their purpose is common to my business. When I contracted with Randy, he wanted a coach to help him think bigger than he could alone. "Bigger" turned out to be a handsomely paid leader in his field in an executive position. However, using Randy's life purpose statement as a guide, "bigger" also had to include a job that tapped into his passion and desire to contribute something meaningful.

As is often the case, coaches work with clients to clarify pieces of a puzzle and might not hang around to see the puzzle finished. We can help people clarify dreams; *they* still need to take action. Randy chose not to pay attention to *all* aspects of his purpose, convinced that if he made enough money and had enough power he would feel as if he was making a meaningful contribution.

Randy phoned back several years later, proud of his success but claiming something was missing. His executive position paid royally, offered panoramic visibility, and fulfilled his materialistic wishes, *but* did not feel fulfilling.

Randy learned one cannot be partially purposeful. A full commitment is needed! Revisiting his purpose statement, we wrote a job description including visibility, power, money, *and* contribution. A year later, Randy, well-established in his new job, feels more spiritually integrated and honors his entire being.

Spiritual Integrity Is Not Part of the Equation—It Is the Entire Equation. Hold up your mirror. If you do not coach with Spirit, your whole being may not be shining through. The profession of coaching, one of the most meaningful ones I have encountered (do you hear *my* purpose shining through?), requires complete integrity and authenticity.

Example



Christopher, a high-ranking military officer, wanted a coach to help him plan retirement. In his life purpose meeting, the word “peaceful” popped up over and over again, ending up as a key word in his purpose statement. At the moment of this discovery, Christopher’s energy quivered. I verbally and nonverbally assured him it was acceptable to be authentic in my presence. He began softly crying, admitting he never had cried in front of anyone before. His two sides had collided—that mendacious part committed to thirty career years leading fighters and that part he later referred to as “the peacemaker.” Ideas for his retirement game plan prior to coaching became diametrically opposed to the one he set out to design after acknowledging his truth.

“As soon as you trust yourself, you will know how to live,” German philosopher and poet Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe wisely stated. Indeed, the life purpose meeting served to surface Christopher’s inner truth.

One might conclude that spirituality in coaching is no more than validation, and in one sense that is so. However, learning life purpose is just the first step. The coaching process continues by guiding clients to develop the habit of using purpose to make choices and the habit of examining obstacles that hinder purposefulness. Having a

coach while awakening and experimenting with your genuine self supports and eases the transition to more consistent purposeful living.

Example



Coach Debbie Call received this testimonial from one of her clients, Susan B. Crew, a personal coach and management consultant herself, lauding the importance of coaching with the spirit of purposefulness:

The primary benefit for me was your ability to guide me to connect with my central essence and to connect with guiding forces larger than myself. This new perspective has increased my creativity, willingness to take risks, ability to pay attention to and enjoy my loved ones; has given me an expanded sense of what is possible in my work; and has resulted in more work (business) of the kind I want. Some of what helped this process was your gentleness, your ability to respond to my concerns by creating a safe space, your willingness to share some of your own experiences when this facilitated my journey, your practicing what you teach, and your connectedness to your own Spirit forces (Susan's Story, 2001).

When an event occurs that appears to derail clients from a purposeful trajectory, coaches can guide clients' awareness to the purpose behind every circumstance. Coach Peter Vajda uses the symbol of the spiral to explain how this works.

The "X" Spot of the Spiral

By Peter Vajda

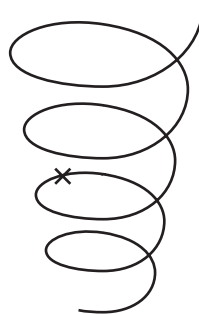
When clients become discouraged during coaching, coaches can provide support without judgment or subjectivity by explaining discouragement or frustration using the spiritual metaphor of the spiral. The spiral represents the essence of the universal plan—reflecting that each of us is in a continual process of growth and development as we seek to align our personal consciousness with universal consciousness. When the former (evidenced by beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and actions) aligns with universal consciousness, we experience an innate sense of joy and well-being that holds

steady even in the face of the initiating cycle of the new spiral, sensed as a downward movement.

Most clients understand that the spiral has downward cycles. Many clients need to realize no spiral ends on a downward cycle; life is in a continual upward spiral flow. In fact, every spiral ends on an upward swing. This means we continue to move forward in a positive direction, even when we feel as if we are sliding backward.

The repetitive point where the spiral moves horizontally may be perceived as a place of stasis, an absence of movement. Feelings of helplessness, being stuck, and going nowhere abound. We can refer to this experience as “the X spot” (see Figure 1.1), the point in the cycle where it looks and feels as if one is repeating old patterns, reminiscent of experiences.

Figure 1.1. The “X” Spot of the Spiral



The “X” spot creates the opportunity for purpose to become a driving factor in conjunction with will and an understanding of the growth process. Trust and faith become supportive allies. On a spiritual plane, the “X” spot presents a challenge. Clients and coaches can use this doorway of opportunity to cross the threshold of fear and doubt by saying “No” to familiar sabotaging and disabling thoughts and feelings. Working to support clients to understand and persevere while acknowledging and experiencing the “X” spot often results in tremendous spiritual growth and emotional freedom and the ultimate prize—purposeful action.



The Path to Coaching with Spirit

Much happens before we become more purposeful. Our path of learning takes us from the quagmire of the pits and the problems into predetermined patterns of roadmaps, the dead end of polarization, paradoxes, preparation, construction zones of possibilities, and finally to the straightaway of purposefulness to partner with Spirit.

Many levels of learning happen as we journey up the spiritual path toward perfection. Perfection on the human plane is not possible because, if we experienced perfection all the time, we would have nothing to learn. The very reason for human existence is learning, and the path I metaphorically refer to represents advancement—the process of evolution. “The frontiers are not east or west, north or south, but wherever a man *fronts* a fact” (Thoreau, 1971, p. 30).

The Pits and Problems

At the entrance to the path to perfection exist problems and “the pits.” If we stay in the pits, we yield to complacency or negativity and deny ourselves the option of resolution, growth, or a way out. Problems and obstacles ironically could be nicknamed “growing buddies” because they keep us in discovery mode. Without movement or change, no new brain synapses can be jumped, no new convolutions built, no learning can occur. In order for us to adapt to constant fluctuations in our vibrational environment, we, too, must keep vibrating or changing.

Invite problems in because they offer grist for learning. Snags, snafus, and glitches induce us to detach from the danger of the smug status quo. Certainly you do not need to seek out problems, but when they knock, allow them entrance.

Patterns

The easiest way to remain stuck is to develop patterns or habits—unconscious routines that keep us on autopilot, shielding us from the requirement to be fully present to what is at hand. When instinctive or autonomic behavior rules, choice is removed. If we do not have to think, we do not have to learn. It appears to be almost humanly impossible to operate 100 percent out of habit. Shifting external environments keep us on a delicate fulcrum between habit and choice. Paradoxical creatures that we are, we resist change with a vengeance, yet crave learning and insight to enable further evolution.

Polarization

Polarization separates, creates extremes, and denies the reality of the continuum. Familiar polarizations such as yes or no, black or white, always or never, and all or nothing diminish options, thereby sheltering the subtleties of life. For a moment, think about the weather forecast and assume the evening news reported bad weather racing your way. Without further information, you would make very different plans if you knew it to be a light sprinkle, heavy snowstorm, rain, sweltering heat, thunderstorms, or gusty winds. The more information you have, the more choices you have, the better judgment you can make.

Continuum thinking and subtlety expand the menu of options; polarization creates myopia. *Always* and *never* miss the possibility of *sometimes* and *periodically*; *yes* and *no* deny the existence of *perhaps* or *maybe*; *black* and *white* preclude shades of *gray*. The absolutist lives in a simplistic world devoid of complexity. The more complex and interrelational our worldview, the greater the number of responses available to us, the more learning is possible, and the higher the probability of adaptability and evolution.

Paradoxes

A paradox—a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true—creates confusion and therefore a delightful launching pad into a space for learning. Contrary to the calm in the center of a hurricane, we cannot rest comfortably in the center of a paradox. Restless, we grapple with the conflict until some resolution becomes apparent, some logical sense regained. In the midst of this mental wrestling match, the fruit of discovery blossoms. Anyone who has attempted to resolve a paradox at the level at which it was created has experienced a frustrating dead end. Abstract thinking, creativity, and higher forms of cognitive ability such as synthesis and evaluation enable us to move beyond the paradox—processes replete with learning. With a twist of humor, the ultimate coaching paradox might be: I have the answers as to how to coach with Spirit. Perchance another paradox forms as we begin to explore how to prepare to be more fully in the present.

Preparation

All of these steps along the path, the problems, patterns, polarizations, and paradoxes intervene in our moment-by-moment experience to catalyze learning. When we exhibit

certain qualities of being, our chances of learning increase. Curiosity, playfulness, attention to process instead of outcome, and being in a state of wonder serve as allies allowing us to relax into a new unknown.

Preparation means getting ready. At any given moment, how quickly can we respond? Travelers pack a necessity bag filled with essentials like shampoo, shaving cream, a toothbrush, and so forth. Those who travel frequently keep their kits stocked and packed, ready to go with them at a moment's notice. What do we find in our coaching with Spirit bag? What do we deem essential to do coaching, to be the coach? Many who have contributed to this book cite their spiritual work as the preparation enabling them to be the best coaches they can be.

Possibilities

Learning, the formulation of cerebral pathways, happens in the present moment because of our power to choose. Coaches often feel as if they operate on trial and error. I suggest we rename it “trial and trial” to honor all that is learning and growth. There are no errors! The “here and now” contains all possibilities, every option, in an infinitesimal intangible worldwide web. Remaining constantly in the present moment challenges most of us; yet we strive to increase those moments. We make every effort, even though we cannot succeed, for that would be perfection, and with perfection, learning disappears. Humans have more choices than other living beings and also the gift to exercise the power to choose. How can we remain open to all possibilities while at the same time select those that bring the greatest learning for all?

Purposefulness

Purposefulness comes with clear intention, focused energy, and integrated alignment for the good of all. Exercising choices consistent with one's purpose brings meaningfulness and discovery at the most subtle and ubiquitous levels. Every person's purpose is unique, a magnificent personal signature claimable and ascertainable by any seeker interested in the pursuit. Living on purpose magnetizes us to our greatest individualistic learning. The purpose of life is to learn; the purpose of learning is to live more purposefully.

Partnership

The most a coach can aim for is to be in partnership with Spirit, preparing for and co-creating a life full of learning—using every problem, unconscious pattern, polariza-

tion, and paradox that springs forth to guide us on our unique journey. This best describes the path to coaching with Spirit.

R E F L E C T I O N

1. Would you be willing to risk exposing your Spirit at work if it meant an increase in your management effectiveness and ease of relating with colleagues at all levels in your organization?
 2. Do you know your life purpose and how it relates to your company mission statement?
 3. As a manager, how can you manifest your Spirit when coaching?
 4. How might you introduce the “X” spot of the spiral to your employees? Colleagues? Work team?
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The Three Grounded Principles of Coaching with Spirit

Three staples form the backbone of coaching with Spirit. Just as emergency medical technicians catapult into action fully prepared to resuscitate a breathless patient, coaches must be ready to infuse their spirit into the life of coaching. Keeping spirituality alive requires CPR: C = Connection, P = Present moment, and R = Responsibility.

Coaching examples and anecdotes from different venues of coaching illustrate varied applications—excavating life and giving meaning to each. Finally, harvesting the questions for reflection enables readers to assess, increase, and keep the ability to coach with Spirit alive and well. The metaphor of earth weaves throughout these chapters, reminding us how grounded spirituality can sprout down-to-earth transformation.

The next chapter, the first of the triad exploring connection, begins with an examination of the importance of connection with oneself.

