

COACHING MODELS AND ISSUES

NOT LONG AGO, a friend and I were driving a few hundred miles to a conference. Before leaving, he turned on his GPS, hit a couple buttons, and followed the machine's instructions to our destination. A voice alerted us to route changes that were ahead, corrected us when we missed a turn, warned us if there was road construction that might get in the way, kept us informed of the miles we had covered and the miles that were ahead, and got us to the conference site easily and without any hassle. Back in the old days, in the first years of the twenty-first century, we would have called ahead for directions, struggled with a big paper map that was impossible to refold, or perhaps downloaded a printout of our route before leaving home. Road maps still exist, of course, and they can be very useful, but now we have a variety of ways for finding where we are and how we get to where we want to go.

There are no GPS devices for coaching, at least not yet, but there are maps to guide our coaching journeys. Instead of calling them maps, we refer to them as coaching models. Some are more detailed or complex than others, but they all seek to accomplish the same purpose: giving coaches a guideline for their work. Just as we can drive to a destination without using a road map, it is possible to coach our clients without using a model. But both road maps and models can make the journey smoother, prevent unnecessary detours, and help us avoid dead-end streets. Unlike many road journeys in which a group of drivers would all travel the same superhighway to reach the same destination, each coaching trip is unique and takes its own distinctive route. For this reason, coaching models are general more than specific, but they give coaches and their clients useful signposts to guide the journey.¹

When I go on a trip, I don't spend much time comparing road maps. I find

a guide that appears to be helpful and I take off. That probably shows why I've resisted the temptation to summarize a number of coaching models and have decided, instead, to focus on one that works.² Doing so lets us pack together what we have considered thus far and get on the road to coaching others.

The coaching road map that we will use in the following chapters has four parts.³ This makes it easy to remember. Some coaches reproduce this model and share it with their clients near the beginning of the coaching. Doing this lays out the overall purpose of coaching and lets everyone see where the process is going. Other coaches keep the model in their minds, using it to guide their coaching work.

The next six chapters will discuss the model in detail with suggestions about how it can be used. To set the stage for this, we begin by looking at an overview in the next few pages. Please keep in mind that this is a big-picture general guideline for coaching. Most often a coach would not deal with all four parts of the model in one session, and coaching will not always move systematically from one point to the next like the hands on a clock. Sometimes you might skip from one point to another or you might decide to go back to an earlier stage. As you read, ponder how this all could apply to you, even before you start applying it to others.

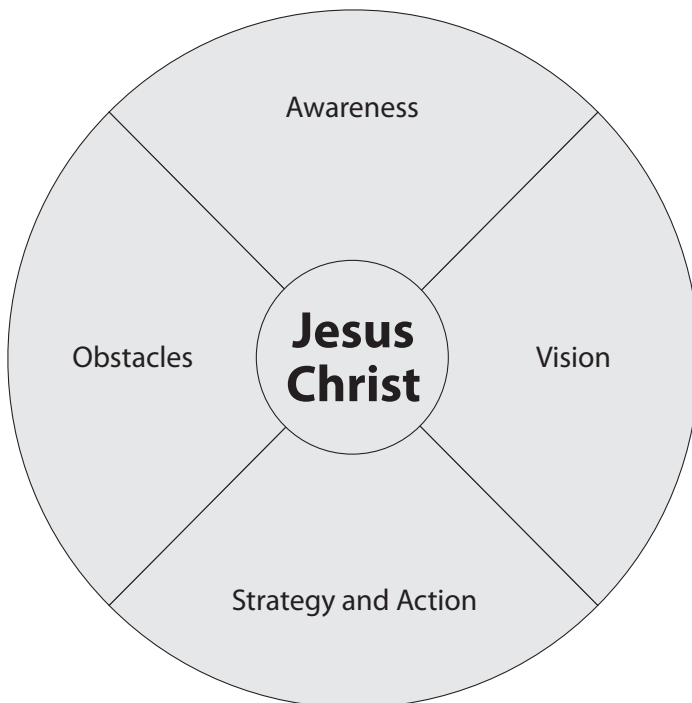


Figure 7-1 The Basic Christian Coaching Model

Before you start around the circle, it is assumed that you will have begun to build a partnership with the person you will coach, clarified what coaching involves, and reached an agreement for how you will work together. Like any relationship, the coaching partnership takes time to build. It needs to be cultivated as the coaching progresses so that coach and client have a congenial ongoing working affiliation.

Most important is that everything revolves around the person of Jesus Christ. He is like the axle at the center, keeping the wheel from spinning off in a variety of directions. In practical terms, what does it mean to have our coaching revolve around Jesus? It means that we commit all of our coaching (and our lives) to his lordship and direction. It means that through Scripture reading, prayer, and worship, we seek to be men and women who know him and are more sensitive to the leading of his Holy Spirit as we coach. It means that we seek to be clear on our values and personal beliefs. We do not reject or condemn those whose values differ from ours, nor do we manipulate clients to accept our convictions or priorities.



Figure 7-2 The Expanded Christian Coaching Model

Even so, we are honest about the values that guide our work. We politely decline to coach anybody who wants our services for the purpose of developing behaviors or lifestyles that appear to be inconsistent with Christian biblical principles and that, as a result, are likely to be self-defeating. We don't judge, but we do maintain our integrity by deciding what is right, as best we can determine this, and by living in ways that are consistent with that decision. Having Jesus Christ at the center means, as well, that we commit to praying for our clients, asking God to change their lives, working in part through our gifts, training, knowledge, and skills as coaches.

AWARENESS: WHERE ARE WE NOW?

As part of my training to become a coach, I took a practicum class in corporate coaching. Each student was assigned to work within a large corporation, doing one-to-one coaching with emerging executives who had been selected for an intensive leadership training experience. Most of us in that course had never heard of the corporation where our clients worked. We knew nothing about the nature of their business, and none of us had any prior contact with the people we would be coaching. In preparation for our work, we were given information about the company, its business, and the high-pressure corporate environment where most of the employees worked. Soon we got to know our clients very well. We learned about their dreams and aspirations. Before long we were walking alongside them as they made decisions and took action to reach their goals. Probably we used different methods and drew on our unique coaching styles, but we all started at the same place. We had to begin by finding out where our clients were at the time our coaching began. It was not until then that we could work with them as they moved from where they were to where they wanted to be.

The first part of the coaching model (awareness) has at least two parts: becoming more aware of the *present* (where the client is now) and becoming aware of the *person* (who the client really is). Later we will discuss tests or other formalized tools that can help us gain greater awareness of where and who the client is, but the coach's best methods are the listening, questioning, and responding that we discussed in the previous chapter.

Becoming aware of the present. This starts with the issues or concerns that have brought your client to coaching. Presumably, he or she is dissatisfied with something in life or at work and wants to make changes. The coach listens with curiosity and tries to discover the nature of these dissatisfactions. What are they? What would the client like to change? What attitudes, behaviors,

or people are getting in the way of progress? What about the client's present circumstances? What is the work environment like? Who are the people, the key players, who are having an impact on the client's life at present? What attitudes, frustrations, values, personality issues, and ways of thinking are influencing where the client is right now?

One business owner wanted coaching because his company was stalled. Sales remained about the same, employees never stayed long, morale was low, and there was little change despite periodic initiatives designed to bring growth. Several business consultants had come in to analyze the company and make useful recommendations, but still nothing changed. Then the business owner hired a coach. She asked questions about the company and listened carefully to the answers. She was not a consultant with expertise in company growth. Her focus was more on assisting as the owner looked at his present situation and explored pathways of action that he might initiate. A simple personality test showed that the owner was a task-oriented person, largely insensitive to people. He tended to be a micromanager who was involved in everything and who dominated most of the employees. He squelched creativity, rarely affirmed anybody, and relied on his own ideas and hard work to bring progress in the company. He resisted making changes in himself until coaching helped this man see that his controlling personality and his management style were major factors in the company's lackluster performance. The recommendations of those prior consultants never worked because the business owner tried to initiate them himself but with minimal effect because they were not his own ideas. As he began to change and the employees were invited to get more involved with decision making, the company began to grow and so did morale.

Becoming aware of the person. This true story illustrates the second part of getting awareness. It can be very useful to focus on the clients themselves. This is not in the sense of analyzing their motives, searching the past for the causes of their present behavior, or looking for personal problems that need to be solved. Instead, the coach encourages clients to look at their abilities, strengths, God-given spiritual gifts, weaknesses, passions, and life purposes. The business owner had some understanding of where his business was at present, but he had never thought of his own strengths and weaknesses. Prior to coaching, he had not considered how his own leadership style was driving him to run the company in an autocratic manner. Later, he was surprised to discover that his employees were well aware of the attitudes and controlling leadership behaviors that they experienced every day but that the company owner had never stopped to consider.

The awareness stop on the coaching circle is where your client tends to

be at the beginning. In the corporate coaching class that was mentioned earlier, all of the coaches were given information about the company leadership training program in which our clients were enrolled. We were told that each person had taken a group of assessment tests to get an indication of their personality types and leadership styles. Of course, the coaches were not given the results of these confidential tests, but most of the clients voluntarily shared these with their coaches later. In all of this, we were getting to know about the work settings of the people with whom we would be working and were beginning to know about the clients themselves.

VISION: WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

A vision is a mental picture of the ideal future. It has to do with what the person wants to accomplish, what he or she would like to have happen, and where the client wants to go. Vision applies to businesses, organizations, churches, families, and people who are building careers.

Having a clear vision is not a problem for some people. They know exactly where they want to go and can articulate their goals easily and often succinctly. A client may want to get a college degree, build a successful business, win an election, lead a church, or become an acclaimed musician. One of my past clients dreamed of writing a book, but he was stuck, not sure how to proceed. He wanted coaching that would enable him to fulfill the vision that was clear in his mind.

This differs from the many people who don't have a vision and don't know how to get one. They may sense that God has some purpose for their lives or ministries, but they have no idea what this is and no clue about how to find their calling. Maybe thousands of books have been written about vision casting and reaching visions, but often we live our busy lives without direction, focusing on the present and giving little thought to where we want to go or where God wants us to go. In contrast, Jesus and many of the biblical writers were focused on the future and guided by the God-given awareness of where they should or could move forward with their lives. They did not ignore the present or discount the past, but they were looking to better things that would come.

Great coaches are visionaries. Great coaches instill, nurture, and encourage vision, then model and motivate surrender to it.

—THOMAS G. BANDY, author of *Coaching Change*

Some people want a coach who will tell them what to do and where to go. Instead, good coaches use focused questions to stimulate the thinking that will let these people discover God's leading for themselves. Coaches call this "stepping into the future." It involves encouraging clients to envision what could be. It's about reflecting, imagining possibilities, and discovering a vision for the days or years ahead.

Sometimes this vision-oriented focus on the future involves major dreams or plans. When one of my friends took over as president of a large Christian ministry, he discovered that the organization was not functioning as well as it appeared to outsiders. Some of the long-term employees were stuck in the past, doing their jobs routinely but without much production and with little awareness of why the ministry even existed. The board of directors knew the original purpose for getting started, but most had given no thought to the changing times in which they lived or to possibilities for the organization's future. With the assistance of a coach, the new president guided the board to formulate and move to reach a fresh and captivating vision. My friend knew that without vision, organizations drift and so do individuals.

This vision-focused part of the model may take a significant amount of time, especially if the concept is new. When I was coached through a career transition, we spent a lot of time clarifying a vision for my future. The coach helped me think about where I was in my life at the time, ponder what I would still like to accomplish, and envision what I wanted my life to look like in the coming years. I never saw a crystal-clear picture of my future. Only God knows the future, so we can only make good estimations of where we are to go. Even so, with an idea of what I envisioned, we were able to move to the next part of the circle and think through strategies and action steps for making my hopes and visions for the future become a reality.

STRATEGY AND ACTION: HOW DO WE GET THERE?

Even when people have a clear idea of where they want to go, they may need help in getting there. This can involve setting goals that are realistic, specific, and measurable. Goals like "losing weight," "being more cooperative," or "paying more attention to my kids" are too vague to be motivating. They tend to be abandoned quickly. Goals that stimulate action involve concise statements such as "Starting after my vacation, I will read a bedtime story to my kids at least four times a week" or "I am going to lose fifteen pounds before my sister's wedding in June." After setting goals and starting to implement them, it soon becomes clear whether those goals are realistic and specific enough to be reachable.

Goal setting may involve something major, such as earning a college degree. But setting and reaching goals also could be a small part of developing a broader overall plan of action. A successful lawyer came to a friend of mine for coaching because he hated his job and found that the long hours kept him from his family. He earned a good salary and was grateful to his wife, who had helped him get through law school, but understandably she was resisting his talk about closing the practice.

The coach listened attentively to these concerns and asked questions about what would make his life better and more fulfilling. She asked why he had entered law in the first place and what he had enjoyed about the field when he started. In those early days, the practice was small. The lawyer was able to be home more often and even took time every week to play golf. This had been a relaxing diversion for him and a complete change of pace that was missing from his currently busy life. Together the lawyer and his coach came up with a plan that would enable him to trim his hours at work so he regularly could have an afternoon off and could go home in time for dinner with his family two nights every week. As part of a larger plan for adding more balance and fulfillment to his life, there were specific and realistic smaller goals that he was able to put into practice immediately with the accountability that came from his coach.

Clients usually come to coaching to do things differently or to do different things. They want to set goals, come up with plans, get into action, and use the accountability of coaching to stay on track. Clients want to be in motion, not standing still, so naturally a great deal of the coach's focus is on moving forward, envisioning the future, and helping clients create the path that will take them there. Coaching that emphasizes moving forward is focused, directed, intentional.

— LAURA WHITWORTH, KAREN KIMSEY-HOUSE, HENRY KIMSEY-HOUSE,
and PHILLIP SANDAHL, coauthors of *Co-Active Coaching*

Coaching and business books sometimes describe companies in which the leader has been able to evaluate the current situation and set a clear picture of the future but has failed to turn the vision into reality. Setting a strategy

and following through with a plan of action can be difficult even for highly motivated people. Nevertheless, this third part of the coaching model is critical if there is to be success. Let's return to the weight-loss issue that we have mentioned earlier. Maybe millions of people go on diets every year. By stepping on a scale, they become aware of where they are in terms of their weight. They have a vision of where they want to be weight-wise. They even may come up with a dieting plan for reaching their goal. Then they stall.

There is little value in having a long-range strategy for making change if the plan is never put into action. Some people very much want to move forward, but they aren't sure how to do it, their motivation fails, or they lose the courage to take even the first step. This points to several important roles for coaches at the strategy and action stage. First, they stimulate the development of a realistic plan of action. As part of this, clients decide what steps are needed to move forward. Next, coaches ask for commitment, maybe even asking a yes-no question: "Are you willing to commit to this plan?" If the answer is no, there needs to be a new plan. If the answer is yes, the coach and client decide when the next step will take place and perhaps a specific time when it will be done. As movement begins, coaches become encouragers and sometimes cheerleaders. Frequently, coaches become accountability partners, motivating and enabling clients to make the changes they desire and helping them evaluate, change, and restart their action plans if the forward movement stalls. It has been suggested that "without accountability, coaching has not happened, even if coaching skills have been used."⁴

OBSTACLES: WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?

Life is not a smooth journey. Progress is hindered by obstacles, roadblocks, setbacks, and disappointments. Like runners in a marathon, we can be hindered by hurdles that trip us up, slow us down, drain our energy, or force us to give up our goals and abandon the race. These obstacles are not always in the environments where we live or work. Many of our biggest obstacles reside in our minds as self-defeating thoughts and self-talk. We think, *If I go ahead, I will be laughed at or criticized. I'll never make it because it will take too long. Last time I tried something like this, I failed—what if I fail again?* These internal progress stoppers, sometimes called our mental gremlins, can be immobilizing, like huge mountains in the way of progress but mountains that few outsiders see because we hide them in our brains.

Look less at the mountain and more at the mountain-mover.

— BILL HYBELS, leadership expert,
pastor of Willow Creek Community Church

One of your greatest tasks as a coach is to help others uncover, face, and get past the self-defeating behaviors and mental self-talk that hinders progress. Some people come to coaching in the first place because they feel immobilized by barriers they can't surmount. Sometimes people are afraid to take risks. Others are persistent procrastinators. A coaching client may talk about changing but feel so secure in the old ways that he or she keeps making excuses for not taking action. Many coaching clients know the obstacles that hinder their own progress, and they can tell you what these are if you ask.

All of us have blind spots however. We don't always see self-sabotaging attitudes or behaviors in ourselves. If we do see them, we may not want to admit them. Coaches are more objective observers who often see the obstacles more clearly and before their clients recognize what might be getting in the way. As a coach, if you see the barriers, be cautious about pointing them out too quickly, especially if you still are building initial rapport. Instead, when you sense the presence of a blind spot, keep observing to see if your observations are valid. Later you can point out the obstacles in ways that keep your client from being defensive or resistant.

In all of this, remember that obstacles can become a major influence in organizations or groups as well as in individuals. People who live or work together can develop a mind-set that psychologists call *groupthink*. Everybody in the group can think like everybody else. If one group member begins to wonder if the group thinking is correct, he or she dismisses the mental doubt with self-talk like this: *Everybody else seems absolutely convinced that what they believe is valid and that they are making the right decisions. Obviously my doubting thoughts must be wrong. Besides that, I don't want to challenge the group, hinder their progress, or appear disloyal and not a team player. If I do express my hesitations, maybe I could get fired or kicked off the team, so it probably is best to keep quiet.* Sometimes an entire group can think this way. Each person harbors reservations, but nobody mentions doubts. The skilled coach can assist groups or individual clients in considering the possibilities of groupthink, encouraging them to face their external or mental barriers to progress, and getting back on the track of moving to where the client or clients really want to go.

This fourth segment of the coaching model, the obstacle-clearing segment

of the coaching circle, may also involve a reevaluation of the progress thus far, sometimes followed by a revisit to the awareness stage and another trip around the circle. This does not mean that coaching goes on forever in circles like a Ferris wheel or merry-go-round. It means, instead, that sometimes after we get past the obstacles, we may want to take a fresh look at where we are now, where we want to go, and the strategies and actions that we have taken or might take in the future. As coaching progresses, new awareness or insights might come to mind, the client may have new experiences, he or she begins to take new actions, and newer, clearer goals may emerge. But unlike the amusement park merry-go-round, the person being coached can stop the action at any time, get off, and go on with life.

After I started work on the first edition of this book, I was presented with an opportunity to be involved in an attractive new coach-training venture. I turned to some close friends for their input, one of whom is a professional coach. These people helped me get a clearer *awareness* of the issues that concerned me about this potential new possibility. They reminded me of what I know about my self, including my strengths, values, passions, and insecurities, all of which were relevant concerns. We looked again at what I had envisioned as the major focus for the next few years of my life, and we discussed how the new venture might or might not fit with my perceived life *vision* from this point forward. We discussed *strategy*, how I might be able to deal with the new opportunity and its impact on other parts of my life. I talked with them about next step *actions* that could be taken, and a couple of them agreed to hold me accountable for what I did next. More than once, I honestly shared fears and other *obstacles* that needed to be dealt with before I could make a decision. These friends were coaching me informally, and their guidance was of immeasurable help. Without thinking much about it, they were helping me get a handle on where I was at present, focus on where I might want to go in the future, and find ways get there. When I reached a conclusion about the new opportunity and then turned it down, I talked with these friends about my decision, and they helped me evaluate what I had decided. Informally, I have done something like this on a number of occasions in my life. Usually in these situations, I have not thought consciously about the coaching model with its four segments, and I have not thought that my wife, close friends, and others have been coaching me when we talked about challenges or new opportunities. But our talks have involved coaching. Many of us coach all the time. Some do it informally. Others develop skills and do it with special competence and expertise.

DOING AND BECOMING

We all know there can be different kinds of change. Some is as radical and long lasting as the metamorphosis of a tadpole into a frog or a caterpillar into a butterfly. Other change is less revolutionary. The same is true of coaching. Sometimes coaches guide people as they undertake down-to-earth efforts for reaching specific goals, getting unstuck, resolving conflicts, or making decisions. This has been the focus of this book thus far. But for many people, coaching can bring about a striking transformation, a significant and lasting change for the better.

I had almost completed this manuscript when I took time to lead a coaching seminar for younger leaders. One of the participants was a pastor who volunteered to be part of a coaching demonstration. He had listened to my discussion of the coaching circle and told me he wanted coaching about his decision to get more education. We started by talking about where he was in his ministry and his vision about where he wanted to go. As he talked and I listened, I wondered if he really was committed to going back to school and starting a doctoral program.

“You’ve talked about enjoying your ministry and wanting more training,” I said, “but I’m not sure I hear much passion. What is your passion?”

Without hesitation, he answered with one word: jazz.

I was surprised because I had not seen this coming. He really wanted to be a jazz musician and admitted that he had always suppressed this desire because he knew it would not be acceptable to his congregation or his family. The more he talked about jazz, however, the more enthusiastic he became. He wanted to keep serving Jesus, doing what he was trained to do, but in coaching he openly expressed his long-hidden urge to be something other than a lead pastor.

I’m keeping in touch with this young leader. I’m not sure he will make a career change, but coaching has stimulated him to give more thought to where he is and to what God might call him to do at the next stage in his life journey.

If you want to help your clients in the short-term, focus on solving problems. If you want to see them radically transformed for life, concentrate on building people.

— TONY STOLTZFUS, author of *Leadership Coaching*

Coaching can focus on helping people *do* things differently, but it also helps clients *be* different. Often coaches focus on behavior change that enables clients to take action to reach measurable goals. It can help young pastors change their job descriptions and follow their passions. At other times, coaches focus on how clients can become different, transformed internally, changed in their ways of thinking as well as in their behavior. That transformation is the ultimate goal of Christian coaching.