

Authentic coaching

Part
Five

Who do you think you are?



By Lizzi Larbalestier

In this article we are going to focus specifically on the role of identity when it comes to our coaching relationships.

Our sense of self will greatly impact our practice and as such influence the very nature of our business in terms of the locations we choose, the modalities we adopt, the clients that gravitate towards us... and the contracts/projects we are and are not inclined to engage with.

Contrary to the blank canvas, coaches often attract clients largely based upon their personality and whilst of course proven skillset is a given when it comes to selection criteria, the very nature of who we are, and how people interpret that, matters deeply.

When assessing the likelihood that we can co-create optimal conditions for insight, coaching, like any partnership, requires true compatibility.

Think about it and take some time to journal – why exactly do people choose to work with you as their coach? It is a big question worthy of more than a cursory thought. I don't mean what is your elevator pitch, or the marketing mechanisms by which you gain clients; this is more a question of 'Who exactly are *you*... and how does this influence your coaching?'

When it comes to *attracting* coaching clients the image you project matters, but when it comes to *retaining* clients and *gaining referrals*, authenticity is a distillation of knowing, doing

Why exactly do people choose to work with you as their coach?

and becoming, which is far broader than the activity of coaching and goes way beyond 'generic' in its resonance.

In the mBIT community we refer to identity as a verb rather than a noun – recognising the transitional and de-nominalised nature of 'selfing'. In the field of Blue Health Coaching we explore and strongly emphasise the ripple effect of our thoughts and actions upon our ecosystems, acknowledging that our sense of self and our sense of connection are intrinsically linked and permeate our whole lifestyle.

Exploring how we are showing up moment to moment – not only for our clients but in the world at large – is something worthy of reflective practice within coach supervision. There is a great phrase: 'Don't tell me you are funny; make me laugh.'

As coaches we endeavour to 'walk our talk' but what exactly does this mean?

An illustration might be: if I claim to be somebody with clear goals of looking out for the environment, you'd hope my actions consistently reflect that. I might perhaps mention the environment in nearly every conversation or every article I write. But for now let's explore a different example.

I once supervised a nutrition coach who had lost sight of how fundamental 'wise nutrition' was to her own mental and emotional wellbeing. Her chaotic nourishment regime and lack of self-care might very well have facilitated some empathy for her clients, but it certainly was not serving her well. As you might imagine, she described herself as feeling like a fraud when coaching others in this area. Her sense of impostor syndrome was deeply rooted in a very real lack of congruence. Changing behaviour alone would



Getting our own house in order must be a priority for any credible coach

have been a short-term fix but reassessing her 'sense of self' as a raw-food and clean-eating individual (and therefore how this manifested within her role of coach) enabled her to restore balance and really step into her power.

As coaches there is no expectation that we are perfect – of course we can at times become derailed – and yet credibility requires congruence. Our clients are seeking to get a sense that we are living proof that coaching works. They might ask us questions such as:

- Why exactly do we believe so much in coaching as a modality for change?
- Do we have a coach of our own and if not, why not?
- How and when do we apply various modalities including NLP to influence our perceptions and actions?
- What are we passionate about and how fulfilled are we within our own lives?
- Have we found our sense of balance and are we living intentionally?

- Do we evidence that we take action upon our insights, making wise choices?

- How curious are we; are we really ambassadors for learning? Getting our own house in order must be a priority for any credible coach. How coachable are you? As NLP professionals, self-development is an open loop and the best coaches are fundamentally 'people who are curious and welcoming of new insight'.

When we take away the expectation and effort required to play the role of coach we free ourselves to bring more of our personality to the table. From here we create a foundation for truly remarkable and progressive conversations.

So what gets in the way?

- Many of us will have no doubt experienced those times where we feel we are wearing a bit of a mask, having to dress a certain way or play political games.
- Perhaps we have admired certain coaches or NLP masters and attempted to replicate their style in some way.



- ▶ Maybe we have been drawn to a certain coaching approach because it seems to be the current trend and the income potential attracted us.
- It could be that we are offering coaching that is safe and a little pedestrian because our clients are comfortable with it and we are not sure they (or we) are really ready for the deeper work. Until we take the time to 'discover our groove in life' our spirit can be stifled and this inhibits flow. When we move from doing coaching to becoming coaches our practice evolves and we find our own coaching rhythm, which is after all simply an extension of who we are as people.

This requires courage: the more transparent our lifestyle the more selective our client base becomes because for every 'heck yeah' there will be a dozen 'huh? I don't get it' responses.

So here's the thing – 'If they don't get your vibe, they aren't your tribe.' That said, with a global population of over 7.7 billion people it is a pretty safe bet that the real you is the perfect coach for easily enough people to fill your coaching schedule.

To focus on your 'coaching brand' before living into your full self is an unwise sequence... it is only in finding ourselves that we can be the coaches we are meant to be. If we are truly living, breathing our best selves, our authenticity will be evident in all aspects of our lifestyle and our communication.

So how can we bring more of ourselves to our coaching and be living examples of coaching in action?

Goals

Since our clients are often working towards values-aligned goals, consider:

- What are your goals?
- What is deeply important to you – a reason for being that runs through you?
- How evident is this moral imperative in the way you live your life?
- What if anything are you holding back on?

Individuality – me

Consider: how accurately would your coaching clients describe the person that you are? How different is the work you do to the home you?

Pick one belief that you sense most dramatically shapes your coaching conversations; for example: 'We are the environment we inhabit.'

It is only in finding ourselves that we can be the coaches we are meant to be

Write a few short 'Who am I?' reminders; over and over using the word 'coach', pick some aspects of your life that link to your wider calling. For example: 'I am an ocean advocate and as such my time and attention are the most valuable resource I have.'

From here you can explore how these influence the way you show up as a coach:

- The language palette you use
- The things you notice or don't notice
- The types of things you are likely to challenge most
- The links and connections you make
- How you value your service.

Individuality – not me

Think about your peer coach community. Play with sameness and difference – first think in terms of your business offer and then explore personality and see what difference these two frames make to your insights.

- Who are you least like and what are you glad about in relation to this?
- Who are you most like – but within that notice quite how vast the differences are too!
- A fun exercise is to draw a picture to represent the contrasting qualities.

Love what you do

- Check in – are you loving your coaching?
- What would make you love your coaching more?
- How courageous is your coaching?
- Are you feeling stretched and learning?
- Beyond income what is your coaching offering you?
- Beyond a successful business what else is your coaching practice really about?

Finally I invite you to make some commitment to yourself to let go of any external expectations of what it means to be a certain type of coach. You are so much more than your skillset and as we all know deep down, coaching is far more than painting by numbers. ■



Lizzi Larbalestier is an ICF professional blue health coach and coach trainer specialising in marine-based change work in Cornwall and California. Disarming humour supports a highly provocative coaching style and she uses the coast as a landscape for trajectory-led philosophical debate grounded in neuroscience. Lizzi is the founder of Going Coastal Blue and Director of Coaching for Blue Mind Works. For more information go to www.goingcoastal.blue