

Reach Higher Coaching™



presents

Magnificent Coaches Use Acknowledgment Instead of Criticism

Nicki McClusky,

Certified Professional Coach

Life-Spirit-Voice Coach

October 1, 2009

Magnificent Coaches Use Acknowledgment Instead of Criticism

It is the premise of this paper that using *acknowledgment* rather than *criticism* yields magnificent---even miraculous results--- in the lives of our coaching clients.

Understanding the Power of Acknowledgment

Interestingly, the root word of acknowledgment is “can.” In Origins, A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English, (Partridge, 1958, p. 73) writes:

“The first description of “can” is could; would, I can, I know, hence *know how*. More particularly, having to do with acknowledgement, “can” means *knowledge*; to admit; acknowledgement, *think: to knowledge* (Partridge, 1958, P. 74).

Since the entire purpose of coaching is to help clients realize and experience how they “can” manifest their dreams, produce great results, create lives of meaning and joy, and come to “know” how to become their very best, it makes sense that “can” is the root of one of coaching’s most powerful tools--- *acknowledgment*. As coaches, we acknowledge individuals for all manner of being and doing, fostering and igniting a solid attitude of “I can do this!” Accordingly, Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1991, pg. 52), sees acknowledgment as: (1) Recognition or favorable notice of an act or achievement; (2) A thing done or given in recognition of something received.

“Acknowledgment is a generous and loving act” (Pappas, 2008). It helps bring out the best in people---in families, the workplace, and in romantic relationships.

Deeper than a compliment, acknowledgment validates and honors the client's action(s) and inspires confidence. (Pappas, 2008). We look for and celebrate "the good."

Marianne Williamson states in The Gift of Change: "There is a magical power in relating to the good in people. Our mission is to affirm the essential goodness in people even when they've made mistakes" (2004, p. 37). When we look for and affirm that which is good, wonderful, magnificent in people---from generosity of spirit, heart and mind---we have decided to become miracle-making coaches.

Coaching is a Pursuit and Recognition of Magnificence

Miracle-minded coaches encourage active inner looking for magnificence. "Miracles occur as involuntary effects of a loving personality, an invisible force that emanates from someone whose conscious intention is to give and receive love" (Williamson, 1996, p. 67). Certainly coaching is about love: love of learning, growth, accomplishment, or love of results, masterful movement and action-taking.

When coached by a magnificence-seeking coach, a client can move rapidly from feeling discouraged to feeling very empowered. Clients do so since the focus is on what they have done positively or may do even more magnificently in the future. When acknowledgments hit a "bulls-eye," clients feel deeply seen and often uplifted. In these moments, a client may experience the miraculous: an old belief may become transformed or healed, freeing the client to *soar*.

“Miracles reflect a shift in how we think, releasing the power of the mind to the processes of healing and correction” (Williamson, 1996, p. 65).

To *coach from an acknowledgment mindset* is a *Soul choice*; it is the activated Divine within us. According to spiritual mentor/coach, Alan Seale, this powerful choice is implemented by “Ego---our physical contact with the world” (2001). Masterful coaches, mindful of how Ego can serve Soul in the outer world, help their clients discover ways in which their soul-mission and life vision(s) can be made manifest (Seale, 2003). Space for the miraculous occurs during soul-based coaching conversations; the energy is luminescent---sometimes, indescribably so.

Energetic States of Human Consciousness

We are on the way to creating a “luminescent coaching experience” when we consciously decide to occupy a highly positive energetic space with others (which is basically the state of the joyful Soul). In simple terms, it means that our soul leads the way, inviting the others’ to emerge. The *dance* between Soul and Ego (Seale, 2001) within both individuals can range from sweet and functional, to passionate and dazzling. The energy unleashed by acknowledging magnificence within the experience creates amazing shifts in vibrational levels of states of human consciousness. In Hawkins’ Power Vs. Force, levels of human consciousness are calibrated (2002, p. 75-92); a logarithmic progression and number is assigned to each level in Hawkins’ research. All levels below the

number 200 are destructive of life in both the individual and society; 200 and above (200 being the calibrated level of courage) indicates movement into *power* instead of *force*. Shame has the energy level of 20---perilously proximate to death; in contrast is the energetic level of love, calibrated at 500 (unconditional, unchanging and permanent). This is the level of true happiness. Joy, calibrated at 540, arises within each moment of existence rather than from some external source (Hawkins, 2002).

However, if we feel motivated to criticize someone, we lower both our vibrational level and theirs: we are operating energetically below 150, according to Hawkins' (2002). At these lower energetic levels, we may inspire or experience consciousness levels of anger (150), fear (100) grief (75), shame (20) or apathy (50) (Hawkins, 2002). None of these is suited to propel forward movement and learning within a coaching context.

Criticism and Shame

When we are criticized, we often feel constricted or diminished; the potential for a loving give and take coaching experience is reduced. Williamson writes, "With every attitude of attack or defense, we send love away. With every perception of anyone's guilt, we tell love to leave. With every thought of limited possibility, we tell miracles we don't want them" (Williamson, 2004).

We've all been criticized and know what it feels like: it usually feels loveless or diminishing. We may not even remember what exactly was said to us by the one criticizing (attacking or shaming) us, yet we probably *do* remember

how we felt or feel about the person doing the criticizing. Were we helped or hindered by being criticized? Did we wind up feeling defective? More often than not, being criticized reduced our feelings of self-worth and increased our self doubt (or even self hatred). Something unpleasant/painful got triggered, setting off a cascade of “bad” feelings and negative thoughts, ranging anywhere from mild to severe. Usually, negative “affects”---the biological portions of feelings--- were stirred, closely followed by negative feelings/thoughts (Nathanson, 1992).

Affects

Donald Nathanson helps us comprehend the complexities of human feeling by breaking things down into understandable units in Shame and Pride. Here are some of his findings:

- Affect: the strictly biological portion of an emotion. Innate affects last from a hundredth of a second to a couple of seconds.
- Feeling: awareness that an affect has been triggered; involves higher order mechanisms that allow knowledge and understanding.
- Emotion: a complex combination of an affect, with memories of previous experiences, and the affects they trigger.
- Mood: a persistent state of emotion in which we can remain stuck for hours or days. (The mood can be one of possibility, hope, or joy---not just sadness, depression, etc.) (Nathanson,1992, P. 47-56)

(Affect is Biology; Emotion is Biography.)

Tomkins, Nathanson’s mentor, clarified: “Affect makes good things better and bad things worse. Whatever is important to us is made so by affect; it is the

engine that drives us.” (1992, P. 59). According to Nathanson, Tomkins discovered that there are nine basic affects.

The *positive* affects are:

- Interest-excitement
- Enjoyment-joy

Neutral affects are:

- Surprise-startle

The *Negative* affects are:

- Fear-terror
- Distress-anguish
- Anger-rage
- Dissmell
- Disgust
- Shame-humiliation

Acknowledgment in Relation to the Positive Affects

Fortunately, acknowledgment triggers positive affects and the positive emotions and thoughts they engender. Coaching through acknowledgment creates new and uplifting emotion, making movement to “greatness” and that which is magnificent or miraculous possible. For some clients, moving into this highly positive energetic vibration/level of human consciousness, is a miracle in and of itself. Masterful, acknowledgment-based coaching increases the likelihood that new and permanent states of being (and doing) will grow in our clients, creating positive mindsets and frameworks unlike anything heretofore experienced.

Criticism, on the other hand, triggers either neutral or negative affects; all sorts of thoughts and feelings follow---most of which are not constructive or

growthful. In the worst case, shame and humiliation are experienced. Of course, living from magnificence cannot occur in such a low and disabling energetic state (20). Instead, choosing to acknowledge others (or ourselves) reinforces a triggering of that which feels wonderful, over and over (Love, 500; Joy, 540, etc) (Hawkins, 2002, p. 75-92). As acknowledging coaches, we promote energetic conversations that focus on the truly magnificent in our clients' being and doing; together, we celebrate its expansion.

Coaching, Criticism, and Acknowledgment

It is clear that criticism in coaching is contra-indicated. Also, "constructive criticism" in coaching is actually an oxymoron: there is nothing constructive about criticism. It most always shrinks the mind, heart, or soul of the one being criticized. For example, in a coaching class, criticism inflamed a male student, with resultant rage emerging. Learning stopped. (Rage, essentially, is a conduit for shame feelings.) (Morrison, 1989) If shame is experienced within a coaching session or class, it is important to name it and positively reframe the situation so that higher energetic levels can once again permeate the conversation or discussion.

Acknowledgment in Coaching Literature

In Therapist as Life Coach, acknowledgment is discussed as being a part of a continuum: *complimenting, acknowledging, endorsing*:

"Telling the Truth As a Coach---we say what is so." It is about pointing out potential incongruencies or mixed intentions about problem areas, *plus* pointing out the client's strengths through acknowledging and endorsing

There is an increased depth when one moves along this continuum, with acknowledgement including “comments about a person’s specific behavior or way of being that shows up in something s/he did. The “who” of someone’s being is emphasized more than the “what” is done (Davis & Williams, 2002, P. 102).

Co-Active Coaching, states:

“The coaching skill of acknowledgment strengthens the client’s foundation. This skill addresses who the client is. Acknowledgment recognizes the inner character of the person it is addressed to, highlighting who they are.” It often highlights a value that clients honor in some action they took (Kimsey-House, Sandahl, Whitworth, 1998, P. 44).

According to these authors, there are two parts to acknowledgement:

(1) delivering the acknowledgement; and (2) noticing the impact on the client. In the second stage, the coach wants to make sure that s/he is truly “on spot;” the client’s response will inform us clearly if we’ve “hit the mark” or not by the acknowledgment given (1998, P. 45).

Ingenious Focus on the Positive Keeps out Shame

Masterful coaching avoids criticism or judgmentalism (as do wise coach training programs). This not only provides a safe learning space---it is ingenious because *noxious energies* are kept at bay: in an acknowledgment-based framework, focus stays completely on the client, reducing the likelihood of the coach projecting any self-negativity onto the client. Positive affects are triggered in coach *and* client, promoting positive energetic states of 200-300 and above (Hawkins, 2002). Negative affects remain un-triggered; shame, fortunately, doesn’t enter the equation.

Conclusion

When we think of acknowledgment and its power, we remember that:

(1) Acknowledgment is a focused coaching process that sees and affirms the good and wonderful in others (and in ourselves); (2) Acknowledgment elicits inspiration and motivation, producing amazing change; and (3) Powerful acknowledgments are very heartfelt and completely sincere.

Acknowledgments beckon to the Soul---“Notice your beauty, your luminescence, your magnificence.” Masterful coaching creates a sacred space for *this kind of miracle and magnificence* to occur. It invites us to enter and live from the *Holy* in us all.

References

- Davis, Deborah C., & Williams, Patrick. (2002). Therapist As Life Coach. New York: W.W. Norton & Company
- Hawkins, David. (2002). Power Vs. Force. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, Inc.
- Kimsey-House, Henry, Sandahl, Phil, Whitworth, Laura. (1998). Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publishing.
- Morrison, Andrew. (1989). Shame, The Underside of Narcissism. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press
- Nathanson, Donald. Shame and Pride. (1992). New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Pappas, Connie. (2008). Wordpress Blog, "The Art of Authentic Acknowledgment." Retrieved July 16, 2009, from <http://www.capappas.wordpress.com/2008/12/04/the-art-of-authentic-acknowledgment> .
- Partridge, Eric. (1958). Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English. New York: The Macmillan Company
- Seale, Alan. Intuitive Living, A Sacred Path. (2001). San Francisco, CA: Red Wheel/Weiser, LLC.
- Seale, Alan. (2003). Soul Mission Life Vision. Boston, MA/York Beach, ME: Red Wheel/Wiser, LLC.
- Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary. (1991). Springfield, Massachusetts, USA: Merriam-Webster Inc., Publishers
- Williamson, Marianne. (1996). A Return to Love, New York: HarperPerennial Publishers
- Williamson, Marianne. The Gift of Change. (2004). New York: HarperCollins Publishers