



Life Design Coaching

Coaching: A Powerful Catalyst for Personal, Group and Global Change

By ICF President Steve Mitten, MCC

Lately I have been reflecting on the emergence of coaching. What gave rise to this new profession? What need in the world is it a response to? What is the common purpose of the coaches who belong to this evolving organization? What is at the heart of professional coaching?

While I hold no pretense of having *the* answers to these questions, it strikes me that coaching is a very natural response to some of the big changes and struggles that are surfacing in our world.

Experienced coaches know that when a client is struggling, he or she is often on the verge of a breakthrough. Whatever level you look at these days, be it individual, organizational or global, you see struggle. Following is a small sampling:


- ? **A UN International Labour Organization study** reveals escalating levels of anxiety, burnout and depression across the globe. Between 75 and 90 percent of all visits to primary care physicians are for stress-related complaints or disorders. A staggering 47 percent of workers report they have trouble sleeping, with stress the main contributor to this problem.
- ? **Gallop's annual study of the workplace** routinely finds that over 71 percent of workers are not emotionally engaged in their work. Translation: Hundreds of millions of people are just showing up for their paychecks, and not deriving substantial meaning from their professional lives.
- ? **We are using up the earth's resources** at an unsustainable rate, leaving ever increasing amounts of waste that threaten our health and environment. The Environmental Doomsday Clock – a measure of the survivability estimates of hundreds of government and private-sector environmental experts conducted annually by the Asahi Glass Foundation – remains at 9:06 p.m., in the “extremely concerned” quadrant.
- ? **Despite unprecedented levels of abundance** and electronic connectivity, the social and economic divide between the “haves” and the “have nots” remains. Each year millions of people in the developing world continue to die avoidable deaths (attributed to war, economic decline, and inadequate distribution of food and medical supplies), while millions in the developed world struggle to find meaning and true connection in their lives and careers.

"We" versus "them"

Obviously, our world has its share of challenges. For all the material advances of the last few centuries, we have racked up a large physical, spiritual and environmental debt that many people simply do not know how to reconcile. Far too many people live and react from a place of fear. There is a growing sense of alienation, and a mounting disconnection from ourselves, each



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other, and the relationships we have with the natural systems that sustain us. Our creativity, joy, sense of well-being, and the very meaning we derive from life are being seriously eroded.

With a rising sense of insecurity, large parts of our world's population retreat into more homogeneous and reactionary communities, which drive out diversity and focus energy on our racial, gender, cultural, political, religious and national differences, developing a “we” versus “them” mentality.

In the past few decades, many academics, poets, philosophers, coaches and students of organizational change have observed that the paradigms we have been living have not served us well. Change is badly needed. There is a sense that we have reached some sort of evolutionary plateau that we need to move past.

Leaders are emerging

Fortunately, many promising conversations, models and theories have emerged to deal with these challenges. And many people around the world are working hard to lead humanity to a higher plane of existence.

Clearly, what people everywhere want are lives and careers with far more joy, creativity, peace, conscious choice, diversity and freedom, balanced by the connection of community, meaning, sense of purpose, true abundance, health and sustainability. Today, more than ever before, the struggles we face are calling each individual, organization, community and nation to make some fundamental changes in how we live and work, in service of a better future for all humanity – a future where we are inspired by love and a communal sense of purpose, rather than motivated by fear and self-interest.

In their latest book, *Presence*, Professor Peter Senge and his co-authors state, “When people in leadership position begin to serve a vision infused with a larger purpose, their work shifts naturally from producing results to encouraging the growth of people who produce results.”

A focus on growth

As coaches, we know that real change happens only when we focus on growing people. And every day we experience first hand the power of coaching as a vital catalyst in supporting individuals as they grow, raise their awareness, connect to their deeper intelligence and make beneficial changes. Professional coaching is by far the most effective modality for this work.

Great coaching is all about taking the time to help individuals clarify their goals, grow, and achieve the outcomes most meaningful to them, their communities or their organizations. Great coaching engages individuals at a deep level, and helps them become aligned, engaged, connected and inspired. It creates the space and expectation for breakthrough change to occur, and stays with process until new knowledge translates into new behavior. This is what the world badly needs.

Whether we coach individuals or organizations, we coaches are engaged in midwifing a better world. I believe that at the heart of our community is a common calling to provide the transformational support only coaching can provide. I believe coaching is one of the most powerful agents of positive change humanity has seen in quite some time. I believe it is the destiny of coaching to play an important role in the creation of a much better world.



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Community is key

I accept that there will be many other assessments of the world's current condition and of what our coaching community is all about. What's most important is that we actually have a community. It is in the coming together of coaches of all disciplines and nationalities that here at the ICF we have created something special: an international coaching association committed to high standards of professional excellence, whose members are dedicated to supporting each other and promoting this profession we love, so we might accomplish far more together than any of us could by ourselves.

I remain extremely optimistic about the future of the world and the future of coaching. I am very proud to be an ICF member, and part of this new profession with you. These are exciting times to be an ICF coach.