Celebrate!
The past, present and future of coaching

Coaching Defies Definition & Containment

Interview with Laura Berman Fortgang

The Future of Coaching in Organizations
Celebrate!

Coaching continues to defy all attempts at definition and containment

It's the 10th Anniversary of choice, the magazine of professional coaching!

We dedicate this issue to looking back at how far coaching has come over the past 10 years, spotlighting key milestones, the move toward professionalization, and the many facets of coaching today. We also look ahead to where coaching is going as a profession, as a business, and as a community. Coaching is alive, strong and growing, and we celebrate the history and future of professional coaching in this exciting issue of choice.
Coaching is an emerging and evolving field, complex and dynamic, integrating the substance of many fields and the innovative thinking of great pioneers.

Coaching’s roots stretch back into antiquity. Eastern philosophers and ancient athletic coaches were among the first practitioners. In the East, the focus of physical training was martial arts, rather than athletics. In the West, images captured on the amphorae of ancient Greece provide evidence that athletic coaches have played a role in Western culture for nearly three millennia. Just like their counterparts in modern sports today, the ancient Greek coaches—former athletes themselves—helped the competitors of their day achieve personal excellence.

Against the backdrop of the success merchants (Norman Vincent Peale, Napoleon Hill, Dale Carnegie) of the 1930s, to humanistic and transpersonal psychology in the 1960s, through the Human Potential Movement of the 1970s, and into the halls of business in the 1980s—coaching evolved while defying all attempts at definition and containment.

Coaching Yesterday
Emerging during the postmodern period of the late twentieth century, coaching, as we know it today, was born of a rapidly changing socioeconomic environment and nourished by the root disciplines of philosophy, psychology, business, sports, and adult education. Philosophy provided the foundation for coaching. Psychology provided many of the essential theories, as well as a practical toolset, with a focus on the individual. The business sector also had established tools and theories—the support offered to individuals and organizations had the focus on improving the bottom line. The results focus of business coaching emphasized metrics as a critical demonstration and justification of coaching’s value.

The coaching profession achieved momentum in the 1980s in business and blossomed in the 1990s with coach specific training programs, schools, and professional associations. Seventy-nine coaching books were published during the 1990s with 62 percent in 1998-1999. Once the information age dawned, around 1995, the spread of coaching has been put into hyperdrive by conferences, workshops, and forums, in both face-to-face and virtual environments.

The competition, or people pointing fingers and objecting that this or that is or is not coaching, which we were see-

In 1997 at the second Professional and Personal Coaches Association (PPCA) annual conference, the theme was “weaving into the tapestry of life.” The PPCA predicted that in 20 years, which would be 2017, that is where coaching would be. They did not say whether coaches as we know them would disappear. They said it would be woven in much as philosophy and psychology are woven into our lives today.
ing in the late 1990s and early 21st century, did not exist in the early days. It was during this time that we heard, “There’s only one way to coach, and if you are not doing it my way you are not coaching.” An example of this occurred during the late 1990s, when someone was refused a place on the board of a coaching professional association because they were a psychologist. I maintain that since coaching came into being we have narrowed this openness and have started to say that “My way of coaching is not your way,” or, “If you are not credentialed how can you be a coach?” In some areas, being credentialed equates to not earning enough money, while not being credentialed equates to having a thriving business.

It was during the early 2000s that 10 coach industry publications were launched, of which six were peer-reviewed in support of evidence-based coaching. Since 2005 the coaching field has appeared to turn the corner, and is moving back to cross-fertilization and inclusion. Forums such as WBCS and Conversation Among Masters have sprung up, in which coaches from a variety of backgrounds meet and share their unique and common perspectives.

Now, approximately 20 years later, we can benefit from the perspective we have gained in coaching’s short yet explosive history. In the few short years of its existence, coaching has achieved:

- Self-regulation through professional associations
- Professional codes of conduct/ethics

“Now, approximately 20 years later, we can benefit from the perspective we have gained in coaching’s short yet explosive history.”
• Significant coach-specific training programs
• Increasing academic evidence-based education
• Expanding specific research and knowledge base
• Proliferation of internal programs
• Influenced changes in root disciplines
• Extensive media coverage and public recognition.

Coaching Today
The global supply of coaches conservatively is 130,000 or so, with annual coach graduates of 25,000. This includes U.S. business coaches (50,000), coaches outside the U.S. (50,000), life coaches in the world (25,000) and individuals calling themselves a coach (5,000). Though some say that the demand for coaches is unlimited, it is important to recognize that the ratio of potential “helpers” (including social workers, psychologists, counselors, etc.) is large. What can be said is that clients are looking for experience first and credentials second, while sponsors of coaching may look for credentials first as a barrier to entry.

In the last several years a return to collaboration and inclusion is evident in the coaching profession. Efforts are underway to develop profession-wide standards in:
• Definition and practice of coaching
• Body of knowledge
• Competencies
• Curriculum
• Accreditation
• Certification and assessment
• Ethics and standards of conduct
• Cultural influences and practices

Coaching Tomorrow
Now, decades later, as we confront the professional challenges the field is facing today, we can benefit from the perspective we have gained on its short but explosive history. That history, characterized by the interaction between its root disciplines and by their cross-disciplinary development, is further complicated by the generational differences and varying professional back-

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grounds of its originators, as well as by the changing socioeconomic conditions of the period.

Our postmodern environment is characterized by rapidly changing socioeconomic conditions, rising complexity, advancing technology, increased globalization, and environmental crisis. It supports innovation, creativity, flexibility, collaboration, and inclusiveness, and encourages a mingling of roles, skills, and expertise. Background diversity and the blurring of boundaries between existing disciplines are both natural and welcome. Knowledge is available, and provides people with a means of testing their own skills and competencies, as well as a way of improving the skills and competencies required by their own situations and needs.

Remember, coaching is an emerging and evolving field, complex and dynamic, future-based and yet firmly grounded by its root disciplines. This article is offered as a contribution to the continuing evolution of coaching, both as a profession and as a social movement.

Coaching’s Past

Five observations summarize coaching’s emergence:

1. Coaching sprang simultaneously from several independent sources and birthplaces, and then spread through a complex and somewhat unpredictable series of relationships.

2. Coaching has a broad intellectual framework that contains the synergetic, cross-fertilized practices and theories of many disciplines. This cross-fertilization was to some extent limited to coaching’s earliest days, as the backgrounds of those who later came to coaching seem less varied, and the forums where such people once met are fewer in number.

3. Modern patterns and practices of coaching are dynamic and contextual. Coaching is customized to the coach, the person being coached, the context, and the specific situation. The fluid nature of the modern coaching environment requires every coach to rely on intuition, creativity, and flexibility, as well as a solid base of foundational knowledge.

4. Coaching came into existence to fill an unmet need in a world of rapid change and complexity. That need, unsatisfied by traditional, pathology-centered therapy – or illness model – was met by the shift to a wellness model founded on the principles of humanistic psychology, and the postmodern perspective of integral philosophy. By adding complementary practices from other fields, and without the constraint of traditional clinical practices, coaching was more interactive, client-driven, and fluid.

5. Coaching came into being as a result of a newly open, integral social network characterized by diversity and inclusion. This first phase of coaching was one of exploration and inclusion, and was about building relationships through mutual adaptation. Approaches were diverse, sharing and collaboration celebrated, curiosity abundant, and the social network open and loose. For the earliest coaches, the goal was to contribute to the wellness and success of others. Everyone was welcomed and his or her ideas were heralded with excitement. When these coaches met their reaction was “Oh great, you do coaching also.”

Your role in the future:

1. Understand influences on and contributions to coaching.

2. Embrace an inclusive definition of coaching that values diversity.

3. Promote collaboration and agility through integral open social network.

4. Support others to effectively use coaching knowledge, skills, and abilities.

5. Model and live coaching moment-by-moment in every interaction.

6. Champion coaching as a social phenomenon.