

## Brief Summary of The Heart of Laser Focused Coaching

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- The Coaching process can be broken down into three simple steps
  - Identify the ideas, thoughts and beliefs that keep your client from getting what they want
  - Help them shift their perspective so that they can feel good about themselves and move forward
  - Help them capitalize on their strengths to achieve fulfillment and their full potential
- All coaching has the same focus – to help the client
  - Become more self-aware
  - Discover what is keeping them “stuck”
  - Create more prosperity, balance and fulfillment in their life and/or at work
- In Laser Focused Coaching, the coach truly focuses on the client – *who the person is, what they think is true, how they behave and what they value*
- As opposed to focusing on results, the intention is on *purposeful exploration* leading organically to long term transformation that affects all areas of a client’s life
- A Laser Focused Coach knows how to create and demonstrate a collaborative relationship by creating context for questions and pertinent reflection
- The role of a Laser Focused Coach is to shine a light on something our client cannot see for themselves. Here the focus is on understanding the person, not the situation or problem
- Learning how to distinguish truth from perception is the foundation of Laser Focused Coaching
- The focus is on understanding what is important underneath the client’s words without wasting time nor overpowering the client
- Laser Focused Coaching emphasizes coaching the “*who*” and separating the “*who*” from the client’s “*story*” or situation
- The coach explores with the client until it becomes evident what the person “*really*” needs
- Laser Focused Coaching allows a client to
  - Move beyond perceived obstacles
  - Discover what they really want and need
  - Realize a new perspective in thinking that is so powerful that they can’t go back to their original thinking
  - Learn the art of surrounding themselves with people who support them
  - Achieve meaningful, consistent results that are long lasting and impact other aspects of their life
- The aim of Laser Focused Coaching session is to understand the client, explore what is troubling them about the situation and ascertain how they would like to feel instead

### The Laser Focused Mindset

- Some of the key elements for developing a true coaching presence are
  - Blank slate – free from preconceived ideas about what is coming or what should happen – which would make them authentic
  - Not knowing – it is crucial to not try to be right, smart or brilliant – be in the “not knowing” state and trusting whatever you need to know will show up

- It all begins with you – understand the mindset, attitudes and beliefs used by outstanding coaches
- Your presence as a coach – being present through your five senses – listening, seeing, smelling, tasting or touching. To be present in a coaching conversation, focus on what you are hearing.
- Let go of the formulas – there is no formula in a coaching conversation – ensure that the conversation is flowing, organic and natural
- Be *friendly* not *friends* – focus the conversation on the client – important to remain professional and staying objective
- Be your own coach first – continually work on personal development and growth
- Your ego and the use of “I” – Important to keep the word “I” out of the coaching conversation as much as possible. The coach’s focus is to be of service and to serve clients from our soul, not from our ego, it is not to fix or solve their problems

### Listening with a new intent

- No matter who we are listening to, our minds take us away from pure listening
- When you are not listening –
  - You might miss important information
  - You can lose patience and want to jump right to a solution
  - You could get distracted and go off tangent
- In Laser Focused Coaching, we want to do more with our listening – and get underneath the spoken word and hear what is behind their word choices. These could be through
  - Collecting data – from the moment you connect with someone every exchange provides data – even a person’s approach or communication style provides data
  - Explore offhand comments – clients may make off-hand comments – they shouldn’t be ignored or dismissed. There is a reason behind EVERYTHING a client shares in a coaching session
  - Maintain neutrality – important to remain neutral when sharing your observations, feedback and ideas
- If you always hold these two critical questions in mind when listening to anyone, it automatically depends on your listening and your curiosity
  - *Why are they telling me this?*
  - *What is making this a problem for this person?*
- These questions will help understand the underlying problem by focusing on the client, recognizing their emotional state, staying curious and listen to what is not being said and what is underneath the words
- It is also preferable to use the client’s language and eliminate any sort of jargon – which would need to repeat or explain to the client
- Silence is one of the most important tools in the coaching toolkit and the one least effectively used – wait for the client to speak first how matter how difficult or uncomfortable it is to stay quiet. Never disrupt your client’s thinking. It is like having a fabulous dream and the alarm goes off – it immediately interrupts the dream and there is no going back
- Be empathetic – your voice, tone and pace matters. Identify one or two primary emotions and reflect that information
- Create a safe and trusting space – keep in mind that the relationship is more important than the results. With a focus on the relationship and letting go of a strong need for results, deeper trust is created and clients go far beyond their initial intention

- You attitude as a coach is critical – never approach coaching as though you are the expert and know what is best for the client. Coaching is not about being right or wrong, it is about *getting to the truth for the client*
- Discovering vs Telling – when emotion is involved, it is best for your client to discover – when they discover themselves, it has more meaning, more value and leads to permanent change. When it is a fact or a direct observation, tell it.

### Setting the foundation

- Every masterful coaching conversation contains three elements to move the conversation forward
  - The beginning – for establishing rapport and trust so the client feels comfortable to share freely
  - The middle – helping them become aware of where and why they are stuck and gain awareness about themselves and their situation
  - The end – for putting what’s been learned into action, setting up support and closing down collaboratively
- A strong opening question could be “In our time together, what can we focus on that will [bring you value / be of importance / make a difference]
- When the client begins his story – separate the story from who the person is and how they think or behave e.g. I want to clean up the clutter in my office. Good questions could be “what makes clutter a problem for you” or “what makes it important to address at this time”
- It is better to avoid questioning the story as that could lead us to a rabbit hole that goes in circles and no new information would be got
- Two questions you should always be asking yourself when listening to your client are
  - *Why are they telling me this?* – the question helps you to listen more acutely to the client and be curious
  - *What is making this a problem for this person?* - it is your job to understand why this particular person has this particular problem
- Gathering more details about the decision or their situation isn’t helping in understanding the deeper considerations of motive, thought processes or behavior
- Support the client’s agenda – not your own – as a coach, keep the conversation focused and moving forward
- The agreement is the point in the conversation where you and the client agree on what the focus will be and what outcome makes sense. Instead of asking “what do you want to focus on” – you could say, “based on where we are, what would be helpful for the rest of the conversation” or “What will be most helpful at this point”

### The Art of the question

- Masterful coaches ask open, thought provoking questions to understand the person – the questions force the client to think rather than provide information they already know
- Be a reflector, not a parrot – a seasoned coach reflects with less precision and includes empathy. Reflection can be thought of as encapsulating the essence, and if possible, the emotion of what your client shared – and helps in building rapport and trust
- It is best to find a balance your client feeling heard and your interpretation without getting into their story
- Client centered, empathetic reflection is powerful and is often followed by an open question to allow the client an opportunity to share their thoughts

- It is important to distinguish between *nosey curiosity* and *coaching curiosity* – nosey curiosity is when you are asking for your benefit, not the clients. True coaching curiosity addresses the client's thoughts and feelings that provide relevant data that distinctly move the conversation forward
- Asking “*What*” questions as opposed to “*How*” and “*Why*” questions almost always yield more pertinent data and prevents clients from going deeper into their story. A *What* question becomes powerful when it forces the client to think about something in a new way, rather than tell you something they already know
- *When you question the situation, your client will go deeper into the story. When you question the person, you invite thinking*
- When you ask questions during a coaching conversation, it is important to provide context, otherwise the question could be perceived as judgmental or referred to as a naked question e.g. “I am intrigued by the way you fold your blanket. I have never seen that earlier. Where did you learn that”?
- Ask short and broad questions – which will make the client to think and respond and doesn't present narrow choices
- Avoid stacked questions – “What does that mean”, What will you do? What comes up for you – asking questions one after the other. Unfortunately, the client hears only the last one

### **Don't Believe the Client**

- The middle portion of the coaching conversation consists of getting closer to the client's truth and listening for discrepancies and underlying beliefs
- Coaches often find discrepancies and something underneath the words as the conversation develops and discover that the client's initial story is just the tip of the iceberg.
- When a client complains bitterly about their job, it can turn out that their marriage, or something else is not working – their job is only a byproduct of a deeper frustration
- Until and unless you get to the bottom-line truth for our client, you are merely providing a band-aid
- Masterful coaching goes beyond the temporary strategies to focus on a deeper, permanent, long term shifts in perspective
- Most of what the client tells us is based on their perceptions, they think perceptions are true, but as outside, objective observers, we realize they are not necessarily the truth, or the only truth for the person
- It is important to distinguish facts from perceptions. The more skeptical you can be and the more you can resist accepting everything stated at face value, the more masterful your coaching will be.
- Coaching becomes meaningful when we focus on what is important about the person, their behaviors and feelings, not the myriad details about the situation that keep the client stuck
- One way to stay focused on the client is the “**Traffic Helicopter approach**” – being in the helicopter, means staying above your client's story to get the biggest picture possible – you could zoom in and zoom out to get both the big picture and details where necessary
- As a coach you would need to separate the issue from the story – reflect on something you heard about the client, and importantly look for the client's emotions such as frustration, annoyance, confusion, disappointment etc. a- since that is what changes

### **Understanding human behavior**

- Structural alignment, developed by Tony Kirkland, is a powerful methodology that uses basic principles of human behavior.
- Structural alignment helps you and your client align intention with action resulting in powerful progress. This is based on the alignment of truth, vision purpose and spirituality so that there is no room for conflict and everything flows in a forward moving direction
- Structural alignment provides a framework for helping your client learn about themselves, receive clarity that is aligned with the truth and change their habitual patterns of thought and behavior
- There are four levels in Structural Alignment and each one has to align in order for someone to create and live a fulfilling and authentic life. These levels are
  - *Truth* – the foundation necessary for a vision to be possible – reality
  - *Vision* – a concept or view in broad strokes, or an aim or desire in designing a plan or intention, a future orientation that serves as the basis for making a decision or taking action. Vision describes the overarching picture and if they are compelling, they pull people forward
  - *Purpose* – a reason for doing something, a vision that is driven by a compelling reason to exist. To discover our purpose, is to discover why we are here in this planet, what our gifts and what we are meant to do with our lives. Purpose must align with truth and vision – only then life feels smooth and fulfilling
  - *Spiritual* – a place of true inner peace where there is harmony between body and spirit – sometimes referred to as “true self” – it is a way of expressing our higher selves and a feeling of a profound sense of belonging. In its purest form, spiritual is a sense of completion and true peace that is guided and connected by something greater than oneself – rooted in compassion, consideration, connection and generosity

### **Using themes to see the big picture**

- Themes are generally expressed through client’s actions, words and thoughts. Themes help inform the coach as to what powerful questions to ask about the person, not the situation
- Awareness of themes transforms the way you develop coaching questions and helps create transformational shifts for your client – getting to the essence in an efficient and effective way
- Twenty-five themes are divided into four categories – with Self Esteem the root of all themes

### **Self esteem**

- Underlying every theme is the issue of self-esteem or how we view ourselves.
- Some of the behaviors that describe insufficient self-esteem are
  - They believe they don’t deserve or are not good enough
  - They overcompensate
  - They do things for other people to make themselves feel better
  - They compromise on things they shouldn’t
  - They get into or stay in toxic relationships
  - They tolerate unacceptable behavior
  - They don’t set and hold good boundaries to protect themselves
  - They don’t ask for what they want
  - They berate themselves
  - They seek perfection in themselves and in others
  - They focus on the negatives
  - They tend to stay quiet and suffer

- They don't acknowledge the beauty and the gifts they bring to the world
- Common Themes in coaching are
- *Valuable Insights*
  - Ambivalence – someone can't make up their mind, because they are getting lost in the pros and cons
  - Attached to the outcome – when someone wants hopes, and believes that their intended specific outcome will be achieved
  - Carrying old messages – adults buying into childhood messages received from a parent, teacher, guide etc. Carrying old messages is like carrying a backpack full of useless rocks
  - Either/Or - when only two options are looked at, we often miss the third or the fourth which might be beneficial
  - Wherever you go, there you are – people believe that changing the environment will get rid of the problem
- *Personal Empowerment*
  - Authenticity – Authenticity is about knowing who we really are and what we really want
  - Going to the Hardware store for Milk – our expectations from other people are not met – resulting in being annoyed and frustrated. In fact, the problem is we did not choose the right person for the right need.
  - Permission – feeling a need to take explicit permission for whatever you do
  - Taking it personally – Whatever happens, we want to believe that what is going on is all about us – while it feels it is about us, it is actually not
  - Unmet needs – when adults aren't getting their deep underlying needs met, or harbor unexpressed emotion, they can unconsciously behave in ways that are unhealthy
  - Wanting things to be different from what it is – when a person wants something to be different, but the circumstances don't support their desire
- *Creating Connections*
  - Abandonment – about losing someone or something – become too attached to non-permanent things – and hence loss is inevitable
  - Alienation – theme is about isolation and separation – and manifests in a feeling of superiority or a feeling of inferiority – feel a lack of fulfillment and even mistrust
  - Authority / Victim – Rules can either be embraced and welcomed or can be thought of as a nuisance and seem irrelevant – this manifest in resistance
  - Boundaries- boundaries are set to protect ourselves from emotional or physical harm from others – they could have different thresholds, different tolerant levels and different values
  - Caretaking/People Pleasing - People pleasers have a propensity to care about every one else's well being except their own and give more than they receive for fear of losing someone's love or respect
  - Lone wolf – People often think that asking for help is a sign of weakness whereas it is actually a sign of strength. It is more a problem of delegation and their insistence on doing things themselves
- *Eliminating Obstacles*
  - Ignoring intuition – Choosing to ignore warning signals and still proceed as planned. This could manifest as refusing to believe what we already know deep down
  - Not in the present – a vast majority of people live either predominantly in the past or in the future – what matters is the present!
  - Perfection and control – the need and desire to be perfect and in control – at all times

- Stuck in a strategy –Have a predetermined strategy and refuse to budge an inch from it
- Tunnel vision – It is good to understand the perspective from which the client says or does something even if you are not in agreement

### **Lasering in on what matters most**

- Laser Focused Coaching is not all about asking many different questions, but rather listening for any discrepancies, underlying needs, misconceptions or firmly held ideas that may not be true for the client.
- Laser Focused Coaching works because it focuses on what created the problem before solving it
- Some of the questions to hold in mind when doing laser focused coaching could be
  - What is the purpose of this story?
  - What is the emotion they are feeling?
  - What is the truth for this person?
  - What does the client want the coach to hear?
  - What thought does the client believe is true that may not be so?
  - What is going on with the client as opposed to the other person in the story?
- Lasering in on a story is about understanding where they are stuck and thinking what makes it a problem for them – make it a point to listen to what is underneath their request
- Mistakes to avoid when doing Laser Focused Coaching
  - Getting too focused on the details and circumstances and forgetting the overall purpose of the story
  - Trying too hard to hasten the process
  - Feeling impatient and/frustrated because you think you know the answer
  - Not exploring enough about the person and jumping to conclusions
  - Not getting permission or an agreement
  - Not stopping when the client doesn't want to discuss a topic you think is relevant
  - Glossing over quick, seemingly insignificant comments
  - Not hearing the discrepancy or disconnect
  - Trying to understand the problem rather than the client
  - Not getting into the client's shoes – where they are coming from
  - Interpreting information without questioning it

### **Creating shifts**

- By definition, a shift is a “change in place or position” – in coaching, it is a change in perspective about a firmly held idea that may or may not be true for your client. Transformational shifts are new viewpoints that transform their thinking going forward
- The objective of creating a shift for your client is to expand their paradigm so they come aware of things they don't already know, thus shifting their perspective
- As a masterful coach you can help your clients invent new interpretations of their perceptions and connect dots that may not be obvious to them
- For a shift to occur your client's thinking must be changed around their belief. Competing subconscious priorities and not having a compelling vision may be the blockers which prevent the client from making the shift
- In a coaching conversation, there would be a point where your client recognizes their pain and suffering, they are currently experiencing versus the fear of going to make the desired change – that is the leverage point.

- The leverage point is filled with fear and limiting ideas, thoughts and beliefs that subconsciously keep them from naturally moving them forward. And often we find, when the client arrives at the leverage point, they typically run back to their original position
- As a coach, it is up to you to point out that the current situation is causing pain and not serving them – and until your client can accept this, they won't be motivated past the leverage point towards what they really want
- Questions that could be used in facilitating a shift and help the client realize the pain of inertia could be
  - What is costing you to ...?
  - What do you get out of thinking that you are the only one to do it?
  - How does it serve you to think you are the only one to do it?
  - If you really believed you got nothing out of it, it wouldn't make sense to keep holding on. There has to be something in it for you to still think you are the only one who can do it
- **Reframing**
- Another option which helps in making a shift in perspective is Reframing – which is seeing the same set of facts in an entirely different way due to receiving added information.
- Unfortunately, we make interpretations based on limited amounts of information and stick on to it despite getting additional information. As a coach, it is important to reframe the statement to change the interpretation
- Reframing can separate fact from perception and can remove some of the stress and emotion from a client's interpretation of the situation
- As coach, your role is to reframe so your client sees the same set of facts in a different way – opening up to new possibilities. Questions which could help here are *"Is it possible that ...."* Or *"What if you knew that ...."*
- A shift can take place at any point in a coaching conversation. Listening to sighs like "Hmmm", change in client's voice to being louder/softer, more energetic, a long pause or silence or even the client admitting that "I have never thought of that before"
- Once it appears to you that a shift has taken place, you could attempt "Looping" – connecting the client's initial emotion or desire to the current place in the conversation.
- Looping provides an opportunity for clients to reflect on their progress, summarize their awareness and realize how much has changed since the conversation began
- One of the ways of asking a looping question could be "At the beginning of our conversation, you were [confused/annoyed/frustrated/indecisive] – where are you at this point? - This is a masterful way of asking your client to summarize and let you know how much has been absorbed and integrated

### **Moving forward and closing the conversation**

- After the client has experienced a shift, you will reach a saturation point, where it is best to move towards completing the session.
- Your client's thinking would have changed – sounding more relaxed, relieved or upbeat
- If there still hesitancy in moving forward, you could check "What might stop you from ..."
- If the client is good to move forward, it is good to ask "Is there somebody/something that can support you in taking this forward" – important because the intention is to for your client to create a supportive environment to further their actions



- It is appropriate to partner with your client to design actions and thinking that align with the desired outcomes that will take place after the session
- To empower your client, let them suggest a step and frequency, if relevant, and then using your client's suggestion as a gauge to, consider adjusting their action plan accordingly
- Closing the session must be a collaborative effort and it must give your client an opportunity to say whether or not they are finished or if there is anything else they need

### **The heart of direct communication**

- In a coaching conversation, it is beneficial to send a very direct message – which is sharing what you notice or observe from a neutral place and asking for a response
- The purpose of direct communication is to immediately allow the client to see their situation as it actually is. It is an opportunity to share your thoughts, intuition, observations and feedback without judgment, attachment or criticism
- Direct communication is often misunderstood – coaches can feel that they are telling their client something they don't want to hear or that they are being so upfront that it will damage the relationship
- When being direct by offering an observation or feedback, you must follow your statement with a question such as
  - What do you think?
  - What is true about that?
  - What comes to mind when you hear that?
  - What can you say about that?
  - What is it like for you to hear that?
- Own your observation, feedback or intuition while being loving and respectful. Use of phrases such as "From my viewpoint", "It seems as though", "I am getting a sense that", "I am noticing that" etc. could help
- Asking for permission to share is helpful sometimes as it prepares your client for what they are about to hear and give you an opportunity to preface your statement
- When you hear a faulty conclusion drawn by your client, as a coach you can offer them the opposite as a possibility by asking questions like "What if there is no wrong choice, what would that be like"
- A defense shows up in a coaching conversation as a specific behavior to avoid something – like a barrier. This can be used to avoid a painful topic. If you notice a defensive behavior it is worth exploring because it indicates there is likely a challenge in other areas of your client's life as well
- Some of the common types of defenses are
  - Data dumping – clients giving us far more detail than we need
  - Client's emotional state – try to be empathetic, be in the objective listener mode and monitor the context and intent of the emotion
  - Confusion and avoidance – confusion could be a ploy for avoidance and unwillingness to share
  - Attacking or blaming you -when a client attacks you, it is crucial to remain neutral and unattached
  - Submission – being compliance or submissive is not a good sign from a client's perspective – it is important to point this out and address it

### Advanced Coaching Techniques

- When something seems to be an obstacle, such as “If only I had [more time/more money/more space] etc., asking what things would be like without that factor can show your client in a moment what they really want. Suppose you had all the [time/money/space etc.] in the world, what would you do?
- This concept is important because it helps your client discern not what they *think* they want, not what they *s* want, not what is feasible, but what is ideal. This helps them see possibilities first and then look at what is realistic. And if it is not realistic, perhaps there is a version of the picture that is, or may be there is a way to get what they want going down a path that they hadn’t imagined yet
- This is called “removing the obstacle” – question what is perceived to be in the way as though it most likely isn’t
- Your client’s dilemma often comes down to choose – they have a choice to let it go or hold on to it. “What might be something you can do to affect a difference”? or “what might be some options that might work for you”?
- Focusing on choice helps people see that their choice may be an interpretation in their mind, and they are not stuck as they thought they were
- In a situation where the client indicates that they are afraid of facing, confronting or challenging another person, a thought-provoking question could be “What would you say or do if there were no consequences or repercussions” – this allows them to literally speak what is on their mind
- Listen for the 1% - Usually coaches focus on what is working well – and not on the aspect which is not. This is where coaching needs to happen – e.g., what is missing to make it a 10 on 10 scale?
- Use of metaphors helps to create a visual image that lets the clients know how you interpret something they said. Metaphors are extremely powerful and can bring something to light immediately without any detrimental effect.
- The most important aspect of creating a metaphor is to first figure the concept or the overall gist of what you are surmising. Also when you present a metaphor, it is absolutely imperative that you ask a follow-up question to check it out with the client

### Coaching Challenges

- The goal in a coaching conversation is to see a change in their perspective as well as the underlying emotion (fear, confusion, lack of clarity, anger, doubt etc.). The real change is actually changing the emotion underlying the words
- When the client asks you or themselves a question, it is best to turn the question back to them, “what do you think works best”
- When you are stuck and have no idea what to ask, best is to ask the client – “what would be most helpful at this point of time”

### Communication Styles and Types

- Client’s styles are behaviors or patterns of communication that clients exemplify in coaching conversations and potentially elsewhere.
- The styles range from two extremes of the spectrum – corporate and restorative.
- In Corporate, since they hold a position of authority, coaching provides an opportunity for them to talk, they move at a fast pace and have a clear agenda. Coach’s observations will make a big difference

- In Restorative, you need to go slow with clients, take tiny steps to avoid overwhelming them – a lot of patience is needed
- One also finds clients coming in with a full agenda, no agenda, being unfocused, resistant a pleaser, defiant, storyteller, tightlipped, storyteller, thinkers and feelers

#### **Final word**

- It is important to distinguish between transactional and Laser focused coaching. It is good to deep with your clients, explore their beliefs, habits and perceptions so that they can choose new views that enrich every aspect of their lives.
- When you employ deep transformational coaching, you will be coaching at a masterful level – and it requires time practice and commitment to consistently coach in a more profound manner – and help transform their lives permanently for the better.

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