Finals Paper

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What concerned me about what I'd learned about coaching.

Human societies are, for the most part, undergirded by a plethora of assumptions via which we navigate our day to day existence. We assume, for instance, that if we hail a cab - in societies where this is a possibility - that the cab driver won't turn out to be a mass murderer who will embark upon butchering us after putting a bullet in our skulls. Likewise, we assume that the bridges and roadways we navigate won't give out from under us as we use them, and more intimately - we assume that our life partners won't attempt to kill us as we sleep. Arguably then, it would seem that a very broad spectrum of our existence, with perhaps very narrow exceptions {like death; no assumptions there, we're all headed in that direction} is undergirded by assumptions which we largely take for granted.

All this assuming, it turns out, generally works to our collective societal advantage. Imagine how overloaded we'd all be if we ditched all assumptions and instead decided to test the veracity of every object, idea, service, and interaction we encountered? It would certainly make for a miserable existence. Nevertheless, there are some prominent assumptions, long held within many Western societies, which hold powerful sway but which, upon closer inspection, act more as myth than function for wide cross sections of members of these societies; that is say, they only have real agency for 'some' members of the society and not others. In my opinion one such

powerful assumption that fits the myth but no across the board function, is the idea of

meritocracy, which I think is one of those pivotal assumptions in the United States. (Crossman,

2019) define meritocracy as the advancement of persons in a society based on their merits. Or, as

further cited by (Crossman, 2019), this notion is often referred to by social scientist as the

bootstrap ideology, whereby one can figuratively pull oneself up by one's bootstrap.

Unlike the assumptions attending bridges and roads which provide the same utility

regardless of user –assumptions of meritocracy do not provide the same across the board utility

for everyone seeking to access what it supposedly offers. (Markovits, 2019) proffers that ardent

adherents still believe that meritocracy exists, and that one can get ahead through means

available to everyone by exerting talent and effort.

I think coaching, like many of the great sociological services, rests upon certain aspects

of meritocracy because it assumes that certain steps can necessarily produce certain outcomes.

(Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House, Sandahl, & Whitworth, 2011) in their introduction put forth a

definition of coaching which posits that, the goal of coaching is to meet the coachee's needs. I

think that implied in this definition is the explicit notion of the possibility of goal achievement

for anyone. I am not here presenting, nor do I believe, that any of the texts studied in this course

state that coaching can solve all ills. I am merely saying that what bothered me about the material

used in the class, is the seemingly implied notion that goal achievement, presumably for any

client who steps into a coaching arrangement, is an attainable possibility. It would be

presumptuous of me, nay reckless even, to here point a finger at the world of coaching and

accuse it of being totally irresponsible in this regard; that is not my intent here. However, to

further focus my point, I am singling out the fact that I could not find a single reference to

powerful societal concepts like racism and inequality, which permeate life in the U.S., in either

of the three books recommended for this course. {I know because I have electronic versions of the texts and can search any of the books for a single word or term.} This was alarming to me – particularly considering statements from (Kimsey-House et al., 2011) in the book's introduction, which admonish that a coach is someone who will tell absolute truth to their clients. Should this truth telling not include an upfront admission, to those clients whose lives perhaps may have been shaped thus far by environments which deny them the assumptions of opportunity, that their goals may not readily be realized but that they can still fight? The obvious retort to this observation, would be to say that all of this would be discovered and discussed within the coaching sessions – and quite rightly so. But given the agency these ideas have been afforded, I thought they ought to have been mentioned in a course dedicated to discussions of the how, why, and wherewithal of coaching lest the wrong impression be laid. (Singh, 2018) presents, in my opinion, a succinct argument for the idea that the exclusions inherent in societal constructs of race persist in the guise of meritocracy. This seeming omission from the texts we studied bothered me most about the idea of coaching. It made coaching seem to be another vehicle of the privileged for the privileged. Some hope in this regard is offered by the admission of (Cavanagh, Grant, & Kemp, 2005) that the role played by social support can help or hinder successful coaching, but this was as far as the readings went, in my opinion, in addressing the realities for some members of society, which lie in direct opposition to the underlying assumptions of coaching.

> *How my perspective, ideas, feelings and thoughts about coaching and coaching skills have changed since starting this class.*

My own experience with coaching leans heavily towards workplace coaching as I have seen and encountered it at places of work. These experiences have left me with a rather dim view of what I thought coaching was. I imagine that like almost everyone else I was also aware, at

least anecdotally, of the power of coaching in the sporting world, and of how powerful some of those experiences were and still are to athletes – many of whom have credited athletic coaches with helping them develop their abilities and leverage their talent in ways they'd not imagined. Nevertheless, in my personal life the notion of coaching, as presented in this course – at least in an intentional way- held no sway. More often than not in the places I've worked, coaching was synonymous with disciplinary action – in fact, if one had to be 'coached', it usually meant one was in trouble and would be admonished in ways that made clear what the trouble was, what steps are expected going forward – and what the attendant punishment would be for future occurrences.

I have seen a personal psychologist though, mostly on and off for the last eight years to manage stress levels related to work and day to day life situations, but I've never viewed those visits through the lens of coaching; but as (Cavanagh et al., 2005) point out, coaching is emerging as a subdiscipline of psychology, and indeed many of my conversations with the psychologist I was seeing revolved around setting goals and achieving them. Because the bulk of my 'coaching' experiences were mostly work related, I came into the class with a rather jaded notion of what constitutes coaching. However, as I read through the chapters for the course, I begin to see coaching from a different perspective. I think that a rudimentary study of coaching, as we've done in this course, which just scratches the surface of what coaching is and can be, offers up a somewhat idealistic, perhaps, even simplistic look, at the discipline of coaching. However, despite my own experiences, and the opinion that I've only been exposed to a generalized overview of the field, some of the ideas put forth in the course were rather eye opening for me. Foremost amongst these ideas were the admonitions regarding the different levels of listening that can be engaged in, and what those different levels can yield or not yield to

the participants. The inference from (Kimsey-House et al., 2011) that workplace listening is absent due to the pressures a work environment can generate, resonated deeply with me in my workplace experiences. In my capacity as a subject matter expert at my current job, the sheer amount of information that has to be disseminated as a consequence of the many questions and issues that have to be resolved to move work forward makes it near impossible for me to listen to anyone for more than the bare necessary information. This course has however, made me more aware of the power of listening at different levels. I was, and still am, in many ways, what (Schilling, 2012) refers to as a sentence grabber, often racing ahead of those I interact with in the belief that I'd heard this before and knew exactly where the person was headed before they'd told me where they were actually headed. As pointed out by (Schilling, 2012) this tendency can result in the non-listener being way off-base at times; a circumstance which has resulted in me having to issue apologies on a not irregular basis because I had raced up what (Hunt & Weintraub, 2017) refer to as the inference ladder. The exercises and readings in this course have been a great eye opener in these areas of my own personal and work-related life. As pointed out in other submissions I have made during this class, I am not a coach, nor have I ever coached. However, my job capacity puts me in a position where I have to talk to many people, so these skills can, I believe, serve me well.

What surprised or excited me about what I have learned about coaching.

Nothing that I learned from the texts used during this class surprised me, because many of the ideas put forward, in the texts and during the course, cut across wide swaths of societal interactions on mostly unconscious levels by many of us. I think that every person who's ever been a parent is, or was, engaged in coaching; likewise, every person who's ever been an educator, a priest, a medical doctor, even an airline hostess in the short term, is engaged in

aspects of coaching. Inevitably, because of the nature of human society, the fundamental passage

of each of us from childhood to adulthood, to whatever vocational practice we pursue, has at one

time or another rendered us coach or coachee in non-official capacities. What most of us do not

have is a grasp of the terms and tactics which can be used to quantify and keep track of what

we're mostly already doing. We all are in fact, engaging in what (Kimsey-House et al., 2011)

refer to as bottom-lining as we race through life – a 911 call is an engagement in bottom-lining;

at places of work, and in our personal lives we are constantly brainstorming, challenging,

clarifying (Kimsey-House et al., 2011). So, in this regard, nothing in the material presented was a

surprise to me. I was surprised though, by how unaware many of my classmates seemed to be to

these common threads. I was especially surprised to hear some of the admissions made by

people, who by their own admission, were already in the field managing people. In retrospect, I

don't think I should have been that surprised though. Given my own experiences and the

anecdotal experiences of many people in employment generally, the seemingly clueless fog

many managers drift in could very well be an explanation for what I perceived. (Bunker, Kram,

& Ting, 2002) point out in their article that a crucial driver of a leader's success is emotional

competence, they further posit that the meteoric rise of some young managers is, in itself, a

driver of their inability to be aware of, and thus avoid possible pitfalls ahead – and herein lied the

surprise for me; that so many people in the class, most of whom appeared young, seemed rather

far removed, in their awareness, from the broad strokes of relevant skill sets which should define

their jobs.

I could not say that anything about the course excited me for I've made a life decision to

banish that imposter from my controllable brain space. I did, however, find the resurgence of

interest in life coaching, particularly in the past 10 years (Cavanagh et al., 2005) to be an

interesting phenomenon. (Ali, 2018) cites that rates of loneliness have doubled in the U.S. in the last fifty years. This problem exists, it seems, despite our ability in a modern age to communicate instantly. In this environment, the resurgence of life coaching can be a boon for all involved.

> *A model, theory or process that you have practiced and/or read about that you might use as a coach or as a coach leader. Describe it, why you chose it, and give real life examples of how you used these skills or how you plan to use these skills in the future.*

The only time I've intentionally used a coaching model was during the course for one of the assignments – as I've said before, I am not a coach and so have not had the experience of utilizing a model in a real-life scenario. For the assignment referenced here, I used the G.R.O.W. model; it is a model I would use again because of its direct simplicity. In my opinion, it allows a coach to move quickly to bottom-lining with a client in order to begin the core work of assisting the client in the pursuit of their goal(s). I used this model in my practice coaching session assignment with a coachee whose goal was to know how to navigate a job-related situation that would put her in a place of having to divulge information to management that could impact a friend negatively. At the beginning of the session I thanked the coachee for coming in, asked about her well-being and then commenced the session by asking her reason for coming in. Once the coachee had made her goal clear, we looked at her current reality in the situation. The coachee seemed to feel torn between the knowledge that she would have to recount a workplace incident to a senior manager, that could possibly impact the future of her friend's employ at the company. I asked the coachee to do a comparison of importance – between her friendship and her job – as a means of allowing her to clarify which was more important to her. After the coachee had decided on what was more important, we begin to look at what obstacles lay in her path to the desired goal. We talked through a couple of scenarios, did a mock walkthrough at her

job, and discussed possible approaches to overcome any of the identified obstacles. The coachee

finally settled on a course of action she felt comfortable with as the way forward. We recounted

the decision she'd made to achieve the stated goal, to make sure that she was comfortable with

the plan, and then we ended the session with a promise to reconvene at a later day to go over

how it had gone.

Identify your two top strengths and how you know they are strengths for you. Also identify 2
skills you want to develop, why you want to work on these and one or two action steps you will
take to develop these skills.

(Kimsey-House et al., 2011) refer to intuition as a nudge, a hunch that shows up, or a

sixth sense. I believe that this a strength I possess. I've always, as far back as I can remember,

felt things about people without knowing anything about them. Over and over, I've approached

total strangers and told them things that left them flummoxed; and the usual question is – how

could you possibly know? I'll give a few examples that stand out to me. Years ago, I worked at a

company named Avaya. One morning a colleague who because of how the office space was

setup, had to walk by my desk every morning when she came in, was walking by as usual and

said to me as usual – when I asked her; seemingly out of the blue. Who is that Cajun woman that

walked in with you this morning? She immediately stopped and became quiet, then teary eyed,

then whispered; my grandmother was a Cajun woman, and today is the anniversary of her death.

I responded, without missing a beat, that she is walking with you this morning. I'd never had a

conversation with her about her grandmother. I just sensed it as she approached my desk. Some

of those experiences have been rather eerie. Years ago, before my daughter was born, I told her

mom that we would have a daughter, before she was pregnant. I've sat in business meetings at

work and instinctively knew that someone in the room was in emotional distress – sometimes

people I've never spoken to before, and when approached and I bring it up they'd break down

and talk about it. I've had these types of experiences so many times that I am sure that it can be considered a strength. The other strength I think I have is level three listening (Kimsey-House et al., 2011) describe level three listening as listening on an environmental level; listening as if you and the other person were the only people alive. My experiences indicate to me that I can listen at this level. I often tell my colleagues that I am listening not only to what they're saying, but to what they're not saying, and that the latter is as audible to me as the former. One of the reasons I think I know this is a strength is that people who've interacted with me for a while, tend to bottom-line rather quickly in conversations with me because they've experienced my ability to quickly zero in on what it is they want, want to say, and are not saying. A colleague of mine at work walked by my workspace one morning, and I heard a difference in her walk – yes, unbelievable; as she was passing back that way, I stopped her and asked if everything was okay – she smiled and said yes. I told her that that was not what I felt in her presence, then she told me about an illness that was affecting one of her sons, and that he'd had a particularly bad night and she was worried about him. She asked me how I knew something was wrong, and I told her I heard it in how her footsteps sounded as she walked by – and I hadn't even realized, up until that moment that she I was listening to her footsteps as she'd walked by every day, but apparently I was because on that day I heard a difference and it sounded to me like the footfalls of someone in stress. The flipside of these two perceived strengths is that I sometimes can come across as devoid of emotional intelligence in some instances – particularly, I have found, if my work agenda is stressed and I have a lot to do, I tend to become totally oblivious to how other people feel. (Hunt & Weintraub, 2017) proffer that emotions and thoughts are not opposites, but that they are interdependent in remarkable ways. As an adult, when I examine my life thus far, I realize that I've always felt it necessary to live life in utilitarian modes to survive. Consequently,

I've fought hard to separate what I think from how I feel. In fact, I've often lectured my daughter on what I see as the perils of allowing what one feels to dictate what one thinks. I have come to see through the lens of many a stumble though, that this has been a serious blind spot for me. One of the more common critiques I have received over my professional years, was that I come across as inflexible and unfeeling. I've always countered that I don't come to work to engage how I feel, but to pursue work-related goals. I now know that were I to embark on coaching in any format; I must learn to pay attention to my own emotional intelligence, and learn how to as (Hunt & Weintraub, 2017) admonish; perceive and register emotional messages in myself and other people – as a means of using emotions as a tool of facilitation. In order to accomplish this, I am taking steps to engage in more self-management by for instance, keeping an inference ladder chart – printed out – on the wall of my workspace. Now when I interact with another person and I feel myself drifting into non-emotional states of interaction; I look at my chart – ask myself what is the emotion this person is expressing right now, and try to access my emotional self by placing myself in their shoes for a moment. It's been quite tedious, because it takes time – and I seem always short on time – but I'm practicing at it. Nevertheless, as pointed out by (Hartman & McCambridge, 2011) almost all top business executives, when asked to name the single most influential factor in their success, name communication. They also cite interpersonal skills as one of the components of effective communication skills (Hartman & McCambridge, 2011).

I think the second weakness I need to work on is my decision to often not focus on the whole person. In the spirit of a utilitarian mindset; I've thus far always dealt with the piece of the person in front of me that needs attending to; this was true even as I engaged in the coaching practice session in this course. I am, as pointed out by (Kimsey-House et al., 2011) like most

people who want to get to the issue of what is the problem or issue which needs to be solved? My mindset has always been that most people aren't even showing up as their whole selves anyway – they are for the most part only always presenting aspects of themselves they want to accentuate to the world. Nevertheless, as again pointed out by (Kimsey-House et al., 2011), people are an amalgamation of all aspects of themselves, and can only properly be understood in this light.

Steps I am taking to remedy this weakness involve asking other people to tell me things about themselves that I may not have perceived – like if they have pets, or keep a garden, or love truck food, or word puzzles. The information feedback has been rather interesting – as it has allowed me to have a wider view of the person sitting across from me.

> *Look for areas in your current or future organization that can benefit from coaching. Identify the types of coaching clients and characterize the needs of the organization. Match your experiences and skills to the need of the organization.*

I think my current job is rife with opportunities for coaching as a means, for example, of developing existing talent. A year ago, I brought this up in a meeting I'd had with two senior directors. I'd suggested to them that we were not doing a good job of retaining good talented people, and that I thought that this was a result of perception that there were no development channels in the department. Given the various skill levels and needs probably existing in the organization, there may be many more opportunities besides development; but I think this is a critical one for the organization. I think literally everyone in the department I work would be a great client for developmental coaching. I don't believe that at this point I have enough of the needed skills to do any coaching in the organization. However, this is an area I am interested in, and in which I need to receive further training.

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