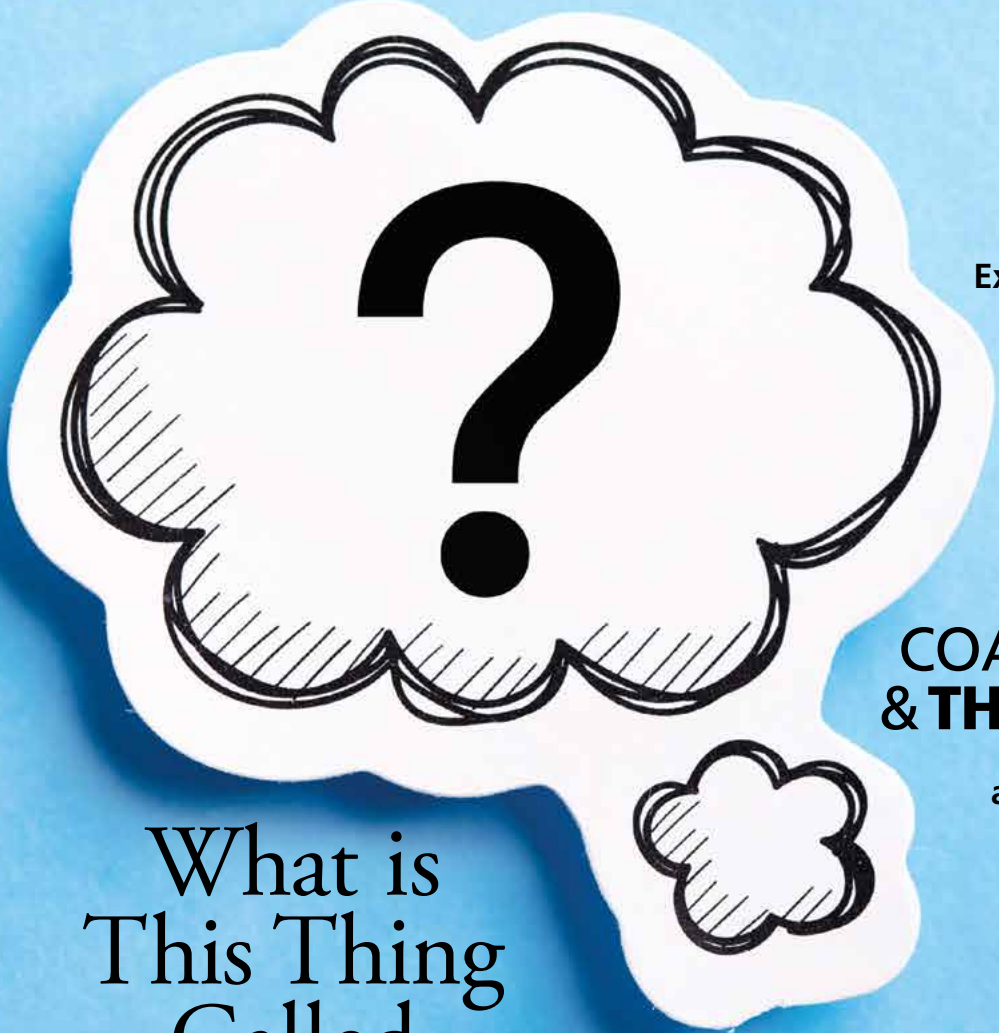


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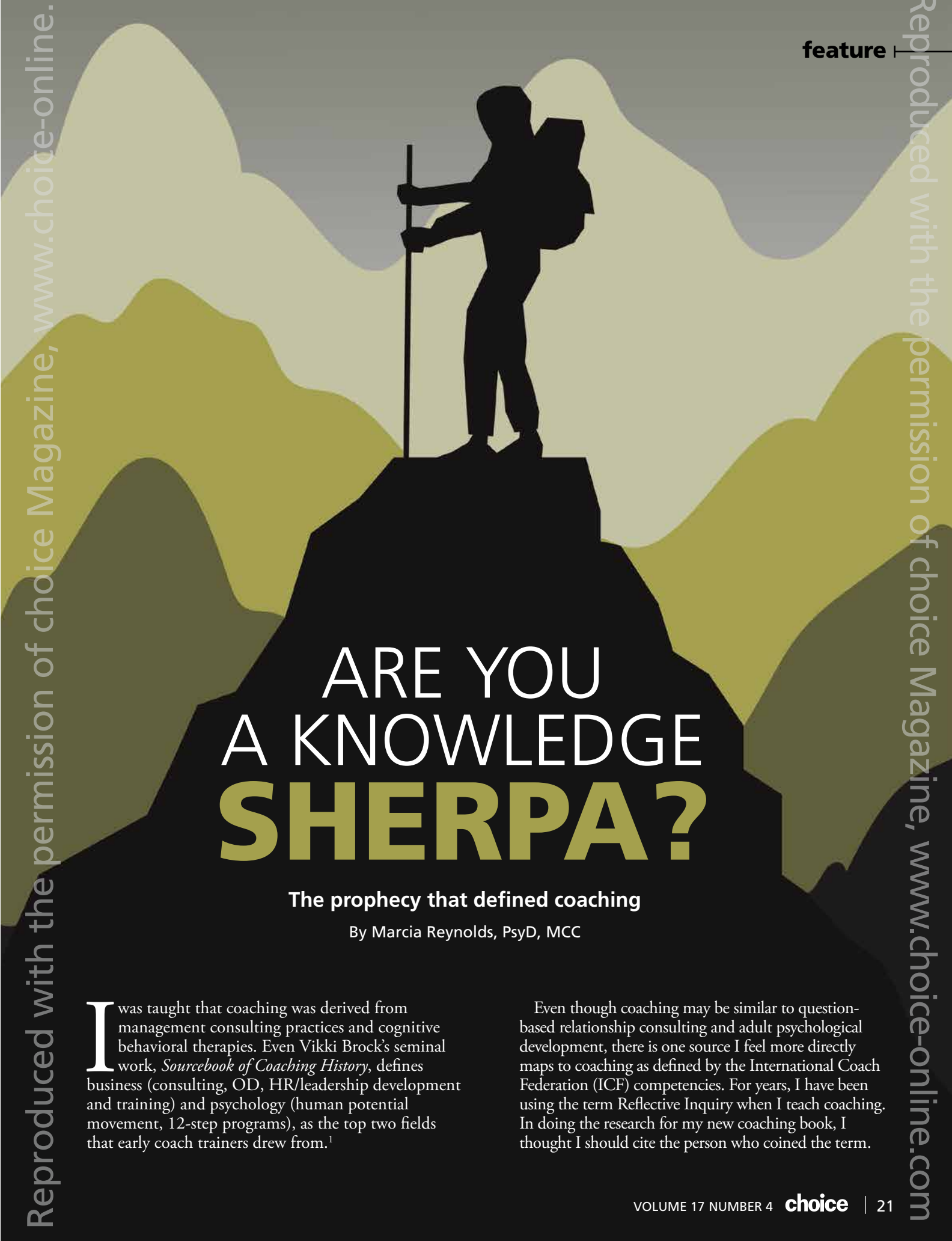
the magazine of professional coaching



**DON'T
BOX
ME IN**
Expanding the
definition of
coaching

**COACHING
& THERAPY**
Correlations
and contrasts

What is
This Thing
Called
Coaching?
What sets us apart



ARE YOU A KNOWLEDGE SHERPA?

The prophecy that defined coaching

By Marcia Reynolds, PsyD, MCC

I was taught that coaching was derived from management consulting practices and cognitive behavioral therapies. Even Vikki Brock's seminal work, *Sourcebook of Coaching History*, defines business (consulting, OD, HR/leadership development and training) and psychology (human potential movement, 12-step programs), as the top two fields that early coach trainers drew from.¹

Even though coaching may be similar to question-based relationship consulting and adult psychological development, there is one source I feel more directly maps to coaching as defined by the International Coach Federation (ICF) competencies. For years, I have been using the term Reflective Inquiry when I teach coaching. In doing the research for my new coaching book, I thought I should cite the person who coined the term.

I could not find the source in any of my doctoral textbooks in psychology and leadership, so I went back to the papers I wrote for my 1987 master's degree in Adult Learning. That is when I learned that coaching was defined over 100 years ago by the educational reformer, John Dewey.

In 1910, psychologist and educational reformer John Dewey defined the practice of reflective inquiry in his classic book, *How We Think*.² Dewey felt that combining the tools that provoke critical thinking with Socratic questioning would prompt a person to go inward to give their thoughts serious consideration. The person would then be able to distinguish what they know from what they don't know, to confirm or negate a stated belief, and substantiate the value of a fear or doubt. Dewey said metaphorically, "reflective inquiry enables us to climb a tree in our minds." We gain a wider view to see connections and faults in our thinking to better assess what to do next.

Dewey felt that combining the tools that provoke critical thinking with Socratic questioning would prompt a person to go inward to give their thoughts serious consideration.

Dewey desired to improve learning in the classroom, to make the experience more interactive and inquisitive. He wasn't just advocating for teachers to ask more questions. He defined *methods of inquiry* that would prompt students to doubt what they thought they knew so they were open to expansive learning.

QUESTIONS VS. INQUIRY

Inquiry may include statements that hold up a mirror to our thoughts and beliefs to provoke insight formation. The practice of mirroring, or what I call 'active replay,' includes summarizing, paraphrasing, acknowledging key phrases clients say, offering metaphors, and sharing what emotions and gestures the client expressed. Clients then expand on the meaning of their words with explanations or corrections.

When coaches use reflective statements, people hear their words, see how their beliefs form their perceptions, and face the emotions they are expressing.

Then, when coaches follow up with a confirming question (is this what you believe?) or exploratory question (what is causing your hesitation?), clients are prompted to stop and examine their thinking.

We use reflective statements plus questions to trigger people to reflect on how they think.

The thought-provoking and creative process outlined in the ICF coaching competencies of Presence, Active Listening, and Direct Communications include reflective statements, not just asking questions.

The goal of offering reflective statements is not to lead the client in a specific direction but to assist the client to clarify and articulate an expanded or new awareness. The coach accepts client responses, even if the client disagrees or gets defensive. Giving the client a judgment-free space to process the coaching observations is critical to their progress.

John Dewey may not have been successful at transforming our educational systems, but his gift of defining how to grow people's minds can be seen in the actions of trained coaches. In 1945, in light of Dewey's work, engineer and science administrator Vannevar Bush predicted the emergence of "a new profession of trailblazers" he called Knowledge Sherpas to help people sort through their thoughts. That profession increased in numbers 50 years later. Today, we call them coaches.

COACHING AS REFLECTIVE INQUIRY

Sometime in the last 20 years, the 'powerful question' was given priority in coaching. Now, coaches spend more time trying to remember the questions they're supposed to ask than paying attention to the person they are coaching. They end up 'check-list coaching' to ensure their questions follow the model they were taught in coaching school or a leadership workshop, which is more frustrating for the client than helpful.

Coaching should be a process of *inquiry*, not a series of questions. The Cult of the Powerful Question has made coaching more complex than it should be. Using reflective statements can be more powerful – and easier – than seeking the magical question. When the coach asks a question *after* providing a reflection, the question is more likely to arise out of curiosity, not memory.

Questions seek answers; inquiry provokes insight.

The intent of *inquiry* is not to find solutions but to provoke critical thinking about our own thoughts. Inquiry helps the person being coached discern gaps in their logic, evaluate their beliefs, and clarify fears and desires affecting their choices. Solutions emerge when thoughts are rearranged and expanded.

“
When coaches use reflective statements, people hear their words, see how their beliefs form their perceptions, and face the emotions they are expressing.

Reflective statements + questions = reflective inquiry.

Adding reflective statements to questions makes coaching feel more natural and effortless. You don't have to worry about formulating the breakthrough question.

Pairing reflective statements with questions frees the coach of the weight of finding the question.

Political philosopher Hannah Arendt, said, “The need of reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning. And truth and meaning are not the same.”³ Questions used with reflective practices hold up a mirror for clients to detach, observe, and break through old patterns of thinking that may not be true or useful to who they are today. Instead of trying to remember or frame your questions correctly, exhale, observe your client with compassionate curiosity, and then share what you hear and notice to help your clients think more broadly for themselves.

What differentiates coaches from consultants and therapists is our role as a *thinking partner*, not an expert or healer. I am grateful to John Dewey for contributing the practice of reflective inquiry to expand people's minds and possibilities. •

RESOURCES

This article is excerpted from *The Coaches Guide to Reflective Inquiry: Seven Essential Practices for Breakthrough Coaching* by Marcia Reynolds, to be released by Berrett-Koehler Publishers in June 2020.

¹ Vikki G. Brock, *Sourcebook of Coaching History*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform; Second edition, 2012.

² John Dewey, *How We Think*. D.C. Heath & Co., 1910.

³ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; 1st edition, 1978, page 15.

REFLECTIVE INQUIRY

Examples of reflective statements include:

- 1 **NOTICING** energy shifts, tone of voice, pace of speech, inflection, and behaviors.
- 2 **PLAYING BACK** clients' beliefs and assumptions to examine perceived truth and limitations.
- 3 **SUMMARIZING** complex outcomes and possibilities, offering the statements to clients to accept or alter.
- 4 **PARAPHRASING AND OFFERING METAPHORS** to help clients examine their thinking in a different light.
- 5 **ENCAPSULATING KEY WORDS AND REPEATED PHRASES** to pinpoint needs, conflicts, and contradictions.
- 6 **OFFERING OBSERVATIONS** when clients deflect, hesitate, or show resistance.
- 7 **ACKNOWLEDGING PROGRESS** to reinforce movement and growth.

