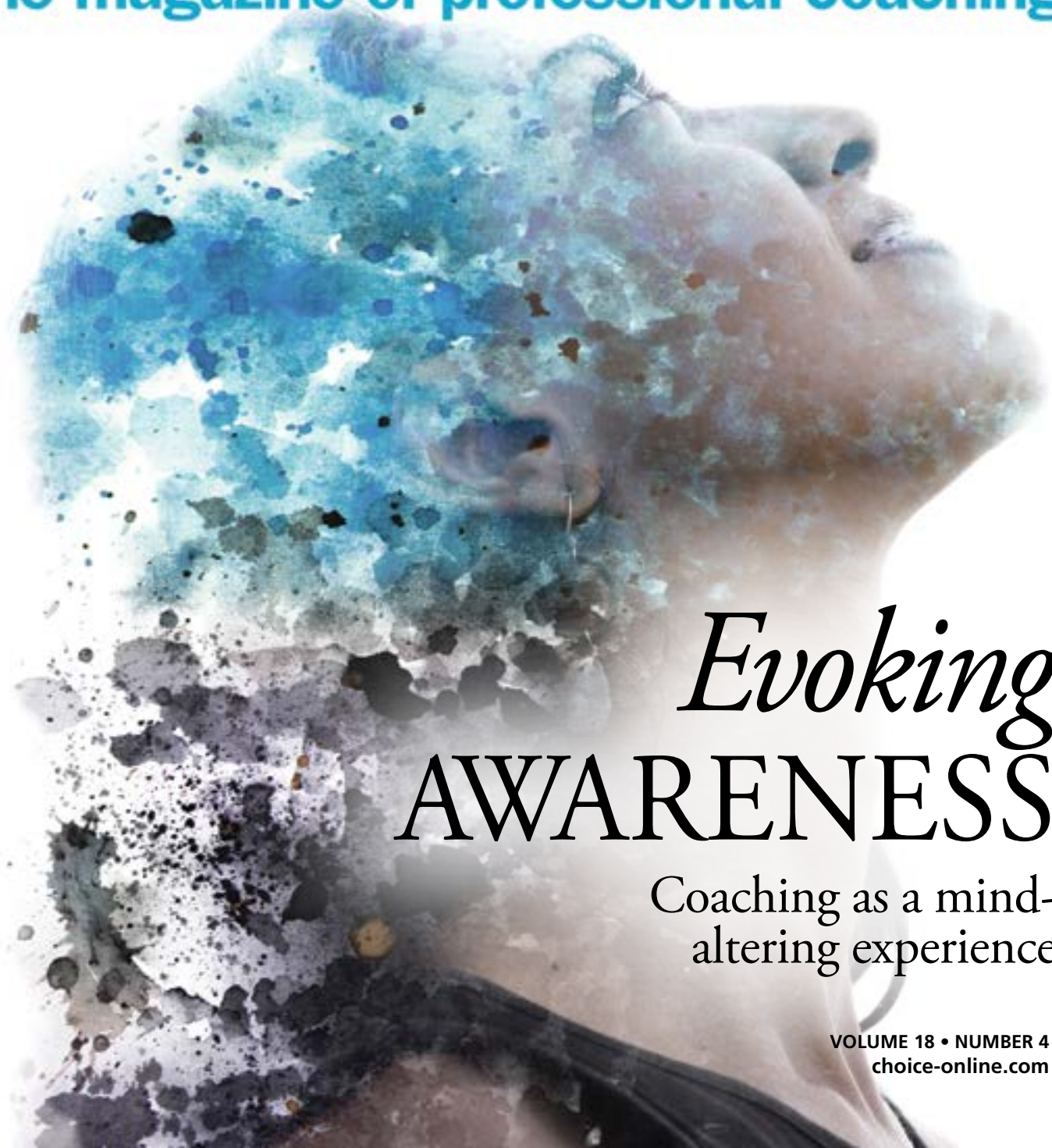


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## *Evoking* AWARENESS

Coaching as a mind-  
altering experience

# *Evoking* **AWARENESS**

## **Coaching as a mind-altering experience**

What does it take to expand and shift your clients' perspective? How does the coach use presence to facilitate the discovery process? What are the mental habits of master coaches? In addition to asking questions, what are the essential practices used in awareness-based coaching? Join us as we explore what elements are needed in a coaching model that goes beyond finding answers to powerfully evoke awareness.

# BALANCING STRUCTURE *with Flow*

**How to move coaching from a nice conversation  
to a life-changing experience**

By Marcia Reynolds, PsyD, MCC

**M**any coaches and people who teach coaching like having a model to follow. The GROW model is used internationally. However, models can get in the way of good coaching.

Coaching models can help us discuss and learn about the process of coaching. Then they need to be thrown away. If you are thinking about where you are on a coaching model while coaching, you aren't present. The same goes for trying to recall your list of powerful questions. You coach from memory in your

brain instead of from curiosity about what is swirling in the brains of your clients.

There is an argument for models: without one, your session might just be a nice conversation that makes your clients feel better but doesn't change their lives. There has to be some structure to ensure progress is made in a session and over time. The trick is balancing the necessary structure of coaching with the spontaneous flow that must occur for the disruptive-creative process of coaching to expand consciousness and change lives.

### THE NECESSARY STRUCTURE

A coaching session can be compared to composing a freestyle rap. Neuroscientists at the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders took twelve rappers and ran them through an fMRI machine.<sup>1</sup> The scientists discovered that although the cognitive brain responsible for self-monitoring and critiquing was active at the start and end of the song. During freestyle, the cognitive brain went quiet. The researchers explained that the rappers were “freed from the conventional constraints of supervisory attention and executive control” so sudden insights could easily emerge.

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In other words, the rappers consciously set the intention of the composition up front. Once they had a sense of where they were going, they switched off their inner critic and analyzer. This allowed for more activity in the inner brain,

where the eruption of new ideas – creativity – takes place. As they moved to closing out the song, their cognitive brains came back online to provide a consciously designed ending to the composition.

Like a rap, most of coaching should be spontaneous interactions with clients to surface what is getting in the way of achieving a specific outcome. Knowing the desired outcome – what the client really wants that isn't present now – is critical. The interaction must have a focused intention even if this intention shifts as more fitting or genuine desires are unearthed. The interaction flows freely until they move to wrap it up at the end. The closing structure that draws out stated insights and commitments is necessary to ensure momentum and progress.

Coaching needs to start with discovering what clients want as a desired outcome. This is not the same as defining the problem. You must discover what they want that they don't have now.

Although it sounds like an easy step for clients to declare what they want, it's not. Clients say, “That's what I need to do, figure out what I want.” Don't push them; listen to their stories. Reflecting their key words and emotional shifts with

## 5 Steps for Building Sensory Awareness in Conversation

- 1**  
**Be quiet, inside and out**  
Quiet your brain to open your sensory channels.
- 2**  
**Listen with your heart and gut as well as your head**  
Before your conversation, open your heart with feelings of compassion or gratitude. Then open your gut with courage.
- 3**  
**Let go of knowing**  
The better you know someone, the more you have to consciously choose to be curious. Remember to believe anything can happen.
- 4**  
**Test your instinct**  
When you feel a sensation in your heart or gut, share what you think they might be feeling, such as anger, frustration, sadness, or yearning. Right or wrong, you will help them name the emotions they are feeling.
- 5**  
**Release the need to be right**  
Appreciate all of their responses. If they disagree, go with their interpretation. They may need time and space to process their thinking.

compassionate curiosity will help them clarify what they want, even if it is just a different way to feel about a situation.

The conscious wrap-up of the coaching session ensures clients crystalize their insights and commit to a step they will take to move toward their desired outcome. Even if there is a breakthrough in thinking during the session, if the coach

The trick is **balancing** the necessary **structure of coaching** with the spontaneous flow that must occur.

doesn't ask them what they will now do with their new way of thinking it's likely clients go back to their busy life and old habits. Their stories continue to be frustrating dilemmas.

The bookends of coaching – the desired outcome and the commitment to the next step – provide structure to coaching. Then coaches need to quit thinking to let the session flow.

### HOW ARE YOU LISTENING?

Once you have at least an initial destination for the coaching session, you can let go of thinking so you can fully receive what your client is expressing. If you receive what they offer, you can reflect back key phrases and words they use, emotional shifts in their gestures and pacing, and when they hesitate, deflect, or jump off the track.

Reflecting what you receive helps your clients put their stories on the table for examination. From here, they can see the gaps in their logic, the old or unsupported beliefs that don't serve them, and the future scenarios they are imagining out of fear.

Most listening is done to fulfill one of these purposes:

#### 1 To Collect Data

You listen to know what to say or do next. You listen to formulate your argument, to compare your perspective to theirs, or to fill in what you think you are missing.

#### 2 To Give an Answer or Solve a Problem

You listen to know what advice to give when they quit talking.

#### 3 To Obey Protocol

You listen because you should, not because you want to. When you listen while thinking you not only miss key elements you need to reflect in your coaching, you restrict your ability to deeply connect with your client. The conversation is a banter, not a flow.

### LISTEN TO RECEIVE

Receiving means to digest what your client expresses beyond your analytical brain. You take in and accept their words, expressions, and emotions as elements of their experience. You suspend analysis. You don't insert your opinions or

judgments. People feel heard and safe enough to be vulnerable with you in the flow.

You receive what people offer with the purpose:

#### 1 To Connect

When you receive without judgment, you create the sense of safety needed to go deep with your coaching.

#### 2 To Establish Partnership

Coaching is a unique relationship of partnership. When you give up being the expert, fixer, or healer, you become a valued thinking partner.

#### 3 To Explore, Learn & Grow Together

Receiving creates the sense of trust necessary for the client to acknowledge cracks in their stories, even if it is uncomfortable.

### Practice Sensory Awareness

To fully receive, you need to develop your sensory awareness by opening the three processing centers of your nervous system — brain, heart, and gut.<sup>2</sup> Before coaching, take in a minute to open your brain by breathing in the feeling of curiosity, open your heart by breathing in love, compassion, or gratitude, and then open your gut by recalling a moment in your life when you stood up in spite of your fear while you breath in the feeling of courage.

Use sensory awareness to pick up the emotional energy vibrating between you.<sup>3</sup> You will grasp when they want you to give them space to think. You know when they are ready to move on. You can tell when they want to be acknowledged for doing the best they can with what they have right now.

Don't let their emotions sit in your body. Empathy is where you receive what they feel, but then let these sensations pass through you as you return to being fully present with your client.

The French philosopher Simon Weil said, "Attention consists of suspending thought, leaving it detached, empty... ready to receive." Create structure in your coaching by clarifying the desired outcome and action steps. Then let the coaching flow. •

### REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Siyuan Liu. "Neural Correlates of Lyrical Improvisation: An fMRI Study of Freestyle Rap," *Scientific Reports* 2:834. November 15, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Shari M. Gellar and Stephen W. Porges. "Therapeutic Presence: Neurophysiological Mechanisms Mediating Feeling Safe in Therapeutic Relationships," *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 2014, Vol. 24, No. 3, 178–192.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*. New York: The Guilford Press; 2nd edition, 2012.

Ideas in this post are constructed from excerpts in Dr. Reynolds' book, *Coach the Person, Not the Problem: A Guide to Using Reflective Inquiry*.