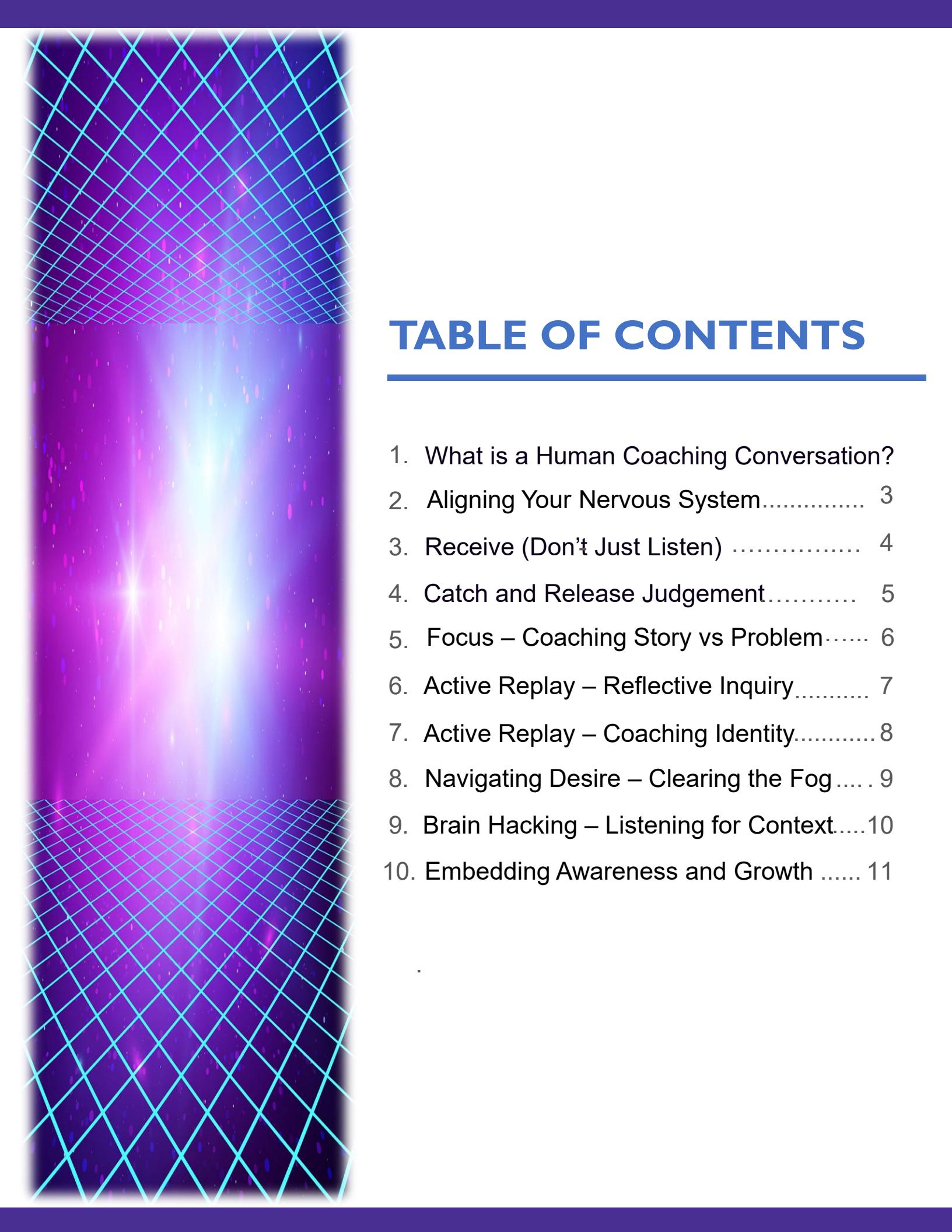


## Tool Box



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# What is a Human Coaching Conversation

By Marcia Reynolds, PsyD, MCC

***“Coaching the person is the art of disrupting the automatic thought process with the purpose of fostering creative insights that change minds and behavior.”***

Yes, there are times when discussing a problem and analyzing possible solutions can benefit from AI-assisted learning, but when emotions are attached to the problem or outcome, sorting through options is more difficult. Anxiety and frustration decreases their ability to talk through possibilities.

Coaching clients to sort through the jumble of thoughts and emotions that are holding their brains hostage until they feel safe enough to let go requires more than technical skills. The human connection is needed to support sustainable changes in thinking and behavior.

The effectiveness of coaching depends more on the quality of your presence than your perfection of skills. The energy you create with your emotions has substance. The relational field is palpable and powerful.

## ***The Power of Insight-Based Learning***

Advising and facilitating problem-solving techniques can activate the analytical, cortical brain and help to make decisions. However, telling people what to do pacifies the brain, leading to actions they already thought to take or possibly forgetting parts of what was said.

Coaching activates the middle brain where long-term memory is housed. This part of the brain prompts the exploration of perspective of situations and self to generate creative ideas and produce insight-based, sustained learning.

Yet the spontaneous exploration of fears, desires, doubts, and beliefs can be uncomfortable. Coaches must maintain a caring and judgment-free presence with clients. Then, the client's need to protect and defend is quieted, creating the psychological safety required to embrace the breakthrough process.

## ***The Relational Field***

Consciously opening your head, heart, and gut – the three processing centers of the nervous system – with curiosity, care, and courage stimulates the biochemicals in your clients that create not only safety and trust but also a willingness to engage in the coaching process with you. Their emotions co-regulate with yours. Your accepting and compassionate human presence allows you to challenge their thinking, gently but firmly keep the conversation on track, and often, add laughter to the self-discovery process.

**Being with a curious, caring, courageous coach feeds our longing to be seen, heard, and valued for all that we are.**

***Three tips for making the emotional connection needed to effectively ignite the insights needed for change and growth.***

**1**

Coaching is not just about using skills in specific situations. It's a way of being with others where the emotional energy as well as connected interactions improves relationships and transforms organizational cultures. Coaching uplifts the stories we tell and enhances the what we create.

**2**

The energy that radiates from your emotions has substance. Even if you are adept at hiding your emotions, clients will be affected by even small shifts in your energy. They will open up and shut down in response to the emotional energy you emit no matter how you cross your legs and arms. They need you to be present more than perfect.

**3**

When faced with the uncertainty of coaching from presence, not memory, many coaches retreat behind their fear of failure and question their value as a coach unless they give advice. Catch this moment of distraction. Let your clients surprise you. When you trust the coaching process and move through your doubts, breakthroughs happen when you least expect them.

More coaching strategies and approaches at  
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# Align Your Nervous System

By Marcia Reynolds, PsyD, MCC

“People step onto the path of growth when they feel seen, cared about, and respected *no matter what they share.*”

Mastery in coaching comes from connections you develop when you practice. Coaching with an open mind, generous heart and courageous gut has two major benefits. First, your full-body presence creates the psychological safety needed to engage clients in an honest, exploratory conversation. Second, you are better able to tune in and receive the whole of what clients express with their words, expressions, and inferences.

Then you must maintain your presence by reopening your nervous system when you are distracted by thoughts and emotional reactions. The following three steps will help you align your brain: 1. Choose how you want to feel, 2. Recall your intention of partnership, and 3. Believe in your client's potential.

## **Choose Your Emotional State**

Before every meeting, release any tension you have in your body and consciously choose to feel curious, caring, and courageous. Breathe these emotions into your body to align your nervous system. Close your eyes to let the emotions flood your body with the sensations you want to feel.

During your conversation, notice if fear, impatience, judgement, or the urgency to advice creep in. Release your thoughts and relax any points of tension in your body. Return to presence by breathing in your chosen emotions.

## **Partner with your smart, resourceful client**

You are the thinking partner of a smart, capable human, not their adviser. Silence any desire to tell your story. Maintain your state of “not knowing” so you remain open to learning. You can invite them to decide on specific actions and outcomes, but they choose the direction, clarify the options, and make the decisions. Never lose sight that the journey is theirs to take. The moment clients feel you are leading them they will resist you, passively comply, or mentally check out.

Remember, your intention isn't to fix their problem or make them into someone else. Your purpose is to broaden their perspective to find the answers they probably knew all along.

## **Always Believe in Their Potential**

When you lose your belief in your clients' ability to discover their own way forward, they are no longer an equal, respected partner in the conversation. Leading their thinking disempowers your clients. You then shut down your heart and gut as your brain takes over. You both lose when you stop trusting the coaching process. You may also lose the trust of your client.

**Magical coaching happens in the space between where energies intertwine and insights emerge.**

*Three tips for aligning your brain to be present emotionally and physically.*

**1**

To mentally prepare for a coaching conversation, take a moment to (1) choose to feel curious, compassionate, and courageous; (2) recall your intention for the coaching partnership; and (3) believe your client can realize and act on insights.

**2**

Practice aligning your nervous system regularly until this mental state becomes your natural way of being. Align your head, heart, and gut when you wake up, before conversations, and as you prepare for a good night's sleep. You will feel more in control of your emotional state and enjoy more of your daily interactions.,

**3**

If your client appears to be uncomfortable or confused, do not jump in to save them. Ask if they would share what is on their mind. Remain open and curious to what they reveal. Believe in their potential to work through their discomfort with seeing their thoughts from the outside. They are discovering what no longer serves them.

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# Receive (Don't Just Listen)

By Marcia Reynolds, PsyD, MCC

*"Receiving what clients offer goes beyond listening."*

When you take in and acknowledge what is offered without judgment and then respond with the intent of understanding what a person means and sees, you broaden their perspective as well as your own. Also, when they feel seen, accepted and understood, they relax with trust, sensing the conversation will be safe and useful.

## ***The Intentions Behind Habitual Listening***

In your daily interactions, you most likely listen with the intentions of gathering just enough information to know what to say or do next, to hear enough to tell others how to solve their problem, to find fault in their thinking, or to spend the minimal amount of time with them because it is polite. You spend these moments in your head thinking more than hearing. Even if your desire is to collaborate, they may feel little emotional connection with you.

## ***The Intentions Behind Receiving***

The act of receiving is when you welcome and value what someone shares. You hear their words, beliefs and desires, notice their shifts in expression and posture, and sense when they are holding back from looking at something when they hesitate or jump to another topic. Your purpose is to engage with care and respect, to learn what they see and want, to stay with them without rushing to a solution, and to comfortably experience the humans you are with.

## ***Compassionate Detaching***

It is important to maintain the flow of the conversation no matter how they respond. You might feel their stress, anxiety, and anger in your body, but you must breathe and release your reactions be able to effectively coach. Empathy is where you receive what another is feeling and then let these sensations pass through you. If you fall into fear or pain, you fall out of flow. Choose to be peaceful and confident while staying present to the moment.

Practice aligning your nervous system in all your conversations to stay present with curiosity, care, and the belief in clients' potential. Do your best to receive what people say even when you fiercely disagree. Let them have their thoughts so you can summarize and confirm what they offer. Your accepting presence encourages connection, safety, and the openness to engage which could change their views in the process.

**When you acknowledge the perspective of the person you are without judgement or getting lost in their drama, you offer the rare gift of recognition.**

*Three tips to keep your thoughts from getting in the way of fully receiving what clients express.*

**1**

Let go of quickly assuming you know what people want and why they can't get it without reflecting and asking about the meaning of their words. Remember, you are there to take their stories, needs, and desires out of their heads to examine and clarify. Knowing someone for a long time is one of the greatest dangers of coaching.

**2**

When they don't agree with what you surmise, accept their response. Keep your heart and gut open. When you feel a sensation in your heart or gut, share the physical or energetic shifts you observed before you offer what you think they are feeling. Even if you are wrong, your offer prompts them to learn about themselves.

**3**

If the flow of the conversation reveals patterns, such as when the client jumps back to talking about the past or declares they want something but has many excuses for not doing anything different, Ask if you can share the pattern you noticed. Your observations will help them focus on what they really want to work through and create.

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*"We are all judgy people by human nature."*

The most common lie coaches tell themselves is "I am not judgmental." Judgment is wired into our brains to help us be safe. What you believe is important, what you value as right, and how you believe others should act lead to judgment. Although you may be trained to use emotional intelligence, you can't help being biased. One of the most detrimental yet overlooked emotions you experience is judgment. Often what we call intuition is really an interpretation.

Also, be careful of inserting what you think "just came to you" and call it intuition with no observations to back up your claim.

## **Judgements Are Human Protective Mechanisms**

Judgment occurs when the brain determines what was said or done conflicts with who you think you are (identity) and how the world should work (reality). Out of survival, your brain is always on the look out for attacks on what you think is right, wrong, good, and bad, real or not.

You also have a natural negativity bias that leads you to view even innocent expressions as negative. When you think you are cleanly summarizing and asking objective questions, your choice of words and how you ask them can be colored by your opinions. Catching your judgements takes consistent practice.

## **Accept Your Are Judgmental to Free Your Mind**

Left unchecked, even slight judgmental reactions affect the power differential, impairing the trust and safety vital to coaching. When judgment seeps through, partnership is lost.

Because unconscious biases are difficult to uncover, allowing someone to help reveal them to you is useful. Ask a friend you can trust to kindly point out when one of your biases appears, giving time between instances so you don't feel attacked. As much as I don't like my judgments pointed out, I am grateful for the awareness. A coach or coaching supervisor can also help you unearth the outdated beliefs behind your judgements.

To help you discern where you feel judgement, do things that intentionally trigger yourself to recognize where the tension shows up in your body. Listen to the news, read Facebook posts, or try to navigate crowded environments like airports. Notice the sensation in your body and then release the tension to clear your mind.

Remember, if you think they need your advice, you are judging their ability to achieve awareness on their own with your coaching. Have faith in coaching even when you think the conversation is going nowhere. Let them surprise you.

Breakthroughs often show up when you least expected them.

***Cultivate the state of not knowing. Judgment is an emotion you can shift before your ideas reach your lips.***

## **Three tips for catching and releasing your judgements**

**1**

Notice when you feel a point of tension in your body that you have learned is caused by judging people's behaviors, ideas, clothing, or how they treat you. Forgive yourself for judging. Be grateful for the chance to practice. Then quickly override your judgment by choosing what you want to feel instead, such as compassionate and curious.

**2**

Question your beliefs about your client's words and expressions. Stay curious even when they are defensive. If you think a client choice will be more destructive than helpful, ask them to restate what they want to achieve and how their choice could help and hinder getting what they want. Don't assume they need your advice.

**3**

Strive to be more curious about people every day. Enjoy looking beyond what you think so you can discover something new. Remember, people are acting out of their frames. You don't have to agree with their points of view, but you can openly listen to understand their perspective. You will gain peace of mind and improve your interactions.

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# Focus: Coach the Person

By Marcia Reynolds, PsyD, MCC

**"You coach because you believe your client is clever."**

It is difficult for most humans to start on the journey of self-transformation on their own even when they know the reasons for staying stuck are unsupported rationalizations. The protective human brain blocks objective self-reflection, especially if how we define who we are is threatened. Trying to sort out problems that have an emotional element on our own does not usually go beyond the boundaries of the stories holding perceptions of reality and identity in place.

Our inability to detach ourselves to see our views from the outside is why we need a coach. When we genuinely desire to alter beliefs and behaviors, we need a *thinking partner* to summarize our words and ask questions about what we mean and want to stop the brain's automatic fabrication of protective rationalizations. We need external thought disruptors.

We discover what is best to do when working with a coach who can override our brain's protective processes by expanding our conscious self-awareness.

## Coaching the person means to challenge their thinking

Breakthroughs in coaching happen when you focus on coaching clients to recognize what they want to create or change, and then discern what is getting in the way of their knowing what needs to happen next. When you summarize their thoughts, uncover their fears and doubts, and reveal their inherited, obstructive beliefs, you clear the fog for them to clearly see the problem and the most desirable resolutions.

Many coaches struggle with shifting the focus from solving the problem to the less-comfortable coaching how their clients are thinking. Coaches might ask important questions to help clients analyze their perception of the problem. They may even coach clients to identify the strengths they possess that could help them implement a solution. These approaches are not enough. Why couldn't the client do this on their own? If anything happens after the coaching relationship ends that rekindles their fears, doubts, and resistance, they might fall back into old thinking patterns. Keeping the conversation comfortable and positive derails learning and growth.

## The best coaches make their clients uncomfortable

While exploring their thinking, clients often experience a brief moment of uncertainty especially if they are experiencing shifts in their identity. Stay present. This insures long-term change both in perception and action. If they feel safe with you, they will stay with the process. Your gift to them is to question interpretations, test assumptions, and explore emotions so your clients expand their perspective instead of just reordering the thoughts they already had.

**People grow when they expand how they see themselves being in the world around them.**

**Three tips for staying focused on the person so they discover their way forward with your coaching.**

1

Agree on what coaching looks like before you start. Show them how you will be their thinking partner to explore situations together. You might give them assessments and resources, but you will not solve their problems for them. When they clear away their mental distractions with your coaching, they will know what is right to do or to learn to move forward.

2

Never give up on their ability to discover what to do next. Stay curious to discover what they *really* want and what is getting in the way of moving toward their desire. Recognize your urge to give advice as a judgement of their resourcefulness. You can share information such as research results to inform, not direct.

3

When clients know you believe in them and you are wholeheartedly there to help them discover their best answers, they will be willing to accept the discomfort of vulnerability that allows them to recognize their mental blocks. Your unwavering belief in them, genuine care, and courage create the conditions for you to coach the person to learn and grow.

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# Active Replay: Reflective Inquiry

By Marcia Reynolds, PsyD, MCC

***"When our view of reality is dangled in front of us, we often laugh at what we see before we bring it up to date."***

Concisely playing back the highlights of your clients' words and expressions invites self-reflection. The follow-up questions then provoke the introspection that opens clients to a conscious understanding of the beliefs, fears, doubts, disappointments, conflicts of values, and desires prompting their actions and inactions. In addition to concisely summarizing what clients offer, the practice of reflective inquiry includes encapsulating, exploring metaphors, and asking about their shifts in energy and emotional expressions.

## ***Encapsulating words and expressions***

One of my favorite phrases in coaching is, "So, you are saying . . ." Then I restate the major points they shared defining the problem (or multiple issues), the key factors they stated making it difficult to act, and possibly what they said they want instead. Sometimes I will ask if I got it right. I don't always have to ask. The client will either agree or correct my perception without my asking a question. Then I ask what a key word or phrase means to them or what led to their belief.

Coach slowly up front. This clarification can lead to the breakthrough in thinking that sets the direction of session.

Active replay not only helps us see what they see, the client then more clearly sees specific aspects of their dilemma and why it's important to work through what is creating or getting in the way of a real, not just compliant resolution.

Use the words clients give you. Listen for these indicators until they pause or move on to a new topic. Capture words and phrases that feel most important but don't think about them. You miss things when thinking drowns out listening.

Although you seek the highlights, don't leave out a conflicting detail. Often a side comment expressed with a shift in emotion reveals the belief that is creating the client's block. Share when they use the word *should* so you can look at who's voice is making the decisions and discounting desires. Ask what came to mind when they stopped to think or looked away and sighed. Don't let these insights slip away.

## ***Paraphrasing and Using Metaphors.***

When they express confusion or uncertainty, use a short paraphrase that sums up their words or a metaphor that paints a picture characterizing their dilemma, like *swimming with sharks, shackled by shoulds, or anxious for the race to start but worried you have the wrong shoes*. Pictures can take their thinking to a different level. Start metaphors with, "It seems like you are..." Then ask what the picture means to them or relates to their beliefs, fears or frustrations.

Be sure to capture and replay *their metaphors*, too.

Good questions emerge from the reflections you share.

***Three tips for giving clients the screen to view their thoughts and motivations.***

**1**

Listen for key words—generally repeated or emotionally charged descriptors or phrases that identify what they don't want or what they think they need. Ask them to explain what the words mean. Allow clients time for reflection. Use distinctions to clarify common words, such as asking, "Do you mean (want, or fear most) this... or this...?"

**2**

Cut through constant excuses and unnecessary backstory by bottom-lining what they said they wanted to change. Ask if what they want is important enough to act on despite their fears or roadblocks. Respectfully interrupt if they keep repeating problems by asking permission to clarify blocks and the outcome they hope to achieve.

**3**

Notice shifts in clients' posture, facial expressions, and pacing. Start with saying, "When you said... or "When I asked you..." then share what you noticed. Pause to let them think; a new meaning may take time to emerge. Then accept what they share even if you have a different opinion. Regulate your reactions to their emotions.

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# Active Replay: Coaching Identity

By Marcia Reynolds, PsyD, MCC

**"It's difficult to embrace a new habit without embracing a new you."**

When clients face a dilemma that is frustrating or confusing, it's likely they are seeing the situation and reacting based how they define themselves in the scenario. Holding on to an old identity is safer than taking steps to become someone new no matter how rewarding a new sense of self can be. Growth is stunted if this transformation isn't made.

## ***Limiting Beliefs Are Rooted in the Limits of Self-Concept***

Harvard professor Herminia Ibarra said we define ourselves daily by, "...the things we do, the company we keep and the stories we tell about our work and our lives." We go about our days unconsciously making decisions about what is good for me, bad for me, and comfortable for me. These evaluations create our fears, motivations, and interpretations of the world we see. We rarely change who we think we are through self-reflection no matter how limiting this self-concept is. Our brains resist the discomfort of not knowing who we are. Author of *The Possible Self*, Maja Djikic, said, "Who we believe we are is often the enemy of who we want to become."

## ***Coaching the Who***

When we coach to reveal what social needs and personal values are driving their behaviors and emotions, we are peeling back the layers of identity. Yet this process is best done by first exploring who the client can become before recognizing the limits of how they define themselves today. When you coach to clarify and understand how clients perceive their dilemma and then ask them what it looks like if they were to change or create the situation that meets their needs and desires, ask, "How do you describe the person you are being in that picture?" Don't be surprised if they say, "I am totally being myself."

## ***Keep The Image Of The Future Self In Mind***

Once they have a new story based on who the person is they see that rises above their dilemma, ask how they are defining themselves today. This is often a breakthrough moment. They recognize how they are getting in their own way of success or fulfillment. Yet there is still a lot of coaching to do to facilitate the transformation. What do they need to address or resolve to step toward who they can become? What are their doubts? Are they afraid of judgement or rejection? What are they willing to do to try out the new identity they want to live into? Wishing for something is not enough to make desires a new reality.

**We must let go of old definitions and defend selves to evolve into another, more satisfying sense of self.**

***Three tips for shifting from coaching the "what" to coaching the "who."***

**1**

When you come to agree on what they want to change or create instead of what they have now, ask your client to define who they see in this picture. Who are they being, such as *the team advocate, inspiring leader, courageous friend, responsible guide, authentic self, or a strong voice with much to share*.

**2**

Ask what they think and feel about their envisioned self. Do they feel excitement or pride? Or are they skeptical? Explore what is getting in the way of embracing the person they hope to be. How does their reluctance affect what they said they wanted to create with coaching? Coaching them to be their best self opens their brain to both solve problems and grow.

**3**

Even if they had defined themselves when telling their story, such as newest, youngest, different, least experienced, or know more than them, go back to their current self definition after defining their best self to identify the change that needs to occur to achieve their goals. The path for coaching should come into focus. Your job is to keep it on track with their desired outcome in mind.

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# Navigating Desire: Clearing the Fog

By Marcia Reynolds, PsyD, MCC

***"There must be a vision of what is possible to keep the session from just being a conversation about a problem."***

The difficult part of keeping the conversation on track is that what clients state they want to achieve at the start of the session will expand, shift, or completely change as you explore their beliefs, needs, values, and doubts. Unwrapping and discovering what the client realizes is best that is in their power to change may take up most of the conversation. This is good coaching.

## ***Imagining Aspirations***

With no desired outcome, client stories ramble and run in circles. They might feel more resolute after talking with you, but the confidence clients feel after talking things out is short-lived. Their story will continue to be a frustrating dilemma.

Three important practices for coaches to maintain a positive flow and ending are (1) unwrapping what clients want instead of what they have now ("Is this what you want?"), (2) tracking progress and changes in the desired outcome as they address what is blocking movement toward their desires ("Is this what you really want?"), and (3) coaching clients to crystalize their insights and commit to actions to ensure progress ("What will you do now?"). Imagining and reimagining the ideal scenario and self helps to clear the fog of fears, doubts, limitations, and social pressures.

## ***The Outcome is Not a Decision or Something to Stop***

Opening topics are often about stopping behaviors or emotional reactions. After clarifying what needs to change, identity what they see when they make the changes. If they didn't have their fears, habits, and barriers, what would be happening instead?

If they say they need help making decisions and plans, seek to understand what the decision or plan will give them and why it is important to them. Then find out what is making it difficult for them to decide or plan on their own.

People are often unsure what they want, or they are afraid to speak it out loud. Your job is to help them clearly see what they want. Once their real desires are articulated, the actions they must take are easier to declare and commit to.

## ***Track Progress And Changes Toward The Goal***

A shift in outcome may appear as you pare off layers of old beliefs and chip away at the armor protecting vulnerabilities. Then, the visual of the outcome changes or it expands. Always keep in mind, "Where are we going?" Share if you notice a shift in direction. Let the client choose to refine the focus or alter the outcome if they want to.

**Clear desired outcomes lead to real resolutions of problems and genuine commitments to goals.**

***Three tips for understanding what the client really wants to change or create.***

**1**

Be careful not to assume what clients experience and want without exploring their view of reality and getting confirmation of what they want to create that is not vague or imprecise. Assumptions of knowing come into play when coaches stop listening because they think they have had the same experience as their client. You have not lived their life. How they process situations is different from you. Stay curious.

**2**

Repeated words such as *control*, *not listening*, and *it's too much* are clues to defining what clients really want if they could change things. You also might hear what they fear they will not get if they change. Flip their complaints and fears to visualize what they would love to have happen if they could find a way to get there. Whether they can get it now or in the future, they have a destination to aim for.

**3**

Stay compassionately steady and resolute about defining the outcome even if they need to first talk through blocks to be able to claim what they really want to change or create. Digging and refocusing can feel uncomfortable. Remember, you aren't coaching to make clients feel better. You are there to help them see better—with clarity and confidence.

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# Brain Hacking: Listening for Context

By Marcia Reynolds, PsyD, MCC

*"Your brain prefers to keep you safe than to permit the transformation you desire."*

We navigate our days based on the stories we hold in our heads. The frames around our stories are woven from strands of our significant life experiences and learnings, forming the meaning we attach to each moment (reality) and how we define ourselves (identity). This is our operating system, running continuously throughout the day.

When coaching, you disrupt this thinking process with reflective inquiry. The obstruction causes clients to pause, step back, and see their stories. Your clients can expand or change their stories when exploring the context keeping the stories intact - their beliefs, unmet needs, and conflicts of values.

## **Beliefs, Biases and Assumptions**

Start coaching by listening for the staunch beliefs, biases in their opinions, and assumptions holding their stories together. Some are true, others are illogical or stale. Bringing beliefs, biases, and assumptions to light might lead to a breakthrough, giving clients a chance to consider holding on or letting go.

## **Social Needs**

On the positive side, the drive to get social needs met leads a person to meaningful success. On the shadow side, the rejection or violation of a social need may trigger a range of emotions. Help clients examine what they need from a situation but think they aren't getting - such as recognition, respect, control, freedom, or safety. Use their needs to help flesh out their desired outcome - what would it look like if they were to get their needs met in this situation or somewhere else. Sometimes they need to let their needs go if what they expect is not possible. Just recognizing social needs frees people up to be the master, not the victim of their reactions.

## **Life Values**

What we feel is most important—our values—define what standards we hold others to and what behaviors we feel are right or wrong. Values and social needs shape our stories and influence our identity. The desired outcomes of a coaching session should reflect a personal value, such as having more love, peace, adventure, freedom, achievement, balance, or success. To feel satisfied and happy, clients must be in alignment with their life values now or in a defined future.

Be careful of judging values that differ from yours. You might try to lead them to your point of view. They must freely decide how their values are impacting their views of their situation and what they must do next if values are compromised.

**Reflecting the beliefs, needs, and values revealed in their stories can lead to frame-busting breakthroughs.**

*Three tips for coaching your clients to see and release what holds their stories in place.*

**1**

As they tell their story, listen for key phrases that follow the words *really, but, and should*. Reflect the major elements, saying, "So you think the reason this is happening is..." or "You got very angry (excited, quiet, defensive, etc.) when you described..." Don't judge their version. Trust they will recognize what is not serving their best self or what they most desire when they hear it for themselves.

**2**

Notice the emotions they attach to the pieces of their story. Encourage them to discuss what they hoped would happen but didn't. Once unmet needs or critical values are identified, clients can then choose to work on getting their needs met and values honored or determine how to live with an unmet need or value while they work on a better future.

**3**

When you agree on a clear desired outcome, recognize how the outcome relates to what they most value. Why is the outcome important to achieve now? If they have tried to solve the problem in many ways but nothing seems to work, ask, "If you have done your best with what you know, what is in your control to do now?" This helps them confidently make the difficult choices on their own.

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# Embedding Awareness and Growth

By Marcia Reynolds, PsyD, MCC

*"A new awareness must be clearly stated so it becomes tangible for clients to build on with actions."*

Coaches often miss the opportunity to confirm the shifts in clients' thinking and final commitments to change at the best time – when a slight smile, gasp, or look of shock indicates clients have landed on a truth or solution they had not seen before. A door has opened to a new way of seeing. The coach still needs to clarify the awareness by asking what they are learning and how what they now see relates to the outcome they had said they wanted to create.

## **Insights Must Be Spoken To Make Them Real**

Insights can be surprising, humbling, and often amusing. They can also trigger guilt, embarrassment, or anger. You may laugh with or emphasize with them, but you still want them to clearly state what they realized in a sentence or two. If they try to change the subject, share the emotion you noticed and asked what it meant to them. They may have trouble finding the words. Give them space with silence. Compassionately reflect what you hear. They may refine what they share or need some time to adjust to this new way of seeing themselves and the world around them.

Once they indicate they are ready to move forward, ask if they want to look at what actions to take now or if they want to redefine what they want to achieve based on the insight they shared. The coaching may take on a new direction.

## **Ending the Session**

Without formally wrapping up the coaching session with a verbalized commitment to action, clients may forget what they thought they knew to do after the session ends. They might even lose the insight they had. They need to state the steps they will take and explore what could get in the way of implementing their plan to ensure progress.

Turn insights into action with these questions: **1) What will you do now?** **2) By when?** **3) What could get in the way of your commitment (which may lead to Plan B or a more realistic plan)?** **4) What other support or resources will help?** If the action includes interacting with someone else, ask, "If it doesn't turn out as you hope, what will you do next?"

End by acknowledging the work the client did no matter their level of sharing. If they showed up and were willing to talk, they are showing some readiness for growth. If this is an ongoing relationship, acknowledge the progress they have made. Then ask if they feel complete to end the session but notice and ask about hesitation if it appears.

**The best coaching often happens between sessions.**

## **Three tips for articulating insights and commitments**

**1**

Emotional shifts precede words when clients have insights, coach them to share their thoughts. They might look away as they try to make sense of the new awareness. An emotion may arise. Give them a moment to process what they now see. When emotions subside, ask what came to mind. If they change the subject, share what you noticed and ask what it meant because it could be important to consider.

**2**

Insights could lead to defining a new outcome to achieve. Insights can also lead straight to actions. Ask clients to state what they are learning and how this impacts their desired outcome. Then invite them to choose what they want to do next. Be sure they state at least one action they will take even if it is to take time to reflect on the insight.

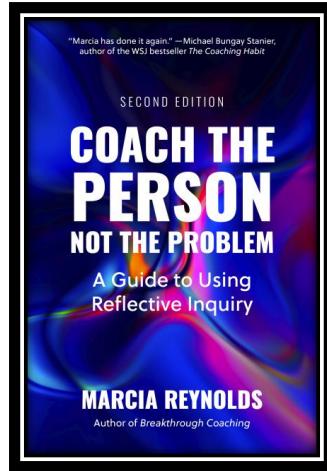
**3**

Don't summarize action plans for your clients. If they stated actions they want to take at different times in the conversation, ask them to restate everything they said they wanted to do and still want to do now. You can fill in what they forgot, asking if the step is still relevant. Always ask, "By when will you do this?" Wrapping up sessions with a commitment to do at least one thing strengthens their conviction to their transformation.

More coaching strategies and approaches at  
<https://covisioning.com>

Constructed from [Coach the Person, Not the Problem, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition](#) by Marcia Reynolds, PsyD, MCC

Check out her other books, [The Discomfort Zone](#), [Wander Woman](#) and [Outsmart Your Brain](#).



I hope these tools helped you elevate your knowledge and skills in using reflective inquiry to create breakthroughs in thoughts and actions when coaching.

Would you mind leaving a review *Coach the Person, Not the Problem, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition* where you purchased your book?

It means a lot to me if you help me spread the word about the power of coaching. Your support is important as I work to provide insights and tools for coaches around the world.

Thank you!

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