

Holistic Leadership Coaching: A Model

Zachary Green, Maria Trias, Stacey Williams, and Mariko Peshon

OVERVIEW

We as human beings need to find deeper ways of connecting with one another and with ourselves. While this is a book about coaching, in many ways it joins the work before it that seeks to cultivate ways of relating that build on the co-creative capacity of people. It is a book about how to engage in conversation in ways that support human evolution. It is for the coach and it is for the teacher, advisor, mentor, and friend. The common denominator is not the role that you have, but your interest in expanding human capacity for generative connection.

The **Holistic Leadership Coaching Model** offers an approach that calls us to grow, lead and love through the coaching process. The model, like many others, is primarily designed to help coaches navigate their engagements with clients towards the achievement of goals. What is unique about the model is an orientation that places an emphasis also on who the coach is becoming. In essence, Holistic Leadership Coaching seeks to develop people on both sides of the process. Particular attention is given to nurturing the emergence of the practices needed to sustain the deeper purpose of our work as coaches. The model also helps to be more authentically prepared to support our clients through their opportunities and challenges; personally and professionally.

At its core, an approach that is holistic invites those of us in the coaching profession to define ourselves and our relationship with our clients in terms of *who we are to become* beyond *what we do* (outputs) or *who we are not* (deficits). It is, perhaps most significantly, about *what we have available in us* that is often left untapped and unexplored in terms of greater self-realization, more developed consciousness, and fuller focused organizational awareness. Ultimately, the model fundamentally foster practices of leadership at the individual, interpersonal, and systemic levels so that the learning can be translated into more effective action regardless of context.

What follows is a journey into the different levels of the Holistic Leadership Coaching Model: the *purpose* (G.R.O.W.), *practices* (L.E.A.D.), and *energies* (L.O.V.E.) of leadership coaching.

THE MODEL



Holism and Transformation

The model is represented as process of interconnection. At the outer level is the container for the leadership coaching process: *context, culture, experience, and ethics*. Each of these elements will be developed a future working paper. The basic nature of this part this process is that attention to these elements is essential for effective coaching.

Experience is the history and competence brought to the coaching engagement by the client and the coach. As coaches, we must pay attention to the interplay between the experiences of our clients and our own experiences so as to discerning of personal and professional boundaries. The delicate balances between coaching and counseling, evoking and advocating, influencing and imposing, suggesting and seducing are each a part of working with experience.

Culture, as an element of the container, is that blend of the organizational culture in which the client is embedded and the salient social identities from which you as a coach and the client come. Effective coaching attends to how these cultural characteristics influence how issues and opportunities brought to the coaching are given meaning.

Context involves the immediate specific situations and circumstance in which the coaching relationship is developed. Initially coaching can have a narrow scope and focus that gives primacy to the context of the coaching dyad. As leadership coaching continues, the container expands to include perspective on ever widening circles that the coaching engagement influences. In many coaching relationships, the alliance and contracting phases help define the context. At deeper levels of coaching, multiple levels of context are explored and integrated into the process.

Ethics can be understood to be those codes identified by various professional coaching organizations as the standards by which practices are to be conducted. As a beginning, most coaching must attend to these established ethical markers. Leadership coaching also includes attention to emancipatory ethics (Western, 2012). In this process, the role of the coach is to recognize the importance of the relationship with clients as a mutual activity that seeks to bring liberation to thinking and behavior, examining more critically patterns that may ensnare us. Linked to this approach to ethics is a commitment to work through coaching in ways that respect the dignity of all human life and keeps the sustainability of planet in consciousness.

With these containing elements, the emergence of leadership coaching continues. Absent these elements, the conversations are something other than authentic holistic leadership coaching.

Emergent Orientation

Emergent orientation is about being open and attentive not only to what is going on, what is happening in the moment, what just happened and isn't happening anymore, but also to what it is yet to become. Emergent orientation requires curiosity, curiosity that is oriented to that which isn't there yet but is within reach. It is not about anticipation, it is not about expectation, it is about listening deeply, quietly and intentionally to that which is present and not yet known. Emergent orientation is also about taking risks, the risk to name that which hasn't been named yet, the risk to experiment, explore, and let go of that which doesn't resonate anymore once approached. In the context of a coaching engagement, this orientation to the emergent lends itself to listen for the unexpressed other, the building direction (momentum), vision, and themes, and to speak to that which has not yet been recognized, or possibly dreamt. This informs the coach's posture of listening, as well as their questions, exploring the potential bubbling just below the surface ready to be awakened. This orientation allows our client to see and create a future, a goal, a starting place and a destination that is an expansion of their previous capacity.

Emergence is more than the simple identification of coaching goals, though this is often a necessary first step. More essentially, an emergent orientation is a calling forth of deeper, yet accessible knowing that is present in the client. This knowing is related to specific outcomes that may be sought as well as to the fuller context of the client's life work. Often the narrow focus on specific goals limits the ability to see the larger systemic context in which this focus is embedded. As such, emergence is limited and obscured by the minutiae of the moment that masquerades as the full face of what the client has to offer. It is the role of the coach to unmask this farce and provide the client with a mirror of experience that is more deeply linked to Self and source (Scharmer,.....). What is triggered by this quality of emergent orientation is anxiety when the gap between how the now is experienced and expressed and what is often presented as acceptable work. The potential space that the coaching creates allows for the goals to reflect a deeper connection to purpose and more profound orientation to work.

PURPOSE (G.R.O.W)

Coaching must occur in service of G.R.O.W.: goals, results, outcomes, and work. The distinction of this model is the final element, *work*. For a client to realize change in his/her life, and for that change to be sustained, the coach must support and foster a client developing a reflective practice that will continue beyond the coaching relationship. It is this practice that breathes life into the work of coaching. As the coach serves as a mirror to the client, the client grows in his/her capacity to look within, to ask questions of oneself, and to identify and move towards professional goals, results, and outcomes. A successful coach is one who works themselves out of a job, as a client learns to do the internal work that is necessary to improve performance.

WORK

As a routine practice, the coach must also be engaged in some level of work. By work, what we refer to is the inner work necessary to be authentically present to what emerges in the leadership coaching relationship. It is inherently necessary that coaches recognize that the ongoing work of their clients is also the work that the coaches must also access and engage within themselves. There is a gap in the coaching relationship, characterized by an illusory technical approach to the process, when a coach operates from a space that is alien from the experience of the client's authentic work. In time the client will "feel" this gap and will approach goals, results and outcomes in a similarly mechanistic manner. While what may be present can be measurable evidence of outcomes from the coaching, these results will be suboptimal expressions of the potential that a coaching relationship grounded in mutual work can offer. Developmentally, coaches new to the profession will often find their own work relative to the client difficult to discover because it is obfuscated by an over-attention to technical skills. We must emphasize that, though the acronym is G.R.O.W., it is indeed the "work" that comes first.

It is the “work” that distinguishes this model from others and it is the “work” that is at the core of the coaching process itself. The coaching happens in the space in between, in the here and now. The “work” continues beyond that mutual space, without losing that mutual condition. The “work” then happens in session and between sessions, and for the coaching relationship to be successful, it must be approached by the coach first, the client next. At the highest level of the leadership coaching relationship, the coach and client are “in the moment” together as the authentic experience of purpose presents itself. Such moments guide action and provide assurance that effective coaching engagements are indeed ongoing work in progress.

OUTCOMES

When we seek outcomes in leadership coaching, the objective is to create the conditions to deliver discernible products, processes, and practices. In a very real sense, the effort is to have something come out of the coaching relationship that is accessible and measurable. The coach has a role in helping the client identify in concrete terms what the difference would look like between the current state and the one that coaching facilitates coming into being. With a foundation of *work*, outcomes are not to be considered static. The major distinction is that each outcome is subject to shift when the realities of the larger context are confronted. At the most essential level, outcomes are the evidence of work and are subject to ongoing evolution. It is the role of the coach to help the client to have resilience in the face of the changing nature of outcomes.

RESULTS

In a related sense, results are what come from setting the coaching process into action. Results take many forms. As coaches we would like to point to the tangible elements of the process such as a job promotion, an improved performance appraisal, a better ranking on some measure of success. Indeed many coaching approaches are results-driven and outcomes focused. In Holistic Leadership Coaching, results also include those less tangible but also very real elements that are produced by the co-creation of two or more people in the coaching relationship. What cannot be excised from the coaching process is the fundamental intimacy that is inherent in sharing one's life with another. Qualities such as a deeper capacity to listen, more compassion for the challenges faced by colleagues, or greater humility in the face of one's achievements are but a few examples of results that may come from coaching.

These latter types of results translate into work and become enduring practices. Results that are more lasting and more fundamental than the outcome of a particular meeting or the volume of sales that one has for a quarter, while important in a world where “ROI” is often key, are fleeting. In the course of a lifetime or a career, coaching that is more

holistic in its orientation invites the kind of results that have applicability across contexts and are transferrable to other parts of the client's life. Gaining such results implies that a process of discernment and reflection preceded the work of moving to create them. In Holistic Leadership Coaching, there is a philosophy that results are first a function envisioning before that are experienced as *being* in the life of the client. Absent exploration of how words offered in a coaching conversation become action, the inattention to intention leads to results that are far from optimal.

The coach must be particularly vigilant about being seduced into taking a route to results that are expedient because of the ease of measurable markers of so-called success. Such a short-sighted approach may leave the client happy in the immediate moment but will not equip him/her with the level of results that coaching grounded in authentic investment in the promoting the developmental lines of a client has to offer. Instead, the coach can work to celebrate such results with a client and use these moments to create the conditions for work and outcomes that are more robust, lasting, and transferrable to settings within and beyond the context of the coaching relationship.

GOALS

Coaches help clients to develop SMART goals. Correct? While the easy answer is “yes,” the more engaged response views goals in the overall context of G.R.O.W. and purpose. A more traditional SMART approach to goals is a necessary and often essential first step in effective coaching. Indeed, for the vast majority of coaching relationships, the development of SMART goals can be sufficient to yield measurable results. Such an approach cannot be said to be a fully engaged leadership coaching experience.

In Holistic Leadership Coaching, goals are the foundation from which the authentic work is discovered. The terms *immediate specific*, *emergent specific*, and *strategic specific* (explored elsewhere...) help us to understand that goals are evolving entities with differing dimension. When goals are set in coaching, they are not to be thought of as immutable and unchanging. Goals must become a part of the flow of the coaching relationship and reflect the changing dynamic of the context in which they are embedded and the deepening of the coaching alliance. Early in a coaching engagement, it is often necessary to establish and help the client meet quick, specific and measurable goals to foster trust in the coaching process. The error that some novice coaches will often make is to see these achievements as the all of coaching. Goals made. Results achieved. Outcomes measured. Process complete.

In Holistic Leadership Coaching, the goals become a currency of the conversation. They are at play in the space between the coach and the client in way that they hold the energy and potential and potency of what this relationship can co-create. What is challenging for the coach may be the degree of his/her internal readiness to meet the client in such an open and essentially vulnerable manner. It means being open to the possibility that goals will not become “SMART” for quite some time and the more essential nature of the work will only reveal itself when the coaching alliance is ripe with the kind of trust that allows for something of value to be envisioned, explored, and allowed to emerge. In some contexts, there will be little patience and even far less support for such an approach. The coach must who is holistically oriented must work within their own ethical framework to determine whether engaging in such a coaching context is desirable.

In any event, goals are the soul of coaching and must be approached with the honor they hold in order for the client to discover the work.

PRACTICES (L.E.A.D.)

You may be asking yourself, what then is “the work” in leadership coaching. We understand “the work” in terms of **practice**— sustained, intentional ways of being that are connected on an energetic level to Source and contribute to one’s movement towards fullness and authenticity, the higher self. This *practice* must be developed within the coach and the client. Turning our attention to four specific practices is L.E.A.D.: *listening, emerging, applying, and discerning*, each of these elements are necessary to move leadership coaching beyond a skills orientation to one where sustainable practices are developed. We believe that the synergy between cultivating these four practices support the client in moving closer to the deeper purpose of their work. As such the practices not only support “G.R.O.W.” but also help create the conditions for clients to live into greater personal and professional wellness.

LISTENING

As a coach, the practice of listening is about settling oneself into the present moment and hearing (and attempting to see) another person where they are. This is about asking questions in service of the asked (PCP), holding space for silence, and being aware of the song beneath the words (Heifetz). The quality of our listening is a practice. It necessitates a reflective discipline where we grow our capacity to suspend the clutter and chaos of our minds and *just be*. For, in being, we are able to hear what is not always said, but what is communicated clearly in a field just within reach.

EMERGING

Said field leads us to the second practice: emerging. At first glance, emergence may not seem like a “practice,” but in returning to our earlier description of emergent orientation as “being open and attentive to what is yet to come,” you can see that it is a posture that can be developed and expanded, that continuously evolves, and thus opens up potential for one to realize their own goals, results, outcomes, and work. Emerging is a practice that requires seeing beyond what is already tangible. As listening is a practice of how you hear, emergence is a practice in how—and what—you see. For the coach, this means an attention to what is yet to be expressed or discovered. And for the client, emerging is a vehicle for one to envision the future. On a developmental level, this practice is about nurturing an internal voice that opens up personal aspirations (Baxter-Magolda, self authorization). For those already self-authorized, it is about pushing beyond the story already written to what *could be*.

APPLYING

Applying is a practice of both experimentation and embodiment. It moves the practice beyond what is seen and heard to what is to be done about it. This action-orientation may be a temporary exploration of a particular tactic/direction/? (i.e. experimentation). With this, the client may decide to try out a new response to the frustrations her boss inspires by taking a deep breath and counting to three before speaking, and can reflect at the next session on the efficacy of the aforementioned change. Application is not always this temporal, and may include a greater commitment to action that embodies some new essence or potential self discovered. In either case, application centers around a question of *what is*, taking the newly encountered options, directions, desires, and characteristics found through listening and emerging and doing something with them.

DISCERNING

The final practice, discerning, takes our application one step further to a decision of continuity. Discerning is the practice of making a decision with intentionality and commitment. As a coach, your role is to create a space for the client to distinguish between the inner voice of truth and the inner voice of fear (Palmer), for discernment implies a rootedness in one’s direction, purpose, and intention. The practice is in learning to hear oneself. While listening and emerging can be influenced externally, when it comes to the point of discernment, it is always a personal endeavor, posing the questions: what do I think of this, what do I want to do with it, what do I want this to mean for me? Discernment is the point at which people are handed the pen and encouraged to write their own story. A caution must be given here: as a coach, you may think you can prophesize or predict the best possible version of a client’s tale, *but this is never the case*, for the best possible version rests on the client developing, remembering, or relying on their internal capacity to imagine and realize their life, goals, and work. Perhaps more significant than the content of the decision is the process: a process aligned with and informed by internal connection. Discernment, then, is about a question of what *will be*,

while its practice rests on one's capacity to explore this question through an interior journey of self-knowledge and discovery.

Listening: Just Be
Emerging: Seek to be
Applying: Is to be
Discerning: Know to be

The four main practices culminate in a process whereby the coach and client “know” that they are connected on an energetic level to other people, parallel processes, and shared purposes beyond the immediate specific context. Coaching at the deepest levels engages such moments, gives them meaning, and seeks to connect the coaching relationship to the larger network of leadership action that is emerging.

When coaches and clients engage in LEAD, they GROW, as they have learned together to access a process within that can be made manifest in the world.

ENERGIES (L.O.V.E.)

The energies are portals to inquiry. Beginning with leadership, the energies invite us to learn more about our authentic capacity for action, our readiness for different lives of development, and our ability to work and live with complexity.

At the most basic level, the energies are the often indiscernible spaces from which we work as coaches. If the leadership coaching relationship is to be truly successful and authentically engaged, we work to find ourselves and *then* find our clients where they are. As we come to understand the energies as coaches, we learn to align our with our clients and allow theirs to align wit us.

The Holistic Leadership Coaching model is composed of four energies: L.O.V.E.: *leadership, opportunity, vulnerability, and exploration*, which the coach must be specially attuned to and constantly curious about. Those energies are unique to each coaching engagement and unique to every encounter. As energy is, they are in constant evolution and subject to change, thus, they will take different forms at different times. This is central to the coaching process as it sets the ultimate need for constant exploration. Therefore, the coach must not only know those energies and be prepared to recognize them in him or herself, but also explore and inquire about them with genuine interest and openness xxx. We will now refer to each of them conceptually, but it is in the process of learning about those energies experientially, that they become portals for inquiry, capable of moving the coaching forward.

LEADERSHIP

The first portal of energy, leadership, refers to the array of orientations through which people together engage activities that make contributions to the good of the world. Some examples are: collective, adaptive, relational, authoritative and positional, transforming, and servant. While these descriptive models of leadership have been the subject of study for the better part of a half-century, in the 21st Century different models of leadership have begin to emerge. These theories place more emphasis on the integral nature of our relatedness as humans, give focus to the role of consciousness in our lives, and invite an orientation towards greater sustainability of the planet. Embedded in these newer approaches to leadership is the question “why?”

The nature of leadership, as understood in coaching, is an activity that brings forward growth and change. Linked to a deeper sense of purpose (the “why”), leadership becomes reflected in the coaching process as well as the outcomes that are influenced by what emerges through the relationship. While it often believed that leadership is related to personal attributes that one seeks to develop, in Holistic Leadership Coaching, the effort is to develop the capacity for inner work needed to meet situations and circumstances as they arise, regardless of context. In this respect, leadership involves awareness of the multiple roles one is in and how they interrelate to create direction and decisions in one’s life. The challenge of leadership is that the coaching makes available the strengths as well as the avoidances that respectively enhance and impede our capacity to live into our purpose.

Central to leadership for the coach is the recognition that the client is invited more fully into his or her own leadership orientation rather than guided or directed towards some facile goal. While the expedience of such an approach may yield rapid and measurable results, the nature of a more holistic stance helps the client to experience a more sustainable sense of purpose, knowing and exploring the quality of work needed for life-long practice.

OPPORTUNITY

The second energy in the coaching experience involves focusing on Opportunity and invites the question of: “what?” The coach and client maintain a sense of curiosity through inquiry around asking, “What do we know? What are we not aware of? What is desired? What is the client’s vision? What is emerging?” This process can open up the journey towards understanding the abilities and gifts that are present in the coachee as an individual. Opportunity also speaks to the potential that is embedded within the coaching relationship to build capacity and create direction. Opportunity allows for the expansion of the client’s vision and the utilization of their strengths in service of their goals. With this energy, the outcomes of the coaching dynamic are limitless as they are varied in scope and range.

VULNERABILITY

Vulnerability is the energy for transformation, for development and growth. It is the subtle and powerful strength by which we “know” and through which we develop a deeply embodied sense of who we are. Vulnerability is that internal state in which we are in touch with our essence, the Source. The question that will guide us into that realm is: *who*? It is the ground, the epistemology, it refers to our way of knowing and making sense of the world. Becoming more and more in tune to that energy, equates into the raising of awareness of our own emergent self and that of our collective consciousness. It is by tapping into our own vulnerability that we allow space for others to become vulnerable themselves.

EXPLORATION

The final energy— exploration— is the pursuit of questions of “if” and “how.” In this space, the coach maintains a spirit of inquiry and awareness of the multiple potential paths and processes. An exploratory energy is not one with answers, certainty, or a specified endpoint, but rather is about *journey*. In fact, it is the journey itself that is the purpose and intention behind exploration. With this approach to exploration in mind, the coach and client access the complexity and overlapping possibilities that lay within the field, awakening a client to untapped potential and greater capacity to access deep Self. As the possibilities surface, the client becomes her/his own author, aware of the self within the system and the choice(s) which lie beyond each horizon.

Exploration, then, is an energy about the *process*, developing with the client an awareness of the varied ways to approach a question, desire, problem, hope in a way that remains open to *what could be*. Exploration is about curiosity— and as we cultivate such openness, the dynamic, evolving, and shifting nature of our life, work, and choices presents itself. For the coach, exploration is the energy that fuels the experimentation involved in a coaching relationship. Learning to trust the process means allowing oneself to trust— and test— a question when you are not sure where it might take the client/session. As coaches their voice and lean into this exploratory spirit, always remaining curious to what arises, the client is invited into the same energy of seeking, wondering, and wandering [exploring] their life. This energy evolves into a practice of holding and allowing for the complexity of multiple possibilities, paradox, and dynamism that is already present in the system to emerge

END NOTES

The subject of inquiry is the client and it is also the coach itself. This inquiry process is basic to the coaching relationship and is present in at least two ways: through the questions posed by the coach to the client, and by the process of action inquiry from which the coach is constantly working. This dual process should be present from the very beginning in any successful coaching relationship and will naturally evolve towards incorporating at least one more piece to it, the process of action inquiry that the client will progressively integrate.

Only from a space of awareness of where each stands in relation to the world will allow the coaching relationship to access its own evolution and the client's relationship to the evolution around them.