

50,000 Life Coaches *Could Be Wrong*: The Importance of Development in Coaching by James Flaherty

Entering a six-month coach training program on the suspicion that life coaches are glorified confidantes who charge a lot of money and that coaching is “new-age nonsense,” the author of a [recent Harper’s article](#) finds lots of evidence to support her hypothesis. The irony of the piece’s title, “50,000 Life Coaches Can’t Be Wrong,” becomes quickly apparent.

Her skepticism is not unwarranted. There are, however, ways of coaching that offer more than what the popular trends promote. Coach training and the work of coaching itself may encompass goal-setting and happy-making, which is a good starting place. However, coaching can be more than being a good listener, giving advice or helping someone get what they want. These are all great things, of course, but they don’t necessarily address true development.

The modality that the author learned, along with her research that went as far back as the human potential movement begun in the 1970s, all speaks to **horizontal** development. In other words, there is something out there – a goal – that I want. To be happier, more productive, thinner, richer ... we all know what goals are, and we know the ones that are common in our culture.

Integral Coaching, the methodology we practice at New Ventures West, is far more concerned with **vertical** development: helping the clients grow in ways that have them actually live in a different way, not just solve the problem in front of them. Coaches can certainly help clients attain their goals (and how wonderful that they do!). But when we understand *why* we’re doing what we’re doing—when we’re attuned to ourselves—the goals themselves change. In Integral Coaching we are interested in supporting clients in developing the capacity to respond to what life hands them and to understand “for the sake of what” they want what they do—what is their *true* longing? What is it only they can bring to the world?

So much of this information lives in the body, an aspect that is often left out of coaching. Attunement and resonance, capacities that are essential in supporting someone as a coach, are developed on the level of physicality. Our physical bearing often correlates to how the rest of life shows up for us. For instance, how much can you infer about someone who is slouching and folded in on themselves all the time? Or a person who can’t stop fidgeting?

Most importantly, practices that occur on the level of the body are the ones that bring about this vertical development and longer-lasting change. Repeated action actually rewires our nervous system. If we train ourselves through repetition to move in a different way (breathe, shout, lift weights, relax, stretch, chant, kickbox – whatever fosters our intended growth), it goes to follow that our experience of the world will change.

We also must remember that we are so much more than our ideas. Insights are fantastic but unless they are grounded in practice it’s possible that they will never become realized. In addition to our thoughts, we are embedded in a world of relationships and

culture. We operate in a particular environment and use tools and technology. Without taking into account the unique matrix that makes up each person we are not seeing the whole picture, and we may not be making adjustments in the most appropriate domain.

Apart from differences in coaching methodologies, coach training programs vary widely in terms of requirements, rigor, and outcomes. The Coaches Training Institute, where the author of the *Harper's* article did her training, and many other popular programs offer modules that are likely to fit in a student's life, certify them and get them working more quickly. A valuable approach.

Integral Coach certification takes one year, plus a two- or three-day prerequisite. That is barely enough to fit in what happens. It is a deep dive into one's own life, ideas, presumptions, relationships, biases, patterns. It's all unearthed, examined and worked with in the interest of building what we call the body of a coach: a body that is present enough to let life through, that is free of bias, that can meet the client where they are. There is no one way to be an Integral Coach except that those qualities come forward in interactions with anyone—not just clients. As such this work finds its way into places other than entrepreneurial coaching practices (i.e. it's far more than a way to market oneself). The certification process not only asks you to demonstrate your aptitude in the methodology. It looks at how present you are—how much you've come to know your habitual tendencies, how consistently you catch yourself acting from the patterns that aren't serving you. These skills and qualities are essential to fully support another person in their vertical and horizontal development. It's not an easy process, and it's not for everyone.

The result, however, is a person who knows herself and can attune to others on a level that is not commonly seen in the coaching industry. When the question shifts from "what do I want" to "what is life asking of me?" we encounter a different human being. And that is the question into which we, as Integral Coaches, are inviting everyone. For some this is a lofty inquiry: there are plenty of people whose life is a series of emergencies and who are looking to calm themselves enough to be able to sit in conversation with someone for longer than five minutes or learn to take a deep breath. So we start there. We start wherever the client is, and we invite them into deeper, self-generating development.

Regardless of the kind of training or coaching one does, how wonderful it is that there are so many people in the world who want to make a living by helping improve the lives of their fellow humans. On that level alone we can probably agree that it's by no means a racket, a ruse or a moneymaking enterprise. Hooray for the people who are learning to be better friends, helping people attain their goals, wanting to make others happy. It's an industry that was born of a collective understanding that there has to be something more to life, and that we have a right to endeavor toward greater meaning, whatever form it takes. We celebrate that so many people want to train as life coaches. Power and luck to them. 50,000 people who are up to that really *can't* be wrong.

What we're up to at New Ventures West is something different, though we haven't yet found a name for it that lives outside of the very broad category known as coaching. The methodology and the training go deep, and people emerge forever changed: set on

unexpected spiritual paths, reconnected with a passion long since forgotten, suddenly understanding what is theirs to do in the world (which may not, in fact, be coaching).

There aren't 50,000 of us doing Integral Coaching ... more like 2,000. But we're out here, and we invite you to explore what's possible.