

What role does advice play in professional coaching?

What are coaches doing?

What do clients want and expect?

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The coaching profession continues to experience strong growth, attracting people from differing backgrounds and levels of experience. Coach training is available from many schools worldwide and varies in both the style and content taught.

Among coaches and schools there is ambiguity and polarised opinion on the definitions and role of both coaching and advice. Some say that coaches should never give advice and dismiss further discussion. Others teach coaches how to give advice. This research asks: What are coaches doing and what do clients expect and want?

This study investigated the current practices of coaches by asking whether they were giving advice and if so, how they give advice. Client needs and expectations were investigated by asking which kinds of advice clients want and expect from a coach, and the acceptable ways in which a coach may deliver on those expectations.

Using the data obtained from 315 respondents from Australia, the USA and the UK, a comparison was drawn between coaches' behaviour and client's expectations. Drawing on reliable definitions of coaching and advice, the findings were discussed with reference to relevant literature and scientific theory on advice, from coaching and related helping professions. Consideration was then given to how the results might be taken forward.

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Introduction

The coaching professional continues to experience strong growth. Recent surveys show that demand is forecast to continue growing. Whitney (2006) points to research indicating that large numbers of individuals and companies are planning to or have already commenced coaching programs to develop their skills and enhance their performance. Garfinkle (2006) cites dozens of recent media articles that support the explosive growth of the coaching industry, including a 2005 article in the *Dallas Morning News* that states coaching has become a \$1 billion a year industry in the U.S. and that half of all business employ coaches.

Coaches can obtain training from over 185 coaching schools worldwide as identified by a recent survey conducted by Brock (2006). In many cases, respondents attended more than one coaching program. This may indicate that students attend different schools to obtain the differing skills, process and techniques taught. Today, while many associations such as the International Coach Federation, Coachville and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council influence the industry, the practice and teaching of coaching remains self-regulated.

People are coming to coaching from differing professions, education and experience. The coaching profession is being influenced by many professions and those who subscribe to their teachings. Brock's 2006 survey findings grouped key influencers into the following categories:

- Human Potential Movement (Coachville, CTI, Coach U, est, Landmark Forum) influencers hold 14 of the top 25 positions for a total 30.1%. Names include Thomas Leonard (8%), Werner Erhard (6%), Cheryl Richardson (2.2%), Laura Whitworth (2.1%) and Dave Buck (2%).
- Psychology and Adult Development at 4.9%. Anthony Grant, Anthony Robbins, Jeffrey Auerbach, Patrick Williams and Frederic Hudson, were named less than 2% of the time.
- Sports at 3.7% includes Sir John Whitmore and Timothy Gallwey
- Management at 3.2% includes Marshall Goldsmith and Stephen Covey
- Philosophy (Ontology) at 2.6% includes Julio Olalla and James Flaherty

The diversity of professions that influence the coaching profession may explain the controversy within coaching around the definitions and role of both coaching and advice. An example of this might be the school of Psychology's definition of coaching versus a Management school's definition of coaching. These two schools may differ on the amount of process versus content that a coach may bring to coaching, and how much it would meet their respective client's expectations and needs.

This research is focused on collecting and discussing data from coaches and clients on the question of "What role does advice play in professional coaching?" Combining the data collected with relevant literature, this research aims to draw on reliable definitions of advice and coaching, and to identify what is currently happening in the industry by investigating what clients want and what coaches are doing. The findings are discussed and referenced to the literature and teachings on the subject of advice from the coaching profession and from some of the helping professions that influence it.

This research aims to offer a balanced discussion that will contribute to the level of professionalism within the coaching industry, and the value provided to its clients. It aims to do this by raising the subject of advice for active discussion and careful consideration, rather than dismissal or covert unstructured practice by members of the coaching profession.

This research aims to bring together the different schools of thought on the subject so that greater understanding and insight may be gained, and will translate into improved coaching practices associated with this subject.

Background

This research subject exists because of controversy surrounding the subject and role of advice. This controversy extends into the scope and definition of professional coaching.

There are polarised views in the professional coaching community. Views differ on the definitions of advice and coaching, whether or not coaches should give advice, what clients actually expect and need, whether coaches are giving advice during their work with clients, and how we should, as a profession and as qualified individuals, respond to these issues

Coaching schools often serve as the starting point for the development of new coaches. Many coaching schools teach that advice is taboo and that it should never be given – sometimes without defining what advice is. In direct opposition, some coaching schools teach coaches how to give advice. This research asks three main questions that arose from these two schools:

1. What are coaches doing?

- a. Are they giving advice?
- b. If they give advice, how do they give advice?

2. What do clients want and expect?

- a. Do clients want advice?
- b. What kind of advice do they find acceptable?

3. How might the results be taken forward?

- a. What considerations are there?

Why are these questions relevant?

These questions are relevant to the ongoing development, maturity and professionalism of the coaching industry. To remain polarised on the subject of advice and the need to address the subject could be harmful to clients and the industry itself by diverting attention away from the continuing skill development of coaches.

There are concerns surfacing in the media around the level of education obtained by coaches. Garfinkle (2006) cites the July 2003 Harvard Business School Journal that warns clients to select executive coaches who have legitimate skills in the dynamics of interpersonal relations. If coaches do not have such professional training, they are in danger of abusing their power without even meaning to.

If coaches are being taught not to give advice but are actually doing so behind the scenes, are they doing so with care, skill and professionalism? Are they aware of what clients expect? Does their teaching qualify them to give advice if in fact they are choosing to do so? And could coaches who give advice without any formal education on the subject be hurting clients more than helping them?

How does the literature define coaching?

Coaching

The *American Heritage® Dictionary* (2000) defines coaching as: To train or tutor or to act as a trainer or tutor. The *Times English Dictionary* (2000) explains much the same thing, that a coach is a trainer or instructor.

Definitions of coaching by respected authors, institutions and members of the coaching profession are:

Whitmore et al (1996) define Coaching as unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance.

Downey (1999) defines Coaching as the art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of another.

Buck (2005) says coaching is: inspiring an individual or team to produce a desired result through personalized teaching, expanding awareness and designing environments.

The International Coach Federation (2006 online) says: "Coaching is an ongoing partnership that helps clients produce fulfilling results in their personal and professional lives. Through the process of coaching, clients deepen their learning, improve their performance and enhance their quality of life."

Learning, performance and development are found to be common among these definitions.

How does the literature define advice?

Advice

The *American Heritage® Dictionary* (2000) defines advice as:

Definition 1: Opinion about what could or should be done about a situation or problem.

Definition 2: Information communicated.

Both definitions of advice will be used in this research. They serve to underscore the controversy and dangers of advice, and to differentiate constructive advice from destructive advice.

The first definition of advice: “An opinion about what could or should be done” highlights a potentially dangerous form of advice in coaching. For example, *I think you should (or could) accept their offer* is an opinion. The word “opinion” is defined by *American Heritage® Dictionary* (2000) as: A belief or conclusion held with confidence but not substantiated by positive knowledge or proof. And the word “should” is defined as: Something, such as an order, promise, requirement, or obligation: *You should do that now*. Advice in this form implies the coach projecting their own judgement instead of honouring the client’s own interpretations and decisions. It also implies a lack of initial choice on the part of the recipient of such advice.

The second definition of advice: “Information communicated” illustrates a potentially constructive form of advice – depending on how and when it is applied. Therefore, to advise, can be to provide or offer information or resources. Such information may not necessarily be expert in nature, as resources can be many and varied, and there is no existence of requirement or obligation. Advice in this form implies choice on the part of the recipient.

Telling

The *American Heritage® Dictionary* (2000) defines telling as:

1. To give instructions to; direct.

Telling is directive. It does not involve choice on the part of the recipient. It implies that one is being directed and that decisions and choices are being made by the person who is telling.

How does the literature define mentoring and coaching?

Mentoring and Coaching

There is a lot of confusion around what mentoring and coaching are. The confusion is created as different authors have attempted to separate mentoring and coaching. For example an early and older definition by one author Starcevich (1998) says that a mentor produces personal returns for the client around affirmation / learning versus a coach who provides returns around teamwork / performance.

To separate any of these “client returns” as being either the domain of mentoring or coaching is to suggest that a coach provides no affirmation or personal learning and a mentor is not able to help with performance. The problems with such definitions are that they confuse and seemingly contradict themselves. The same author says that “the coach develops specific skills for the task”. This would indicate that a coach does contribute to client’s learning.

Such earlier definitions and thinking on coaching versus mentoring have been prone to creating confusion and debate. For example, Starcevich (1998) helps us to consider this with the following attempts to define a Mentor Versus a Coach:

1. Mentoring is a power free, two-way mutually beneficial relationship. Mentors are facilitators and teachers allowing the protégé to discover their own direction.

A coach is trying to direct a person to some end result, the person may choose how to get there, but the coach is strategically assessing and monitoring the progress and giving advice for effectiveness and efficiency.

2. A mentor is like a sounding board, they can give advice but the protégé is free to pick and choose what they do. The context does not have specific performance objectives.

A coach has a set agenda to reinforce or change skills and behaviours. The coach has an objective / goals for each discussion.

While these definitions will all attract support, they will just as easily attract criticism. Attempts at separating coaching from mentoring by exclusive definitions appear to be incomplete and confusing both to client and coach. Such definitions are, as the findings of this research indicate, inconsistent with client's expectations and with the behaviour of professional coaches today.

Many institutions are currently merging the terms together. Hay (2003) explains that the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC <http://www.emccouncil.org/>) decided to remove the confusion by merging the terms. The EMCC was founded in 2002 by Sir John Whitmore, Professor David Clutterbuck, Professor David Megginson, Eric Parsloe and Julie Hay. It aims to establish and maintain standards for professional coaching/mentoring. Hay goes on to note that coaching styles are matched to coaching needs along a continuum called the push / pull continuum.

Coaching Styles along the Push / Pull Continuum

Coaching styles are located on a push / pull continuum depending on the amount of advice given by a coach. Hay (2003) explains that the push end is where the coach does all the work, and the pull end is where the client or learner does all the work. Different styles taught by coaching schools exist somewhere along the push / pull continuum. For example, the GROW coaching model is said to be toward the pull end, whereas the RADAR coaching model is considered toward the push end of the continuum.

Hay (2003) suggests that the degree of push or pull applied by a coach is determined by the client needs, for example a push style (coach advising how to do something) might be employed if a learner needs to learn something where there would be safety implications if they get it wrong.

It is acknowledged that the push/pull styles continuum recognises client needs, however this study is concerned with first exploring whether advice has a role to play and if so how that might be more clearly defined.

What does the literature say about advice?

There is a lot of valid literature suggesting that advice is dangerous. There is growing amount of literature on how to give advice, but this literature is limited and without much supporting data or research.

This research identifies literature that warns of the dangers of advice, and literature that attempts to address constructive forms of advice. Starting with the dangers of advice, much of the literature comes from the large amount of research and writing in the Psychology, Sports and Therapy fields. They all have influences on coaching as helping and service professions where advice requires caution.

Cautions on Advice

Burnard (1999) cautions us by saying that “Attempts to ‘put peoples lives right’ are fraught with pitfalls. Advice is rarely directly asked for and rarely appropriate. If it is taken, the client tends to assume that ‘That’s the course of action I would have taken anyway’ or he becomes dependent on the counsellor (or coach). The Counsellor (or coach) who offers a lot of advice is asking for the client to become dependent. Eventually, of course, some of the advice turns out to be wrong and the spell is broken.” (p86).

A coach who gives a lot of advice must question their motivation to do so and could begin with their philosophy and attitude toward clients. Does the coach view being a professional as having all the answers? Does the coach fear looking ignorant because they are unable to quickly solve their client’s problem? In this case one must ask, who is the coach really focused on and what do they think about the client’s ability to play a part?

The International Coach Federation, ICF (2006 online), lists a key coaching competency of being fully conscious and creating a spontaneous relationship with the client by being open, flexible and confident. This requires that a coach “Is open to not knowing and takes risks.” Maister et al (2000) warn that when a coach is more worried about how they appear and perform, their attention becomes focused on their self-centred fears. When this happens the coach’s attention is not centred on the client.

Rogers (1951) describes a client-centred orientation as an equal relationship between client and counsellor (or coach), where the counsellor (or coach) treats the client as a co-worker on a common problem, respecting the client's capacity to self-direct and organise themselves.

A coach's belief in a client's ability to self-direct and make choices is shown in the coach's actions. Egan (2002) notes the importance of living our values as helpers. Instead of values being a good idea, we must walk-the-talk. For example, a coach that values self-responsibility in clients, but at the same time sees the client as helpless and makes decisions for the client, is directing rather than guiding the client. Making decisions for and directing the client is not only a poor form of advice, but is a form of oppression.

Giving advice by directing a client can rob the client of responsibility. As Egan (2002) explains, a client who does not take responsibility will not become empowered. Client empowerment involves "Helping clients identify, develop and use resources that will make them more effective agents of change both within helping sessions and in their everyday lives" (p55). Egan (2002) warns the opposite of empowerment is dependency and oppression.

Allowing a client to become dependent has serious ethical implications. For example, a coach receiving money from a client for services rendered risks breaching professional ethics if the client becomes dependent on those services. The author notes that while coaches may sell their services initially, they are risking a breach of ethics by acting in ways that result in the client becoming dependent on the services provided to help them.

ICF (2006 online) Code of Ethics state "17) I will not knowingly exploit any aspect of the coach-client relationship for my personal, professional or monetary advantage or benefit. A coach's awareness of this code automatically obligates them to observe this ethic in everyday practice.

Another caution on advice is that clients become more receptive to advice the longer they spend in a coaching relationship. Maister et al (2000) explains that the more clients trust a coach, the more they will reach for advice, be open to accept and act on a coach's advice and judgements. Once a coach understands this dynamic, it is easy to understand how a client can help a coach breach coaching ethics by abusing the

relationship. Therefore, a skilled coach would benefit by asking themselves before giving any form of advice whether it is ultimately in the client's best interests, especially if the client directly asks for advice.

Coaches who give advice are at risk of projecting their own beliefs onto clients. Whitmore (2004) explains this as projection and countertransference. Projection and Countertransference might happen when a coach attributes their own ideas, feelings, or attitudes onto the client or client's situation rather than coaching the client to interpret their own situation.

The danger with projection is that the coach is seeing the world from their point of view, not the client's. This contains the risk of removing power and responsibility from the client and places focus on the coach's agenda. Whitmore (2004) warns that projection and countertransference are something that all of those who teach, guide, coach or manage need to learn to recognise and minimise. This can be achieved by recognising when this is happening and putting it aside to focus on the client's interpretations and agenda.

Egan (2002) notes that "Helpers should pursue their clients' agenda, not their own." (p47). In other words, this can mean that professional coaches are employed to facilitate and coach on their clients needs, not their own.

Egan (2002) suggesting that the helper's focus be on learning instead of helping by viewing client sessions and the time between sessions as a process of learning, unlearning, and relearning. Howell (1982: as cited by Egan 2002) states: "Learning is incorporated into living to the extent that viable options are increased" (p. 14).

Exploring viable options and acting on them is a key process of coaching. It is common to many coaching styles and schools and is a form of learning for clients. The key consideration is timing. For example the GROW model explores options with clients only after the client has decided what their issue, goal and reality is. Egan's Skilled Helper model does not explore strategies with a client until a client has decided on and committed to desired outcomes.

Cases for Advice

Dave Buck, CEO of Coachville, often writes on the subject of advice and the role it plays in professional coaching. He approaches the subject from the client's perspective. Buck (2005) says that people hire coaches for many different reasons, most of which are to "produce a desired result".

Buck believes that coaching contains a fundamental teaching component, and that most people hire a coach because they believe the coach has knowledge and experience to share. Buck (2004) firmly states that "if you are a coach who wants to be paid for coaching, you have to come to the table with some demonstrable expertise that the client needs."

Whitmore (2004) argues that "Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them." (p8).

Egan (2002) balances these points of view on teaching and learning by discussing the process of co-creating outcomes in a counselling setting, stating: "The job of the counselors (and coaches) is neither to tell clients what to do nor merely to leave them to their own devices." (p65).

Questions are a common way to help clients without "telling" them. John Whitmore's work is commonly understood to be opposed to instruction, preferring questions to raise awareness and create responsibility. This study recognises that advice in the form of instruction is potentially destructive advice.

Whitmore (2004) clarifies that questions can also be a form of instruction, saying that poor coaches may rely on leading questions as a form of instructing or directing a client. He explains that such manipulation is quickly found out and that trust is damaged, saying "Better for the coach to tell the coachee that he has a suggestion rather than attempt to manipulate him in that direction (with leading questions)." (p48).

Methodology

The data required for this research came from professional coaches, clients who had received coaching and who had not but knew of coaching applications.

The survey data was collected using an internet-based survey tool. The method used quantitative research techniques that included structured questions with a “tick box” method. This resulted in the survey forming its own coding where responses fell into coding such as Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Disagree nor Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The data was analysed using numerical count and percentages. This method was chosen to best show population statistics in relation to the research question. A sample of respondents showed that information was collected from the USA, UK and Australia. Among them age and gender we mixed.

Findings / Results

The findings are introduced with breakdown of respondents. The respondents are then grouped into two groups: coaches and non-coaches. The non-coaches responded only to client questions. The coaches responded to both coach and client questions. Therefore the client responses contain responses from clients regardless of whether they were a coach or not.

The breakdown of respondents is:

Table 1. Percentage of respondents who were coaches and clients	
36.3%	Were Coaches
51.9%	Were Clients

Breakdown of client experience of coaching

Table 2. Percentage of clients who have employed a coach	
48.1%	Of clients have employed a coach
51.9%	Of clients have not employed a coach

Grouping the Findings

The findings are grouped into two groups to form the discussion from two sides which are: 1. What coaches said they are doing and 2. What clients said they expect.

1. What Coaches said they are doing

Of the coaches surveyed:

- 97.2% Give advice in some form
- 2.8% Never give advice

Of those who give advice:

- 98.2% Introduce clients to new information and resources
- 94.5% Give clients recommendations to consider
- 48.6% Tell clients what to do (rarely, but sometimes)

Table 1 indicates a breakdown of coach’s responses to the question:

As a coach, I give these kinds of advice when necessary:

Table 3. What Coaches Do	
98.2%	Introduce clients to new information & resources
89.0%	Tell clients relevant stories
48.6%	Tell clients what to do (rarely, but sometimes honestly I do
94.5%	Give recommendations for clients to consider
85.3%	Share relevant personal experiences with clients
97.2%	Summarise what the client said
89.0%	Ask questions that direct the client to make a decision (e.g.: “Which do you prefer, A or B?”)
51.4%	Provide simple formulas such as “Focus + Action = Results”.
11.0%	Telling clients what their best solution is
2.8%	I don’t give advice at all, ever

2. What Clients said they expect from a coach

Of the clients surveyed:

- 89.9% Want advice in some form such as new information & resources

Of those who want advice:

- 89.9% Want coaches to introduce new information and resources
- 82.8% Want to be given recommendations to consider
- 12.5% Want to be told what to do

Table 4 indicates a breakdown of client’s responses to the question:

As a client, I like these kinds of advice:

Table 4. What Clients Want	
89.9%	Introduce me to new information & resources
73.3%	Tell me relevant stories
12.5%	Tell me what to do
82.8%	Giving me recommendations I can choose from
73.6%	Sharing relevant personal experiences
59.8%	Summarising what I said
85.8%	Ask questions that help me decide
56.4%	Provide me with simple formulas such as “Focus + Action = Results” to help me learn or understand.
12.2%	Telling me what my best solution is

Table 5 compares what coaches do with what clients expect.

Table 5. Comparing Coaches Behaviour to Client Expectations		
Coaches Do	Clients Want	Type of Advice
98.2%	89.9%	Introduce clients to new information & resources
89.0%	73.3%	Tell clients relevant stories
48.6%	12.5%	Tell clients what to do (rarely, but sometimes honestly I do)
94.5%	82.8%	Give recommendations for clients to consider
85.3%	73.6%	Share relevant personal experiences with clients
97.2%	59.8%	Summarise what the client said
89.0%	85.8%	Ask questions that direct the client to make a decision (e.g.: "Which do you prefer, A or B?")
51.4%	56.4%	Provide simple formulas such as "Focus + Action = Results".
11.0%	12.2%	Telling clients what their best solution is

Tables 6-8 show further client expectations of coaches:

Table 6. Learning something from their Coach	
95.0%	Agree they would expect to learn something from their coach
4.0%	Neither agree or disagree on expecting to learn something from their coach
1.0%	Disagree and do not expect to learn something from their coach

Table 7. Expect a coach to have expert knowledge on their subject	
84.5%	Agree they would expect a coach to have expert knowledge on the coaching subject
7.5%	Neither agree or disagree
8.0%	Disagree

Table 8. Expect a coach to have experience on their subject	
81.0%	Agree they expect a coach to have experience on the coaching subject
12.0%	Neither agree or disagree
7.0%	Disagree

Tables 9-14 Show clients expectations on receiving advice.

Table 9. Expect a coach to ask permission before giving advice	
53.0%	Agree they prefer a coach to ask for permission before offering advice
29.0%	Neither agree or disagree
18.0%	Disagree

Table 10. On being expected to take advice	
11.5%	Agree that it is okay for a coach to expect clients to take any advice they give.
23.0%	Neither agree or disagree
65.5%	Disagree

Table 11. Expecting advice to be optional	
85.5%	Agree that a coach should make advice optional, allowing me to decide whether I want to take the advice.
11.0%	Neither agree or disagree
3.5%	Disagree

Table 12. Expecting a coach to provide advice in multiple options	
76.0%	Agree that a coach should provide more than one option when advising me, so I can decide which option is best for me.
19.3%	Neither agree or disagree
4.7%	Disagree

Table 13. Clients sometimes do NOT want advice	
64.0%	Agree that sometimes I don't want advice, even if I am struggling with a problem
12.0%	Neither agree or disagree
24.0%	Disagree

Table 14. Expecting a coach to understand them and their situation first	
94.6%	Agree that before giving me any advice, a coach should have a good understanding of me and my situation
4.7%	Neither agree or disagree
0.7%	Disagree

Discussion & Implications

It was discovered that the majority of coaches are giving advice in various forms. It was also discovered that the majority of clients expect advice from coaches.

The two definitions of advice provided in this study appear relevant to the findings. Given that 95% of client respondents expect to learn something from a coach and 87.5% do not want to be told what to do, appear consistent with the second definition of advice, "Information communicated" or the provision of information.

These findings indicate that client respondents do not want to be directed, given instructions or told what to do. As previously noted, the action of directing clients removes their responsibility and is a form of oppression.

The findings that 48.6% of coaches sometimes tell clients what to do, and 12.5% of clients want to be told what to do, indicates that the second definition of coaching "Opinion about what could or should be done about a situation or problem" is rarely desired or found acceptable by clients. While almost half of the coaches admit to telling clients what to do sometimes.

This form of advice appears to fall into the definition of Telling, "to give instructions to; direct." 64% of clients support this by agreeing that "Sometimes I don't want advice, even if I am struggling with a problem" while only 24% disagree, suggesting to coaches who tell clients what to do that they are close to if not already abusing their position in the coaching relationship.

94.5% of coaches and 82.8% of clients agree that coaches should give recommendations for clients to consider. This is consistent with 76% of clients agreeing that "A coach should provide more than one option when advising me, so I can decide which option is best for me" while only 4.7% disagree. These findings support the definition of advice that provides information to clients without directing them in any way.

How do the findings fit with existing theory and literature?

The findings that 95% of clients agree that “I would expect to learn something from my coach” are consistent with Buck (2005) who says that coaching contains a fundamental teaching component, and that most people hire a coach because they believe the coach has knowledge and experience to share. The findings are also consistent with Whitmore (2004) who says that coaching helps unlock a client’s potential and is about helping them to learn rather than teaching them.

Whitmore (2004) suggests that the way people teach and the way people learn must be called into question. Given that coaching involves clients learning something, this research suggests we must consider how people learn and develop. Vygotsky’s Cognitive development theory, described by Bee (1998) suggests that learning and development occur in a sociocultural context. This is done through a process called Scaffolding. An example is how children learn to read. The parent starts by reading to the child, thus modelling reading skills. The parent then encourages the child to commence their own reading development and ensures that the process matches the child’s level of development, called the zone of proximal development.

It is the zone of proximal development that coaches can use to help clients develop and learn. Sigelman & Rider (2003) define the zone of proximal development as: “the gap between what a learner can accomplish independently and what he or she can accomplish with the guidance and encouragement of a more skilled partner.” (p185).

Berger (1998) explains that Vygotsky’s theories describe a process of “Social Apprenticeship...The implicit goal of the apprenticeship is to provide instruction and support for acquiring the knowledge and capabilities that are valued by the culture.” (p47) and goes on to state that “the process also works for adults, who are continually guided by each other.” (p47).

The same principles apply to an adult being coached on various subjects such as leadership skills, public speaking skills, health and wellness, job performance, sports performance, career change or dealing with challenges and issues that require coaching support, process and knowledge to bring about a desired result.

Buck (2004) explains that expanding awareness is essential to coaching work and that this can be achieved using the coaching framework applied by Coachville (2003) that makes the following point about finding the answer:

Does the client have the answer? Or does the coach? How about a book? How about the ethers? The point here is that it doesn't really matter where the answer is, but that there is an answer somewhere and it's up to the coach and client to find out where it is. This also stimulates the creative/collaborative relationship between coach and client, instead of forcing either party to come up with the answer. (p 21).

Whitmore (2004) also explains that good coaching can and should take the performer beyond the limitations of the coach or mentor's knowledge. This is consistent with the client-centred approach that if the coach is worrying about whether he has the answers, he is probably not focused on the client and agreed outcomes.

The finding that 73.3% of clients like coaches to share relevant stories and 73.6% like coaches to share relevant personal experiences supports the social learning theory. It also suggests a form of advice that provides information via stories. This form is both given by coaches 89% and desired by clients as reflected in the data.

Advice in the form of stories can be a way of reassuring the client and helping them to move past doubt. Stories such as those found in the Bible, Children's Fairy Tales and other culturally-specific tales all serve to reassure people when in doubt. O'Hanlon & Weiner-Davis (2003) refer to this technique as "Normalizing" and state:

We may tell anecdotes that place the client's situation in a normal context, anecdotes from our own or our friends' experience. Particularly useful are stories by which we can suggest, "Yeah, me too." (p95).

Questions are a strong method for expanding the client's awareness, increasing the coach's understanding, and aiding the provision of information. 89% of coaches ask questions and 85.8% of clients want to be asked questions, and 94.6% want a coach to understand them before giving advice. A coaching session might go like this example, adapted from an unknown source:

A client presents a problem they are having with one of their staff. Questions are used to explore the issue. This results in the client stating that her problem is a fear of firing the person because she believes "people are our most important asset". The coach asks, "What if they are the wrong people?" The client responds with "I hadn't thought of that".

The coach introduces a new possibility by saying, “The old adage ‘Our people are our greatest asset’ is a fine principle, but we could potentially extend it by saying: ‘The right people are our greatest asset’. How do you think this applies to your people?” The client responds with, “We’ll I guess some people are in the wrong jobs, so we could find them more appropriate roles that fit their interests and talents”. Once the client had decided this for herself, the discussion goes on to finding a person a more appropriate job and so on.

How might the results be taken forward?

The results indicating that most clients want a coach to provide new information raise an important question: ***When is it appropriate to offer advice in the form of providing information?***

Allow the client to make their own decisions

After a client has self-directed, made their own decisions and asked for information, it may be appropriate to provide additional information. For example, a client has come to their own decision that they want to change careers. They now want information on available options and possible approaches for the next step. The coach may or may not have these answers but as Buck says, together the client and coach will find them.

Providing information before a client has self-directed, made their own decisions and asked for information becomes a destructive form of advice along the lines of the directive and telling definitions.

Be sure advice is being sought

Maister et al (2000) explain that “One of the biggest mistakes that advisors make is to think that their client always wants their advice.” (p42). They give the example of a married couple who try to solve each other’s problems and when advice to “do xyz” is rejected, more advice is given, rejected and then a form of argument occurs, emotions rise and resentments are built. The point here is that while advice was well intentioned, it may not have been what the receiver wanted. Instead the receiver may have wanted someone to listen to them while they collected their thoughts in a safe environment. Clients don’t always want or need advice, they often want and need someone to listen.

Earn the right to give advice

Maister et al (2000) explain the need to earn the right to give advice. They explain that a common violation of a client relationship is to rush to give advice before earning the right to do so. They support this by keenly observing the belief held by clients and advisors that the client/advisor relationship is all about asking for and receiving expertise. However, the act of “receiving answers to important questions is not something (a client or) anyone does lightly.” (p43).

Earning the right to give advice is explained by Maister et al (2000) as having three(3) parts: 1. Understanding the client’s situation; 2. Understanding how the client feels about it (is it their decision or the coach’s) and 3. The client confirming that the coach understands both of the previous two items.

The need for a coach to earn the right to give information is supported the finding that 94.6% of respondents agree that “Before giving me any advice, a coach should have a good understanding of me and my situation.”

These results that the majority of coaches are giving advice in various forms, including telling clients what to do raise questions around the training offered to coaches:

1. How could coach education benefit from consideration of advice.
2. What considerations are appropriate?

Considerations for providing information

As discussed, the provision of information requires consideration and caution, even though it was found to be the form of advice accepted and expected by clients. Literature balances the need for caution by warning that providing information before a client had self-directed, made their own decisions on desired outcomes and asked for information was a form of oppression which fell into the first, directive definition of advice that clients did not accept.

Table 15 summarises considerations for providing information

Table 15. Considerations for the Provision of Information form of advice	
Considerations	Client Opinion
Allow clients to self-direct, making their own decisions first.	87.5% of clients do not want to be told what to do
Use questions to expand awareness that do not: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Manipulate or direct clients b. Infer judgement c. Assume understanding not yet gained 	85.8% want to be asked questions. 65.5% say a coach should not expect clients to take advice
Understand the client as fully as possible before offering any advice	94.6%
Ask Permission to provide information or recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Be aware that clients will ask for advice or give permission, but this may be to avoid taking responsibility or because they trust a coach. 	53% agree. A further 29% neither agree or disagree. While 18% disagree.
Provide information when requested that does not: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Remove client responsibility b. Remove or precede client choice and decisions c. Instruct clients in any way 	89.9% of clients want new information and resources. 87.5% do not want to be told what to do
Provide information with a number of options	74% want options to choose from
Tell Clients stories to provide information, expand awareness and normalise the client's issue.	73.3%
Provide simple formulas such as "Focus + Action = Results".	56.4%

Limitations and improvements to this research

This research was limited by not differentiating the style of each coach surveyed, and the school they studied coaching with. The research did not collect and differentiate the client's coaching subject and needs and other contextual demographics such as age, gender, race, country, business or personal sponsored coaching. The research did not consider the impact of long-term coaching relationships and their effect on a client's receptiveness to advice in such a relationship.

This research could be furthered by formally testing the considerations and forms of advice discussed here. Such tests could measure the effectiveness of such forms of advice and contribute to a model for teaching accepted and effective forms of advice.

Conclusion

This study discovered that the majority of coaches are giving advice in various forms. It also discovered that the majority of clients expect advice from coaches.

The study found two definitions of advice that were applicable to the responses given by coaches and clients. The definitions were:

Definition 1: Giving an opinion about what could or should be done about a situation or problem; This definition implied that coaches were directing clients and even telling them what to do. Clients in the majority did not accept or expect this form of advice. The literature provided strong reasons against this form of advice.

Definition 2: Providing information; This was accepted and expected by clients. Cautions were given on the provision of information, even though it was found to be the form of advice accepted and expected by clients. Providing information before a client had self-directed, made their own decisions on desired outcomes and asked for information fell into the first, directive definition of advice that clients did not accept.

The findings support the recent literature suggesting that clients expect advice. The findings that show many coaches give advice seem to support the schools who teach how to give advice. However, this is bought into question by the findings that show large numbers of coaches tell clients what to do sometimes. This suggests that existing teaching is not complete or being observed by coaches. The number of coaches who are giving advice is in direct opposition with the schools that teach never to give advice. This suggests that their teachings may also be incomplete and are not being observed by coaches.

Clients' most highly rated (94.6%) pre-requisite of coaches giving advice was: The coach had to have a good understanding of the client and their situation before the client was receptive to advice.

In summary, this study found the following answer to the question "What role does advice play in professional coaching?" *The role of advice in professional coaching can be to provide information at the right time in the right way to support the client's performance, development and independence.*

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