



COACHES NEED TO WORK WITH THE PAST... IT IS RIGHT THERE IN FRONT OF THEM

In her regular column for Coaching Perspectives, **Marie Faire** explains why she hopes more coaches will work with their clients' pasts as well as their futures – to better to achieve lasting change.

When my daughter was quite young, Paul, my partner, and I joked that when I didn't pay attention I would open my mouth and my mother would fall out. Fortunately, at least it wasn't my father, which would have resulted in a whole different story.

Some psychoanalysts would suggest that, unless we have 'done the work', almost every interaction is some sort of transference, where we are searching either for someone to give us what we didn't have in the past or just repeating it.ⁱ Andrew Curran, a paediatric neurobiologist, whom we have had the privilege of working with for many years, agrees.ⁱⁱ

I am sure I am not alone in having supported friends through messy break ups, only to be shocked when their next partner is just a shorter or taller version of the one they just left.

Over the years I have come to the belief that our scars – the emotional and psychological ones – shape us. We are who we are because of them, not in spite of them. We are the sum total of our experiences. And when our clients walk in the room, all their past comes with them.

I have, for instance, had numerous clients come to me because of their lack of confidence, self-worth or self-belief; others have come troubled as a result of their lack of empathy, or because they have a reputation for being intolerant or aggressive.

Given the chance, they inevitably tell me their story. They tell their story because they want someone to know how they ended up here (wherever and whatever here is). They ache for the chance to speak it out loud to someone who, with compassion (if it wasn't surgically removed during coach training), will listen without judgement, nor rush to fix it the situation or make the client focus on their future prematurely. They need a damn good listening to.

Not one, not a single one, has ever said they just woke up one morning to find themselves with those issues.

Although issues may result from one-off trauma in adult life, almost all limiting beliefs about the world and the consequent patterns of behaviour begin as a child: most before the age of two and all certainly before the age of eight or nine. A limiting belief formed at that age may stay with us, unknowingly, all our lives. Only if it is unearthed can any of us start to tell ourselves a different story about what we can and can't do, who we are and who we are not.

If what is discovered is the trauma of (extreme) insecure attachment, it requires the sort of patience and care that is in the domain of a good psychotherapist.ⁱⁱⁱ Here we are wise to refer. We can be pleased that we were a trauma-sensitive coach and party to a client's journey. We may even work alongside a therapist to support a client if all parties agree that this would be appropriate.

In many cases, the causes are careless or inadvertent messages (spoken or not spoken) from well-meaning adults. As coaches we can assist people in discovering the meaning they attribute to their story and help them to change it. We can help them have compassion for their younger selves, and we can help them change their limiting beliefs, attitudes and perspective in order to self-regulate and transform.

Our obsession in the coaching profession to only focus on the future ('therapists deal with the past') is a false and limiting distinction. The boundary needs to be our competence, not some artificial professional turf war – more on that in a future column.

In an AC webinar several years ago, Professor Paul Brown, of neuroscience fame, stated that he hoped that the coaching profession would mature and realise it had to deal with the past. I am still hoping so too. Coaches have no option but to deal with the past (whether they want to or not). It is right in front of them, in the present.

If you have an idea and would like to be a guest writer for this column in the future, please do get in touch at marie@thebeyondpartnership.co.uk

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