

# COACHING A GOOD FRIEND OF THE WILL

*Translation by Achille Cattaneo*

This phrase of one of the Founding Fathers of Coaching, John Whitmore, placed at the beginning of his book “Coaching”, expresses in my opinion the fact that between Will and Coaching - as interpreted above - there is a basic affinity. It is not my intention here to deepen it, nor even highlight the existing differences, trying my hand at theoretical subtleties. I would rather say that, based on my experience, “coaching a person” means for me very simply “*accompanying him in performing an act of will*”. Literally. When then an individual has trained sufficiently to get to do self-coaching, the act of will is able to organize it on its own.

That coaching is an action-oriented tool clearly emerges from its origin in sports: an area where the improvement of performances to achieve the goals implies for the athlete a continuous and growing work of education and solicitation of his star of the functions.

The coaching is structured as a methodology aimed at ferrying the individual from a condition of identification into problems, needs, desires and thrills of change in a future state of achievement of goals, development and satisfaction: a state achieved through the definition and pursuit of a sequence of steps taken, in fact, with *awareness and responsibility*.

“What do you want to achieve today?” And “how will you recognize that you got it?” are the two typical questions that the coach asks at the beginning of a session. Do you also feel the shiver of responsibility in the customer? And the lack of any propensity to be offered solutions by the coach? The point is that the client at that time hopes to get results still out of reach, while the coach is putting in the relationship all his confidence in the fact that the customer can draw a state of consciousness that will make him go beyond the limits he perceived and lived as real. In its young history, coaching has gra-

dually extended from the strictly sporting, to the organizational / business and then personal, in various forms: and in fact “what is your goal?” is a valid question for anyone, in any situation, places the responsibility of promoting a change in his life.

I wrote above that coaching is “literally” to travel together an act of will. I precise that there are various coaching methodologies and that the “literally” I refer in particular at the School that I followed: maybe not for all the Schools it could be said and it is correct to specify it. The fact is that, when I was introduced to the “model of coaching conversation” of the Master I attended, I was completely astonished while I was saying to myself “but this seems to me the act of will!”. In reality it is not so, because the five steps of the model group the six stages of the act of will in a slightly different from the latter: but the steps to be taken and their sequence remain the same and maintain the inimitable completeness and efficiency of the Assagioli method.

The first step - that of *establishing the focus* - explores and summarizes the four elements of the first stage of Assagioli: evaluation, motivation, intention and objective. The focus is summarized in this last one because the coaching wants to be incisive, therefore defined, not vague. But coaching requires awareness and therefore is not interested in forming “achievers” who jump like tanks on the target as in a blitzkrieg of unhappy memory, trampling everything and everyone just to conquer it (however, such people generally do not feel the need for a coaching, in case the organizations propose it to them to acquire a more systemic vision, expanding awareness beyond the limits of their ego).

As for the act of will, this first step is perhaps the most important, at least for certain types. It goes without saying that accessing coaching implies already possessing a considerable amount of motivation: and it is equally obvious that the correct coaching approach in this area is expressed in identifying how to increase them, certainly not in analyzing why they are scarce. Returning to the objective, especially in the first meeting of a path, the path itself is defined; but then every single session must have its own session goal - consistent with that of the path - that anchors in daily practice what decided. Coaching does not allow vagueness and, of *intentionality*, emphasizes the propulsive energy value, but struck - politely - the alibi that sometimes is hidden:

- “I intend to improve my fitness”, the client begins;
- “So what do you propose to do?”
- “1, 2, 3, 4, 5...”
- “and among these actions which is the priority for you?” “and then?” “and after?”; “**so today what do you want to work on?**”; “what result do you want to achieve?”; “so what is the most urgent initiative to take?”.

Therefore, the client is constantly asked to choose, always in the discretionary area of his / her adherence to the methodology.

The second step is to widen the possibilities of action conceived by the client: it is the stage of *deliberation*. Here is the coach's ability to promote the client's ability to get out of his habitual problem solving path and make him/her to explore new ways of solution or, at least, new alternatives.

- "If you think of other situations that you know that are similar to yours, what worked in those?"
- "What is the consequence of the alternative A?";  
"And that B?";
- "What other resources could you access? What kind? Where do you track them?"
- "What could happen if ...?"
- "How can you get this that you miss?"

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The answer to this last question often reveals the need to stop the process hitherto followed and to open another front of work; the same can happen after exploring more possibilities of solutions. Back then the above verification: "**so now what do you want to work on?**"

The first result of the coaching session is for the customer to choose a SMART goal: synthetic, measurable, current, achievable, timed. It is therefore the stage of choice, decision and affirmation that the client makes at the same time: after a sequence of twists and funnels, he arrives at the actual session objective, which can naturally coincide with the initial one, but which - if not coincides - testifies the maximum possible focus to give concreteness ("I want to complete my paper for the GTA within three weeks") to what follows.

What follows is the *action plan*. Here, perhaps, is the greatest resemblance to the act of will in its planning, programming and direction of execution steps. The questions asked by the coach become more and more practical and anchor the planned actions in time and space: "what do you have to do to reach your goal?"; "In what other ways could you?"; "What is the most important action to do this week?"; "On which other people / groups influence your effort?" And "how could this help you?"; "What dates do you feel you can respect?"; "how long does it take?"; "When you begin?"; "How much will you work every day?".

You understand that such an approach, if it is very va-

lid for behaviors and actions, to adapt to changes in moods and changes in consciousness must be blurred; but, in fact, I wrote that between Will and Coaching there is only affinity, certainly not that they are completely overlapping. At this point the fourth step, the *elimination of obstacles*, takes its particular importance. It is a matter of identifying the barriers that could prevent the successful completion of the action plan: for example missing skills, issues concerning power, excess of ambitions, inadequate budgets, individuals, structures, roles that are put in the wrong direction and etc. Assagioli makes the point 2) of planning and calls it verification of feasibility, that is to say the comparison between the feasible and the unattainable or the feedback on the adequacy of the pre-established times. So I have nothing else to add, except to reiterate that it is always through questions that the client is led to reflect on and to develop effective counter-plans.

The last step provided by the model I am presenting is that of the *session synthesis*, which is carried out by the client. He is asked to follow with his own words the strategy by himself prepared with the connected action plan and to reiterate the precise dates for the results of the same: it is the final operation to reiterate the responsibility of the client and the effectiveness of the work played.

Methodologically, you see that the coach works almost exclusively through the sequence of questions-listening-questions: these come to constitute a succession of stimuli which solicit, from the client, the level from which only self-input to change can start: the mental/ higher/ design one, typical of the will. Energy follows the thought ... And here I stop, precisely because it was not my intention to fully describe the coaching or transmit "the soul". Much better can do it the book mentioned at the beginning, "Coaching" (I have it in the 2003 edition Sperling & Kupfer), in which John Whitmore - husband of Diana Whitmore and died in April 2017 - writes to the 15th chapter dedicated to "coaching and search for meaning": "*many years ago my wife and I discovered with great interest the depth of thought and the great capacity for intervention of psychosynthesis, whose theories, from then on, have permeated my coaching activities*" (pages 175-176).

It is also for these words, and for the testimony that John Whitmore has given it, that I can affirm that Coaching, as I have known it, is a good friend of the Will.

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#### Note

A much broader and more rigorous analysis of the conceptual and operational relationships between Psychosynthesis and Coaching can be found in the essay by Nuriel and Piero Righelli "Coaching e Psicointesi: il Coaching Psicointetico" - Edizione BCSmedia, Roma - 2012.

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