A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE COACHING EXPERIENCE:
IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the subjective experience of individuals who had experienced coaching within the last year. Since coaching is a relatively new phenomenon, this study was exploratory in nature. Therefore, a qualitative phenomenological methodology was used to guide the data collection and analysis. The research question that guided this study was: "What is the lived experience of individuals who have been coached?" Data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with a volunteer sample of six participants. The main criterion for recruitment of participants included those individuals who had been coached for a minimum of five months or at least 15 sessions. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Using Colaizzi's (1978) method of data analysis, individual themes and themes common to all six participants were extracted. The results highlight the experiences of individuals, thereby contributing to a discussion of the comparisons and contrasts between coaching and counselling psychology.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

As a helping profession, counselling psychology is in a constant state of development, continually addressing the changing needs of modern day society (Blocher, 1987, 2000). This is reflected in the over 400 distinct psychotherapeutic therapies and techniques that have emerged over the last 100 years (Ford & Urban, 1998).

Coaching is a more recent offshoot of the helping professions and is currently receiving attention through the popular press. Zeus & Skiffington (2000) observe that coaching has its roots in psychology. That is, coaching principles are reflective of existential and humanistic psychology, and coaching practice is reflective of many cognitive therapy models such as solution-focused therapy, neurolinguistic programming, and constructivist therapy. Similarly, coaching demonstrates a close association with counselling psychology in that “both seek to situate the individual in a context of adult development” (Zeus & Skiffington, 2000, p. 12).

The term ‘coaching’ first appeared outside of the sports realm in the late 1950s where it was embraced as a management tool (Evered & Selman, 1989). Evered and Selman (1989) documented the change in management culture in the 1980s and highlighted the role coaching played in that change. Since that time, especially within the last eight to ten years, there has been a convergence of different coaching practices to serve an increasingly broader spectrum of clientele. That is, coaching has enjoyed wide spread appeal due to its focus on personal growth and fulfillment. Similarly, as coaching has embraced a wider client base, a mutual attraction has developed for people looking for fulfillment in their careers. That is,
they have either adopted coaching skills and tools to incorporate into their current positions, or they have made a complete shift into coaching as a new career (Zeus & Skiffington, 2000). The result is a phenomenal growth in the coaching business that extends from the development of coach training schools (International Coach Federation, on-line, 2001) to the creation of hundreds of coaching niches (Leonard, 1999).

Given the relative newness and rapid growth of this current approach to coaching, there are many unanswered questions about the practise of coaching. In attempts made to distinguish coaching from other established professions (International Coach Federation, on-line, 2001), it must first acknowledge the overlap between them in order to gain credibility. With relation to counselling psychology, the practise of coaching is not easily differentiated, as there are over 400 different theories of psychotherapy with which to compare. Nevertheless, in the interest of all helping professions and those considering coaching as a career, it is necessary to address this overlap and determine if a clear distinction can be made between coaching and counselling and use that information to better serve the general public.

**Statement of the Problem**

There are no published academic studies conducted in the area of coaching in comparison to counselling psychology. Most of the literature on coaching is provided by the popular press and coach practitioner publications. However, one research study on coaching was conducted in relation to mentoring (Wilkins, 2000). It stressed the importance of research to further develop the practise and theory of coaching. Likewise, at a recent conference (October, 2000, Vancouver, B.C.) of the International Coach Federation, the main governing body that oversees the credentialing of coaches, a panel discussion reinforced the necessity for research in coaching to ensure its longevity. They further emphasized that
coaching research is necessary in order to distinguish itself as: a) a profession separate from others such as counselling and therapy and b) to prevent coaching from becoming another personal development fad.

**Rationale for the Study**

Given the rise in its popularity and worldwide success, coaching warrants a closer examination, particularly since the coaching relationship and the skills that are employed share many similarities with counselling psychology. However, the similarities are not clearly defined or agreed upon due to the lack of research in coaching. This has major implications for those therapists and counsellors who are most likely ‘coaching’ clients as part of their current practice as well as those considering coaching as an additional and/or alternative career. Their understanding of the similarities and differences in coaching and counselling need to be stated clearly to their clientele in order to determine the kind of helping relationship that will develop.

After conversing with coaches who were formerly therapists, their understanding of the similarities and differences between coaching and counselling were inconsistent and thus lend further support for the need to create uniform and clear distinctions. In so doing, both coaches and clients will have the opportunity to work within clearly defined boundaries in an atmosphere of mutual understanding.

The growing number of people, outside of the counselling profession, who choose to become coaches further necessitates clarification between coaching and counselling. One does not need formalized training to become a coach, and many assume this role without a lot of investment in acquiring the skills. Therefore, most are not likely or able to distinguish a coaching issue from a counselling issue. As for people who do pursue formalized training in
coaching, there are no standards to guarantee that students will be able to make these distinctions.

Therefore, it would be beneficial for all training facilities to apprise themselves of the latest coaching research and to encourage further investigation in order to attain a level of professionalism comparable to those already established. Similarly, standards must be set in terms of entrance requirements, supervision and ethics to ensure a level of safety and competence for the general public.

In the meantime, the non-regulatory nature of coaching makes differentiation of roles most confusing and the need for more research more necessary. As well as those directly involved with coaching in some capacity, the general public also has a vested interest in being able to discern between the different roles in order to make informed choices.

Therefore, for the purposes of providing insight into this relatively new coaching phenomenon and to contribute to its body of knowledge, this research study will focus on gathering descriptions of clients' coaching experiences. Since a study has recently been conducted on coaching from coaches' perspective (Wilkins, 2000), this study will focus on clients' perspectives.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions are presented:

Counselling psychology. Counselling psychology "is defined by the study of how individuals adjust to problematic events and accomplish life tasks within major spheres of living such as work, education, relationships, family and recreation, as reflected in the Specialty Guidelines for the Delivery of Services of Counseling Psychologists developed by the American Psychological Association. In studying the development of persons over the course of life,
the professional aim of counseling psychology is to understand how people overcome problems and accomplish life tasks, and to design effective ways to help them live more productive, fulfilling meaningful lives.” (excerpt from The Mission Statement of the Counselling Psychology Program at the University of British Columbia, 2000).

Effective counsellor. “The degree of aliveness and psychological health...is the crucial variable that determines the outcome” for clients (Corey, 2001, p.16). An effective counselor will display and/or is in the process of working on developing the following qualities: “have an identity; respect and appreciate themselves; able to recognize and accept their own power; open to change; making choices that shape their lives; feel alive and their choices are life-oriented; are authentic, sincere, and honest; have a sense of humour; make mistakes and are willing to admit them; generally live in the present; appreciate the influence of culture; have sincere interest in the welfare of others; become deeply involved in their work and derive meaning from it; and are able to maintain healthy boundaries” (Corey, 2001, p. 16-17).

Coaching. Wilkins (2000) amalgamated and synthesized the definition of coaching from many sources associated with coaching: “Coaching is a one-on-one relationship where a coach supports, collaborates with, and facilitates client learning by helping a client to identify and achieve future goals through assessment, discovery, reflection, goal setting and strategic action” (p. 5).

Coach. Wilkins (2000) defines a coach as “an individual who has been educated and certified by a coach certifying agency to support a client in identifying, and achieving the client’s goals including but not limited to: personal, career, recreation, health, emotional, spiritual, financial and educational. Coaches are paid by clients” (p. 5).

International Coach Federation (ICF). The ICF (est. 1996) is a non-profit, professional organization of personal and business coaches. Its mandate is to distinguish coaching from
other professions and at the same time, develop standards that are reflective of established professions. This is accomplished in their development of core competencies, certification requirements, pledge of ethics and standards of conduct.

Research Question

The research question that will guide this study is as follows: “What is the meaning of the lived experience of individuals who have experienced the coaching process?”

The phenomenon that I was interested in studying was the experience of the coached client as it related to the experiences of the counselled client.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There is virtually no academic research conducted on coaching from a counselling psychology perspective. Therefore, the challenge of this literature review is to begin the investigation process by laying a foundation from which to conceptualize this phenomenon. To this end, a brief history of the origins and the developmental nature of counselling psychology will be discussed. This will be followed with an outline of other theories and approaches that are reflective of coaching practice. As with eclectic and integrative approaches in psychotherapy (Ford & Urban, 1998), the philosophy and practice of coaching appears to be a synthesis of different processes and principles reflective of established counselling psychology and psychotherapeutic theory. To lend evidence to this assertion, the latter part of this literature review will describe what is known about the practice of coaching according to the many practitioners in the field. The connections to counselling psychology and psychotherapy will then become self-evident.

The chapter will finally conclude with a description of the single academic study conducted on coaching, whose inclusion led to the research question that was addressed in this study.

An Overview of the Origins of Counselling Psychology

Counselling psychology has been evolving since the beginning of the twentieth century. According to Blocher (1987, 2000) and Gladding (as cited in Hackney, 2000), the profession of counselling emerged from the guidance movement that went through several changes (ie. social reform, vocational and special education, mental testing and differential psychology) before its first theory emerged. The trait-and-factor theory was dominant
throughout the 1930s and 1940s that paralleled the development of psychoanalytic and
behavioural theories (Gladding as cited in Hackney, 2000). Over time, however, there came
to be a growing discontent with the limitations of theories that grew out of an objective-
experimental paradigm (Ivey, 1991) and consequently, “counselling psychology was born out
of a need to create an alternative model to the traditional clinical practice” (Sexton and
Griffin, 1997, p. xii).

The Developmental Nature of Counselling.

As the discontent grew, the focus of counselling shifted from specific school groups
and employment services to a wide range of concerns and problems that affected clients
across their entire life span in numerous other settings. According to Blocher (1987, 2000),
this developmental focus is unique to counselling psychology and is guided by three distinct
propositions:

- The primary value of commitment of the counsellor is to facilitate human
development by helping those with whom he or she works reach their highest level of
functioning and to overcome obstacles that might hinder further growth.

- Developing human beings can only be fully understood and truly helped within the
context of their interactions with the physical, social and psychological environment.

- The ultimate goal of counselling is to work with both the client and the environment
to facilitate a dynamic and vibrant engagement, or “fit,” between the developing
person and environment. (p.11)

The first proposition asserts that change is inevitable but development is not. Clients
can become developmentally stuck and would therefore require the assistance of a counsellor
to help confront and remove obstacles in order for the client to start moving and growing
again. The goal would be to maintain some measure of freedom, independence and
responsibility (Blocher, 1987). The second set of goals within this proposition centre around the concepts of competence and human effectiveness that are closely associated with the implementation of choices and the attainment of goals. Blocher maintains that, “effective human behaviour can be defined as that behaviour that gives an individual the greatest possible long-term control over his or her own life” (p.13).

The second proposition refers to the process of utilizing three conceptual tools to understand clients. These tools are very different from the ones used in abnormal psychology and psychotherapeutic practice. The first tool used by counsellors is to help the client identify effectiveness and ineffectiveness in social roles and relationships. For example, a client may be socially competent in one aspect of his or her life (e.g. work) but ineffective in another (e.g. family). Once a counsellor and client pinpoint the problematic situation, specific and focused intervention can occur. With the second tool, counsellors come to understand the client’s coping style and behaviour in relation to stress and thereby, make it possible to understand the interaction between the person and environment. The third tool refers to the concept of developmental tasks which society places on individuals to master before they can move to the next task (Havighurst, 1972 as cited in Blocher, 1987). By observing the level of psychosocial task development and the context in which human behaviour occurs, the counsellor can avoid intrapsychic labelling common to the practice of psychotherapy.

The third proposition focuses on the counselling “goal of facilitating a dynamic and growth-producing “fit” that ultimately sustains a lifelong pattern of personal development.” (Blocher, 1987, p.15) That is to say that the counsellor is concerned with processes occurring within the client as well as the concerns about his or her environment. The
counsellor would be in a position therefore “to intervene on behalf of the client to attempt to improve the quality of the environment” (Blocher, 1987, p.16).

**Humanistic Psychology**

**History.**

Humanistic psychology emerged academically at the same time as the hippy counterculture, the human potential movement, and as the Big Sur – Esalen phenomenon of the 1960s gained attention (DeCarvalho, 1991). Those who figured most prominently in the humanistic psychology movement were Gordon Allport, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Rollo May and James Bugental (DeCarvalho, 1991). They came together in response to a rejection of psychoanalytic and behaviourist views to create the third force in psychology and psychotherapy (Ford & Urban, 1998; Shaffer, 1978)). This movement is reflective of phenomenological philosophy and stretches further back in history to the scholarly works of Socrates and Plato. More recently, that is in the 1950s, the developmental phase of humanistic psychology was largely influenced by George Kelly’s personality theory (DeCarvalho, 1991).

The three foundational schools that have figured most prominently in the development of the humanist approach are the Client-centred (Person-centred) approach developed by Carl Rogers, Gestalt therapy introduced by Fritz Perls and existential therapy created in Europe and then elaborated further by Rollo May and James Bugental (Ford & Urban, 1998). Subsequent experiential approaches that have evolved have built on the foundation of these traditions (Ford & Urban, 1998).
The Humanistic Approach.

Rather than become a tradition of strategies and techniques, humanistic psychology has become more of a philosophic orientation that guides many therapeutic approaches such as the ones mentioned previously (Shaffer, 1978). As Shaffer (1978) and Ford & Urban (1998) indicate, there are common principles and assumptions that are reflective of the humanist tradition. To begin with, conscious experience of the here-and-now is the starting point to which therapists can understand the individuals' construction of process and content. Underlying this constantly constructing interaction with self and environment is a basic human motivation that is directed toward unity and wholeness, or what is otherwise known as self-actualization processes. This distinction guides humanist therapeutic practice in which the therapist accepts individuals' conscious experiences for what they are without attempts to reduce them into more basic drives or defences. This antireductionist orientation lends itself further to a view that human nature can never be fully defined, and therefore describes human personality as infinitely expandable with unlimited possibilities.

Therefore, given the proactive, purposive and self-directing nature of individuals, they have the freedom and responsibility to identify goals and make choices that can provide value, significance and meaning to their existence, all of which contribute to their psychological organization. This openness to the flow of experience and change is indicative of optimal human functioning.

Constructivism

The term constructivism originates from the Latin construere, which “means ‘to interpret’ or ‘to analyse,’ with emphasis on a person’s active ‘construing’ of a particular meaning or significance” (Mahoney, 1991, p.96).
History.

The constructivist paradigm has been introduced to current counselling research and practice in the twentieth century as an alternative to the positivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However, organized constructivist thought has been around a lot longer. According to Mahoney (1991), during the eighteenth century, Giambattista Vico and Immanuel Kant were instrumental in introducing constructivism. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Hans Vaihinger who was a Kantian scholar, was very influential in guiding the development of theories and therapies of both Alfred Adler and George Kelly. Consequently, Kelly’s personal construct theory has figured prominently in the development of current constructivist thought (Hayes & Oppenheim, 1997). However, it is Jean Piaget who has become the most influential twentieth-century constructivist given his contributions to genetic epistemology and developmental psychology. To this end, the influences of Piaget and Kelly are being extended by current constructivists in the areas of structural-developmental cognitive therapies, extensions of personal construct theory, constructivist family therapy, narrative reconstruction and social constructionist therapy (Sexton & Griffin, 1997).

Constructivist Approach.

Constructivists within these areas assume that humans cannot directly know reality. Therefore, they are always in a process of constructing ideas about reality and creating new and alternative realities (Sexton & Griffin, 1997; Ford & Urban, 1998). Furthermore, constructivists “adhere to a dualist ontology” (Ford & Urban, 1998, p. 511) to which radical constructivists endorse “that there is no reality beyond our personal experience” (Mahoney, 1991, p. 111). Critical constructivists, on the other hand, assume that a reality exists but is
beyond what we can ever directly know. Both views emphasize, however, “the organization of the world as manifested in human experience” (Ford & Urban, 1998, p. 511).

To extend this further, constructivists assume that each person is responsible for creating his or her own knowledge and therefore his or her own personal meanings. The result is a multiplicity of meanings and multiple realities that are complex, dynamic and subjectively constructed (Ford & Urban, 1998). Therefore, given the continuous creation of reality, it is not possible to establish absolute truth. However, to avoid solipsism, which is “the belief that the only reality people can know are their subjective experiences and mental creations” (Ford & Urban, 1998, p. 512), constructivists assume that the primary location of truths is in our social interactions (Sexton & Griffin, 1997). It is through our interpersonal communications that knowledge develops and meaning takes form. Ford & Urban (1998) clearly explain that “what is basically subjective—one’s experience and patterns of representations or meanings—can become a culturally mediated, socially shared phenomenon through symbolic communication; consensus is a form of confirmation” (p. 512). Individual and socially shared ideas can then be held up against viability and coherence criteria for what some constructivists might call a “social correspondence theory of truth” (Ford & Urban, 1998, p. 512).

Solution-Focused Therapy Approaches

Solution-focused therapy is one of the constructivist cognitive-behavioural approaches that have emerged from family systems therapy. This approach, perhaps more than any other psychotherapeutic approach, bears the closest resemblance to the coaching model (Zeus & Skiffington, 2000). Three forerunners of the current solution-focused approach are Milton Erickson, the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto, California and the Brief Family
Therapy Centre in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Milton Erickson, who practiced therapy from the late 1920s to the late 1970s, has been one of the most influential people in the areas of hypnosis, family therapy, brief therapy, strategic therapy and solution-oriented therapy. His approaches differed from his peers in that his therapy was not guided by a theory of psychopathology (O'Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1989). He was not interested in the origin of the problem or how people became unstuck. Rather, he turned what others saw as liabilities into assets and utilized what the client presented as resources he could use in therapy (de Shazer, 1985). Erickson thought that therapy should be flexible enough to be adjusted “to meet the styles and idiosyncrasies of each client” (O’Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1989, p.16).

He believed in the abilities of his clients and their capacity to change. Furthermore, he emphasized the role of positive expectations and the effect it would have on clients’ ability to change. The timeline for his approach to therapy was brief. That is, Erickson thought that if the problem could appear suddenly, the therapy could appear suddenly. Erickson developed many innovations for therapeutic practice and therefore could not be labelled as having a totally solution-oriented approach (O’Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1989). However, his contributions have given rise to the popularity of solution-focused techniques in such a way that various organizations have emerged with adapted versions.

The Mental Research Institute extended Erickson’s therapeutic teachings and started a brief therapy project in 1966 in connection with the growth of family therapy (de Shazer, 1985; O’Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1989). John Weakland, Richard Fisch and Paul Watzlawick thought that therapy could be accomplished in less than 10 sessions. They operated on the premise that the problem is the attempted solution. They focused on the presenting problem with the intention of reframing clients’ belief systems. That is, clients
were asked to alter or reverse the way the problem had been handled previously in order to achieve the desired goal (O’Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1989).

Steve de Shazer, who was also at the Mental Research Institute and a follower of Erickson’s, developed a model of therapy that was in direct contrast to what was practised at the time. From the systemic model of brief therapy, de Shazer developed a solution-focused model in 1969 in which the focus shifted from looking at the problem for solutions to looking at the solutions directly (de Shazer, 1985; O’Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1989).

de Shazer eventually left the Mental Research Institute to build on this model and started the Brief Family Therapy Centre in Milwaukee where he expanded the solution-focused concept within the context of constructivist family therapy (Corey, 2000). Today, many of the assumptions of solution-focused therapy are mirrored in the postmodernist social constructionist point of view. The 12 assumptions that guide solution-focused therapy are (Walter & Peller, 1992, pp.10-34):

1. Focusing on the positive, on the solution, and on the future facilitates change in the desired direction.

2. Exceptions to every problem can be created by therapist and client, which can be used to build solutions.

3. Change is occurring all the time.

4. Small change is generative. Small changing leads to larger changing.

5. Clients are always cooperating. They are showing us how they think change takes place. As we understand their thinking and act accordingly, cooperation is inevitable.

6. People are resourceful. People have all they need to solve their problems.

7. Meaning and experience are interactionally constructed. Meaning is not
imposed from without or determined from outside of ourselves.

8. Actions and descriptions are circular.

9. The meaning of the message is the response you receive.

10. Therapy is a goal – or solution-focused endeavour, with the client as expert.

11. Any change in how clients describe a goal (solution) and/or what they do affects future interactions with all others involved.

12. The members in a treatment group are those who share a goal and state their desires to do something about making it happen.

Solution-focused therapists use the language of possibilities to co-create a social reality with the client. Through various questioning techniques, a shift in consciousness occurs that ultimately leads to resolution of the presented complaint. Solution-focused therapy is primarily goal-oriented which is a key factor in speeding up the resolution of the problem (de Shazer, 1985). That is, once a client can envision the way things would look once the problem is resolved, the steps to get there do not seem as complicated.

Furthermore, the relationship between therapist and client is cooperative in nature and therefore, there is no client resistance. de Shazer (1985) maintains that steering away from the negative aspects of the complaint, focusing on goals, identifying exceptions to the complaint and using language to turn thoughts into action contributes to the cooperative atmosphere.

Therapist views of the situation are also important to consider in the success of this approach. In solution-focused therapy, therapists do not need to know much about the complaint in order for the therapy to be effective. That is, de Shazer (1985) has discovered that solutions do not have to match the problem. His method of constructing a solution is
utilizing the concept of the “skeleton key” (p.119). This involves having a repertoire of techniques that, for the most part, can be used for any given situation.

More specifically, some of the techniques that appear to be the most powerful and spark movement within the client are related to the questions that are asked. Hudson (1999) categorizes questions that are employed by solution-focused therapists to elicit favourable outcomes. These include exception, coping, scaling, miracle, future-oriented, competence and resource questions.

The outcomes of this approach have been favourable in that clients’ are able to experience immediate results in the first session as a result of shifting their focus from the problem to the solution (de Shazer, 1985; Weiner-Davis, 1989).

Coaching

Due to its recent emergence, there is no research literature on coaching from a counselling psychology perspective. Further investigation reveals that there has been only one research study conducted on coaching in relation to mentoring (Wilkins, 2000). Alternatively, much has been written about coaching from a non-academic perspective. Therefore, this part of the literature review will attempt to inform the academic world about coaching using the resources available.

History.

The concept of coaching is not new. “For centuries the world’s athletes, painters and artists have employed personal coaches to develop and enhance their performance” (Zeus & Skiffington, 2000, p. xiii). Corporations have subsequently borrowed many of the sports-related concepts related to peak performance in their ongoing efforts to maximize employee performance, and thus achieve a more attractive ‘bottom line’ (Evered & Selman, 1989). In
the last ten years or so, coaching has become more visible and accessible to the general public.

The emergence of coaching can be compared to the popularity of the human potential movement in the 1960s in both academic (humanistic psychology) and non-academic (Big-Sur Esalen movement) circles. A comparison of the past and present ‘movements’ reveals similarities associated with people unsatisfied with their current predicaments, unrealized potential and unbalanced lifestyles.

As with the development of sports coaching and corporate coaching, the origins of coaching, in its present form, can be traced back to its psychological roots. That is, much of the content and context of coaching are reflective of the concepts of developmental, educational, transpersonal, humanistic and organizational psychology (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl, 1998, Zeus & Skiffington, 2000). The goals of coaching are reflective of those associated with counselling psychology, and the actual practice of coaching is an eclectic mix of established psychotherapeutic models.

Definition of Coaching.

There are as many definitions of coaching as there are professional coach organizations, coach training facilities – 42 at last count (International Coach Federation, online, 2001) and coach practitioners. However, they are in general agreement with respect to guiding principles. In her study, Wilkins (2000) has synthesised many of these definitions into one definition that encompasses these principles: “Coaching is a one-on-one relationship wherein a coach supports, collaborates with, and facilitates client learning by helping a client identify and achieve future goals through assessment, discovery, reflection, goal setting and strategic action (p. 40).
What Coaching is Not.

Since the definition given above could apply to many professions, coaching may be more easily understood by what it is not than by what it is. According to the International Coach Federation and those in the field (Hudson, 1999; Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl, 1998; Zeus & Skiffington, 2000), coaching shares many similarities with other professions (consulting, mentoring, training and therapy); but they maintain that coaching is a distinct profession. However, the information they use to compare other professions appears to be selectively generalized.

For example, these comparisons do not honour the distinct differences among the mental health professions, specifically counselling psychology (psychosocial) and psychotherapy (intrapsychic). Rather, they refer to an outdated medical model for comparing the therapy client to the coaching client. In their view, those who seek therapeutic help are seeking relief from emotional pain incurred from past traumas. They also view the therapeutic relationship as a power imbalance in which the therapists are the experts of the client’s lives. They maintain these differences, among others, primarily because they do not want the stigma of therapy attached to coaching (Solomon, 2000). Furthermore, to expose the true nature of both counselling and psychotherapy would bring into question many of the principles they maintain are coach specific.

Types of Coaching.

It seems that a person can highlight a specific niche area that he or she would like to focus his or her coaching energies and then put the word ‘coach’ after it. Many authors (Zeus & Skiffington, 2000) identify several of these niche areas; however, three major areas of coaching practice are identified: life skills coaching, business coaching and executive coaching.
Profile of a Coach.

Zeus & Skiffington (2000) cite a recent poll conducted in the United States by Harriet Salinger and Judy Feld in which a coach profile was outlined. Salinger and Feld found that the majority of coaches had previously established careers specific to psychology, human resources, management consulting, teaching and health care professions. Demographically, the majority of coaches were female and belonged to the ‘baby-boom’ generation.

From their observations, Zeus & Skiffington (2000) indicate that there are several reasons why someone would choose to be a coach. These include but are not limited to: “recognition, financial gain, entrepreneurial spirit, independence, self-worth and career change” (p. 21). Underlying these reasons are curiosity, altruism and challenge.

Furthermore, a person interested in becoming a coach should demonstrate personal qualities identified by Zeus & Skiffington (2000) as being characteristic of successful coaches. These include a capacity: for self-awareness, to inspire others, to build relationships, to be flexible, to communicate, to be forward-looking, for discipline, to manage professional boundaries, to diagnose issues and find solutions, for business acumen.

Profile of a Client.

In an unpublished, unverified client survey commissioned in 1998 by the International Coach Federation to address legal, regulatory and credentialing issues, a client profile emerged. 210 clients responded to survey questions that focused on demographic information, how they heard about coaching, coaching issues, role of the coach and other questions related to coach training and credentialing. 65 males (31%) and 145 females (69%) responded to the survey. The average age was 41 years with a median of 40 years of age. The total range in years was between 24 and 67 years of age. In terms of occupation, 197
(93.8%) considered themselves professionals. As for formalized education, 74.2% had a master's degree or higher.

At the time of the survey, most respondents had been in a coaching relationship between six and eight months. Some of the issues clients brought to the coaching sessions were related to time management, career, business, relationships/families, physical/wellness, spirituality, personal, goal setting and financial. The respondents also identified what they perceived to be the role of the coach: sounding board 84.8%; motivator 78.1%; friend 56.7%; mentor 50.5%; business consultant 46.7%; teacher 41%; taskmaster 30.5%; spiritual guide 29.5%; other 13.3%.

Coaching Purpose, Process and Relationship.

The next section on coaching refers to a coaching model developed from academic research conducted by Brenda Wilkins (2000). Her groundbreaking study focused on interviewing twenty-two purposefully selected Master Certified coaches who achieved this designation through the International Coach Federation.

Wilkins developed this model from a qualitative grounded theory methodology. Due to the scope of the study, however, client input was not sought in the development of the model but was recommended for future studies. As Ford & Urban (1998) observe “…because models are generalized representations constructed by humans, they are subject to error and should always be considered provisional, subject to change, improvement, and eventual replacement” (pp.35-36). Keeping this in mind, Wilkins’ model is the most comprehensive to date in its representation of coaching and has yet to be challenged.

Wilkins's (2000) coaching model makes reference to three major theoretical constructs that emerged from the data analysis. These constructs are purpose, process and relationship that are diagrammatically represented at intersecting points of an equilateral
triangle. This visual representation serves to demonstrate the interdependency of each of the constructs. That is, without any one of the constructs, coaching would not be possible. To highlight this relationship, Wilkins’ (2000) coaching model can be summarized as a coaching definition. That is, “coaching is an interaction between coach and client, where the coaching Purpose, Process and Relationship interdependently function; seeking to develop the client to their fullest potential” (p. 151).

A closer examination of the constructs reveals the extent of the relationship between the three constructs.

Purpose.

“The motivation and goals that synergize to support the client in living according to their values and priorities” (p. 151). The two phenomena that support this theoretical construct are motivation and goals. “Motivation has to do with what brings coaches and clients to the coaching process” (p. 133). Goals refer to the types of goals (task, balance, self-actualizing) clients pursue and the process (identification, action, fulfillment) that is undertaken to achieve them.

Process.

“The skills and strategies used by the coach, and accepted by the client, to support the client in fulfilling their Purpose” (p. 151). The two phenomena that support this theoretical construct are skills and strategies. Skills are related to specific behaviours coaches have developed in order to implement strategies. They include communication (listening, questioning and conversing), intuition and connection. Strategies are identified as specific approaches used in the coaching process to help clients fulfill their purpose. They include consciousness (subcategories: awareness, focus, truth, learning and change), support
Relationship.

"The development and dynamic of the coach-client relationship that supports the client in fulfilling his or her Purpose" (p. 151). The two phenomena that support this theoretical construct are development and dynamics. Development describes the temporal nature of the coach-client relationship from initiation to termination.

Dynamics refers to the coaching relationship in terms of the coach’s role, the characteristics of the coach-client relationship and the relationship culture (supportive and safe environment, free of expectations, judgments and burdens of clients’ daily lives). More specifically, with regard to the role of the coach, coaches act “as equal partners who collaborate[d] with, and support[ed] the client in the coaching process” (p. 139). The characteristics of this relationship include both parties being committed to being fully present and focused. To this end, coaches are committed to being supportive, challenging, collaborative, motivational, inspirational, aware, holding the client accountable and asking for action.

Summary

In this literature review, an attempt was made to lay the foundation for the practice of coaching in relation to counselling psychology since both practices appeared to have many similarities. Therefore, it was necessary to briefly describe the origins of counselling psychology and focus on specific aspects that were reflective of coaching practice. Humanistic psychology, constructivism and solution-focused approaches were all highlighted.
Since there was no academic research conducted regarding the relationship of coaching to counselling psychology, I briefly described the nature of coaching having referred to a grounded theory study conducted by Wilkins (2000) on coaching and mentoring. Recognizing the paucity of literature available in this area, the research question that guided this study was: “What is the meaning of the lived experience of individuals who have experienced the coaching process?”
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a description of both the underlying concepts and procedures that guided the design and implementation of this research project. A qualitative phenomenological research method was employed to answer the research question: "What is the lived experience of individuals who have been coached?" Furthermore, this chapter describes the procedures that were used for data collection and analysis as well as reviewed issues of "trustworthiness" of the data.

Method Selection

The purpose of this research study was to describe the lived experience of individuals who have been coached. Since the coaching phenomenon is relatively undefined in the academic world (Wilkins, 2000), the aim of this research was to develop an understanding of what the experience and meaning was for those who had experienced the process first hand. Phenomenological research methodology is particularly suited to this type of inquiry due to the very nature of its philosophical underpinnings. That is, "phenomenology is the study of the structure, and the variations of structure, of the consciousness to which any thing, event or person appears" (Giorgi, 1975, p. 83). Therefore, the phenomenological point of view, and the methodology that emerged from it, appeared to be most suitable for describing little known phenomenon (Osborne, 1990). Phenomenological research is appropriate in illuminating the subjectively recalled experiences of individuals in order to gain an understanding of the phenomenon (Osborne, 1990). Furthermore it was the pre-reflective,
and therefore subjective experience that was highlighted rather than the participant’s assumptions or opinions of the experience (Osborne, 1990; 1994).

Phenomenological research methodology also “has a close affinity with counselling” (Osborne, 1990, p. 79) in that they both share and remain close to the interest in the meaning and actuality of human experience (Colaizzi, 1978). As well, counselling skills were utilized throughout the research process, from establishing rapport with participants, to showing sensitivity and perceptiveness in understanding data collected by phenomenological methods. Bracketing.

Since prior understanding of the phenomenon orients the researcher to the phenomenon in a certain way and may be an influential presence throughout the study, bracketing of my presuppositions (Colaizzi, 1978) was essential for “those who read reports of research will be able to take the researcher’s perspective into account” (Osborne, 1990, p. 81). For further clarification, “phenomenological reduction is the process of continually identifying one’s presuppositions about the nature of the phenomenon and attempting to set them aside (bracket them) in order to finally see the phenomenon as it is” (Osborne, 1994, p. 170). The next few paragraphs outline my initial attempts to bracket my presuppositions. Further bracketing took place throughout the study by recording my presuppositions in the form of field notes.

Is this all there is to life? This has been the topic for which my friends and I have wrestled with over the past few years. Having established relatively successful careers and recognition for these successes, the cost of that success has created an imbalance in our lives. What we thought would bring fulfillment to our lives has not. Paralleled with this was the realisation that we do not have the time or the energy to address something so personal. And so the cycle continues. In what seems to be a constant state of “busy-ness”, we half-
heartedly wish for something else and at the same time realise that it is very difficult to change our course of direction. In our conversations, therefore, we would commiserate with each other yet explore no further.

Personally, I had been in a space where I felt been extended as far as I could be both mentally and emotionally with regard to counselling adolescents. It was time to explore other possibilities. However, I did not want to abandon counselling altogether because I was still interested in helping people. I wanted to be in a place where I could feel energized from the helping experience rather than emotionally and physically drained by it.

Along came coaching and my perspective shifted. My personal interest in the coaching phenomenon, as a viable alternative or complement to counselling, has prompted my interest in this study. I happened to hear about a presentation on personal coaching in April, 2000 and have been intrigued by the whole concept of coaching ever since.

However, there are several questions I have about coaching specifically related to its similarities with counselling psychology. I am not convinced at this time that the two are that discernible. When I expressed my concerns about the overlap, the responses I have received within the coaching community range from defensiveness to total agreement depending on one’s understanding of the coaching overlap with counselling.

After attending the October 2000 conference of the International Coach Federation, my concerns were confirmed and I realised that I needed to pursue this further if I wanted to work with people in a different capacity. During this conference a panel discussion, involving those prominent in the coaching community, confirmed that coaching research was necessary. They maintained that if coaching is to remain viable and become a well-respected profession, research into its processes, techniques and outcomes is key. This strengthened my resolve to examine coaching more closely before I embarked on this new career.
As well, I am hoping this study will make a contribution to the coaching and
counselling community as well as to the general public in order to enlighten and inform
people about the coaching experience. With this knowledge, helping professionals in
general, can make use of this information to arrive at their own conclusions.

I do believe that coaching has a place in modern society. It has emerged at a time
when the development of our technological culture has placed more demands on our time and
energy with no relief in sight. I think that coaching can serve a preventative role by helping
individuals re-focus their lives and develop a plan for self-management before they reach
critical levels. However, even though a need for coaching has been identified, the future will
decide whether coaching can rise above the current wave of popularity and survive. It is at
this time that support for academic research must grow in order to establish coaching as a
profession and be able to withstand the scrutiny of other professions and academe.

As an added note, as part of my ongoing investigation of coaching, I enrolled in a
virtual coach training program specifically designed for therapists and counsellors making
the transition to coaching. This program helped me place this research study in context by
clarifying some of the issues I have had with coaching and counselling. As well, it provided
me with a chance to air my concerns regarding the overlap of coaching and counselling in an
atmosphere of respect and understanding, and provided me with more to think about as I
proceeded with my research.

Data Collection and Procedures

Participants.

According to Osborne (1990), “participants should be people who have experienced
and can illuminate the phenomenon” (p. 82). To this end, to be included in this study,
participants were paying clients involved in the coaching experience within the last 12 months with duration of no less than three consecutive months (ie. nine sessions minimum). After conducting a pilot interview with an individual who had been coached the minimum allowed time, I realized that there was insufficient data to support my question. Therefore, I needed to increase the minimum requirement to five months. Since most coaching sessions typically occur three to four times per month, varying in length from 30 to 60 minutes, the revised minimum requirement helped to ensure that the participants would be able to recall and articulate an in-depth description of his or her experience.

Initially, a relatively homogeneous sample of participants was sought. As part of the exclusion criteria, individuals who were not coaches and who were not enrolled in a coach training program were to be interviewed for this study. However, I soon discovered that this requirement was too restrictive, as many people who are drawn to coaching usually have an interest in other coaching-related activities. Therefore, it was difficult to access people who fit the initial criteria. As a result, I had to expand the parameters. As it turned out, three individuals who had some coach training or coaching knowledge were included in the study. Furthermore, provided that people usually access coaches for personal and or business-related issues, clients from both areas were invited to participate in this study. For this study, only those who experienced coaching in a work-related context responded.

A final sample size of six participants was interviewed for this study. Small sample sizes have been determined to be typical of qualitative inquiry as they can yield "information-rich cases for study in depth" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Likewise, information-rich cases for study can be achieved through the process of purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) as described above.
In summary, the six participants chosen for this study were a relatively homogeneous group of mid-career professionals who were introduced to coaching in a work-related context. One of the participants was self-employed. Two participants resided out of province. Five of the six participants were female. The age range for participants was 35 to 48 years. Three of the participants were married and had children. Three participants were divorced and two of them were single parents. All participants had some level of post-secondary education with the highest level being a master’s degree. Altogether, individuals were coached in the range of five to eighteen months with most sessions taking place over the telephone.

Procedures.

Participants for this study were recruited initially through word of mouth utilizing my coaching contacts. These coaches had expressed an interest in coaching research; therefore, I initially approached them for referrals. As I was able to achieve the desired sample size in this manner, I did not have to access other sources. Since access to potential participants was, for the most part indirect, those who provided the referrals (i.e. gatekeepers) played a key role. Their presence was important as, “building the interviewing relationship begins the moment the potential participant hears of the study” (Seidman, 1991, p.37). I provided copies of a letter of initial contact (refer to Appendix A) to each coach to explain the purpose of this study. Interested coaches then contacted their clients; and those individuals interested in participating were advised to contact me after they had received their copy of the letter of initial contact.

Screening of individuals took place over the telephone to determine if they met the inclusion criteria. Once it was established that they had met the criteria, I presented “the nature of the study in as broad a context as possible and …[was] explicit about what [would]
be expected” (Seidman, 1991, p. 38) of the participants. I sent them a copy of the informed consent form (refer to Appendix B) by electronic mail that outlined the purpose and logistics of the study, and answered any questions about what was involved or expected of them. The participants were reminded that their involvement in the study was completely voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any time. Participants were also advised that they could refrain from answering questions that they felt uncomfortable with.

During this introduction, issues surrounding confidentiality were discussed and participants were invited to choose a pseudonym for use in all oral and written reports of the study. When both parties agreed to proceed, the participants were asked to sign the informed consent form together with a witness and send it back to me via facsimile transmission. In this way, they were able to keep the original copy for themselves. Background information was collected from each participant at this time, which included brief demographic questions related to age, education, and employment status as well as questions regarding the extent to which participants were familiar with the coaching phenomenon (i.e. number of sessions) (refer to Appendix C).

Appointment times were booked for the six participants for the first in-depth data collection interview that was set to be 60 to 90 minutes in length but on average ended up to be approximately 45 minutes. Since the majority of coaching takes place over the telephone, this option as well as the option be interviewed were presented to participants. As it turned out, all participants chose to be interviewed by telephone.

Interviews were conducted for the collection of descriptive data, as they were considered to generate data rich in phenomenological reflections (Colaizzi, 1978). The aim of in-depth phenomenological interviews is to understand “the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 1991, p. 3). By employing the
skills I developed as a counsellor to establish trust and rapport, I engaged in the process of imaginative listening (Colaizzi, 1978). To make the interview as minimally intrusive as possible and to elicit data that would otherwise be missed, “open-ended, minimally structured interviews” (Osborne, 1990, p.84) were conducted. The interviews were audio-taped for purposes of data collection and analysis.

The Data Collection Interview.

“We interview in order to come to know the experience of the participants through their stories” (Seidman, 1991, p.91). Moreover, language has been determined to be the primary means to understand human experience. Therefore, interviews conducted in the linguistic realm have been thought to uncover the many layers of expression that interact with the layers of reality (Polkinghorne, 1988). That is, “narrative is one of the forms of expressiveness through which life events are conjoined into coherent, meaningful, unified themes” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 126). Therefore, in keeping with the phenomenological method, these expressions of meaning were captured in the narrative interviews. To that end, detailed, in-depth descriptions of the participants’ perspectives on coaching were illuminated.

For the first part of the interview, I explained to each participant that I was interested in understanding his or her experience of being coached. I began each interview by reading a general orienting statement (refer to Appendix D) to each participant to ensure that the context of the study was presented in a consistent manner. This statement and follow-up open-ended questions (refer to Appendix E) followed Seidman’s (1991) guidelines for conducting in-depth interviews. That is, by first establishing “the context of the participants’ experience” (p.10); then by having the participant “reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs” (p.10) and finally, encouraging “participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them” (p.10), the participants had every
opportunity to uncover descriptions of their experiences. The interview was conducted in such a way as to maintain the focus of the study and at the same time allow for ambiguity, as contradictory elements appeared in the participants’ narratives (Colaizzi, 1978). Counselling skills such as attending, active listening, empathizing, clarifying and paraphrasing were used to help participants further articulate their experiences without being too intrusive or imposing meanings. Prompts and open-ended questions were only used as necessary when the participants appeared to be stuck but had more to say (Osborne, 1990). A list of questions (refer to Appendix E) derived from my self-exploration was occasionally used to help orient, organize, and create a clearing for the phenomenon to appear and to deepen participants' self-exploration of their experience (Colaizzi, 1978). The interview was considered complete when the participants felt that they had nothing more to add.

Prior to ending the first interview, I asked participants, if upon further reflection they became aware of additional descriptions of their coaching experience, an opportunity would be provided in the follow-up validation interview. The participants were also given an opportunity to ask any questions or discuss their experience of the first interview. I then briefly described the next steps in the research study, once the interviews were complete, including the validation interview and informed each participant that I would be giving them a copy of the results section once the study was complete.

Detailed field notes were recorded immediately following each interview to document salient aspects of the interview that could not be recorded. This included the participant’s demeanour and behaviour (verbal and non-verbal), as well as the emotional climate of the interview and any notable distractions or disruptions that took place. I also recorded impressions of how I felt the interview proceeded, any personal reactions and biases that
emerged that might have influenced the interview process, and what I might focus on in another research study if the opportunity presented itself.

**Data Analysis**

"The purpose of qualitative [data] analysis is to develop a statement delineating a structure or pattern of relationships that organizes the phenomenon under investigation into a unified whole" (Polkinghorne, 1991, p.191). With this in mind, I reviewed each of the audiotapes to get an initial sense of the participants' experience and become familiar with the content of the interview. The audio taped interviews were transcribed verbatim and line numbered for efficient retrieval of text. Three copies of each transcript were made to aid in the coding and labelling of the data.

From this point, data was thematically analysed using procedures developed by Giorgi (1975) outlined by Colaizzi (1978) and discussed further by Osborne (1990) and Polkinghorne (1988). “Any starting point begins an inductive, generative, and constructive process because the final set of categories are not totally predetermined, but are carved out of the data according to their meaning” (Schumacher & MacMillan, 1993, p. 487). To begin with, I listened to the recording of each participant in its entirety in order to get a feel for the data and sense of the whole. Each passage was then listened to more closely, and “significant statements” (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59) directly associated with the coaching experience were marked. Following this, the theme of each of the statements was interpreted using creative insight while continuing to let the themes emerge from the data. The statements of meaning were then organized into clusters of themes. This process was repeated for each transcript. These steps represented a with-in persons analysis (Osborne, 1990).
Once all transcripts were individually analysed, it was at this point that Polkinghorne (1988) determined “a full description of a story should include both the elements that are unique to that particular story and those that can be found, at least in essence, in other stories” (p.167). Therefore, the next step was to organize the cluster of themes into those that were both common and unique to the participants in the study thus constituting an “across-persons analysis” (Osborne, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988). At this point, common and unique clusters of themes were repeatedly compared back to the original transcripts to ensure that the original meanings would not be lost.

The structure of the phenomenon was then presented two ways. First a complete account of each participant’s story (ie. case narrative) was described and secondly, an “exhaustive description of the investigated topic” (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 61) in the form of a comprehensive narrative brought their stories together, weaving in the many common and unique and themes that had been identified.

**Follow-up Interview**

Prior to speaking to participants for the follow-up interview (refer to Appendix F), I electronically mailed to them their individual case narratives (which included their biographical sketches) along with a copy of their transcribed protocols to refer to for accuracy. They were given one week to look these over and make comments. Three participants responded with suggestions for minor grammatical changes. I then electronically mailed each participant a copy of the comprehensive narrative in page definition format (PDF). I asked the participants to read over the comprehensive narrative and reflect on the identified themes prior to the final interview. During the validation interview, I asked for the participants’ reactions to the common themes and asked them to discuss how accurately they
reflected their own experience. Altogether, interviews lasted from five minutes to just over one hour with participants indicating there were no changes to be made.

**Trustworthiness**

Issues of reliability and validity common to quantitative research approaches cannot be applied in the same way to qualitative studies (Krefting, 1990). Therefore, in order to establish rigour within a qualitative research study, criteria that are reflective of the study of the human condition must be employed (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), qualitative research studies should be judged on the basis of their trustworthiness. More specifically, issues of credibility (truth value), transferability (applicability), dependability (consistency) and confirmability (neutrality) comprise a conceptual model that can be used to evaluate the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Krefting (1991) argues however, “not all qualitative research can be assessed with the same strategies” (p.214) in the same way that qualitative studies cannot be evaluated using quantitative methods.

**Credibility.**

Guba and Lincoln (1989) described the credibility criterion as “establishing the match between the constructed realities of respondents...and those realities as represented by the evaluator and attributed to various stakeholders” (p.237). Establishing rapport and building trust through lengthy interviews helped to establish credibility in this study; thereby uncovering constructions within the context’s culture (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Furthermore, credibility was enhanced in this study through the process of bracketing that occurred before the study was conducted and continued at regular intervals throughout. According to constructivist and phenomenological principles, the researcher and participant are jointly
engaged in the construction that emerges from an inquiry; therefore, bracketing was a method that kept my construction of reality within privilege and enhanced credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Similarly, credibility was established through “member checks” with the participants in the study. In this case, the follow-up interview was designed to verify that the multiple constructions presented in the final narrative were those that the participants had provided in the interviews (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Transferability.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) maintain that the “burden of proof for claimed transferability is on the receiver” (p.241). That is, it is the researcher’s responsibility to provide as thick and complete a description of the data base as humanly possible; and then it is up to others, who may wish to apply the study to their own situations, to make transferability judgments (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). For this study, I began this process by providing a thick description of the research methodology and continued with this process throughout. In what Osborne (1990) refers to as empathic generalizability, findings were checked with two individuals who had experienced coaching, but were not included in the research study (refer to Appendix G). They concurred that the essence of their experiences was reflective of the comprehensive narrative to a certain extent.

Dependability.

Dependability pertains to the variability of the inquiry (Krefting, 1991). Since qualitative research emphasises the uniqueness of the human situation, variation in experience is sought. Therefore, in order to achieve dependability, variability must be trackable (Krefting, 1991). That is, any shifts in the construction of the emerging design must be documented and publicly inspectable (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). For this study, I paid particular attention to the details of the process so that outside reviewers “can explore the
process, judge the decisions that were made, and understand what salient factors in the context led the evaluator to the decisions and interpretations made” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p.242).

Confirmability.

To assure the integrity of the findings, data must be tracked to their sources. Therefore, it was imperative that “the logic used to assemble the interpretations into structurally coherent and corroborating wholes is both explicit and implicit in the narrative…” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 243). In this study, this was achieved by continually bracketing presuppositions, having all raw data available to be reviewed and inspected, checking data analysis procedures to ensure that the essences of the raw data were kept intact and checking with participants in the follow-up interview to confirm that the reduction of the data into general themes illuminated their experiences.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter begins with a brief outline of the common and unique themes that emerged from the data analysis and presented in a fashion that loosely reflects the beginning, middle and end of a common narrative. The themes are then clustered into common groupings within the narrative to further define the participants’ experiences. This is followed by a summary of each participant’s coaching experience presented in case narrative form. A comprehensive narrative is presented at the end of the chapter representing a synthesis of the six case narratives.

THEMES

PRECONDITIONS:
• Various levels of dissatisfaction
• Levels of awareness
• Amount of control each participant had over the decision-making process
• Coach selection

THE COACHING RELATIONSHIP:
• The importance of having a strong interpersonal connection
• The nature of the coaching relationship
• The uniqueness of the coaching relationship
• Relationship on the same level
• Unevenness of the relationship
• Dual relationships
QUALITIES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF COACHES:

- Coaches role model desired behaviours the importance of role modelling for their staffs
- Various (coaching) roles
- Coaches were resourceful
- Mentor-like qualities (of coaches)
- Noticeable qualities of coaches
- Importance of having a coach with experience

COACHING PROCESS:

- External Assessment and Self-assessment exercises
- Intrapersonal development and/or interpersonal development and job performance (issues)
- Control (issue)
- Consulting on specific projects or personnel issues at work
- General coaching format
- Format became less structured over time
- Skills and strategies used in the implementation of the coaching process
- Coaches’ self-disclosure
- Being accountable

OUTCOMES:

- Significant learning occurred and subsequent changes appeared in the cognitive and behavioural realms.
- Development of new insight and new perspectives about self and others
- Shift their sources of validation from an external locus to an internal locus
- Specific behavioural changes
- Specific new skills and actions
- Learned how to set boundaries
- Building support
- Direct and indirect feedback
Future possibilities and goals

OBSERVATIONS:

- Positively impact on other facets of participants’ lives
- Suggestions for making the experience more effective
- Helpful to take a break
- Importance of friendship
- Coaching in comparison to counselling and psychotherapy
- Ending their coaching relationships
- Making the transition from client to coach

Case Narratives

Broncofan.

Broncofan is a 38 year-old businessman. He is married and has two small children. At the time of this interview, he had been coached for five months. He was in contact with his coach weekly. Once a month he would meet his coach face-to-face for thirty minutes to one hour. The other weekly sessions were conducted by telephone and lasted anywhere from fifteen to thirty minutes in duration.

Broncofan was introduced to coaching through the organization that he worked for. The organization decided that he needed a coach:

[They] saw my raw talent from a technical perspective, I guess below the water line if you want to call it and they wanted to improve my skills above the water line, which was more on how do I influence and work with other people. So the investment they wanted to make was to improve that side because, I guess, there were some areas of concern with how I got things done in certain situations. And also they wanted to see me progress in my career, and the only way they saw me doing that in leveraging the kind of skills I have was to be able to improve that.
Reflecting on what the company presented to him, Broncofan thought that he could look at the whole coaching idea either positively or negatively. If negative, he said "...you could be depressed about the whole thing and feel sorry for yourself" for "you know they’re making a statement." Alternatively, with a positive outlook, "...which is the way that I took it," Broncofan found it "was an opportunity for me to improve on things that....I haven’t had a lot of time to spend...time focusing on." Furthermore, Broncofan did not feel threatened by his company’s proposal. "...certainly there was no indication to the coach or the prospective coaches that I was in a position where I could be fired or anything like that. It was nothing like that at all." Rather, "they saw a high potential performer that they wanted to bring to the next level and that’s the way I perceived it and I took it as an opportunity to improve some of those skills.”

Since the company brought the whole idea of coaching to Broncofan, they also provided him with a selection of coaches to choose from:

Our human resource area actually forwarded three names of three prospective coaches, so they did the research...I don’t know where they went to get the research but they did research through their own connections and presented me with three coaches which I interviewed and I looked at the one that I felt I would work with the best.

More specifically, Broncofan chose his coach because "she made me feel relaxed right away, that I was comfortable talking to her about some of the situations that were concerning me or that might impede my progress around certain things." He also noticed that, "everything about her I guess made her personality seem a lot like mine. And I just felt really good about it.” With respect to the other two coaches he interviewed, he did not have the same feeling. He observed that they seemed to be arrogant and “more interested in the dollars.”
When asked about the expectations he had of his coach, Broncofan pointed out that he expected his coach:

To be able to identify some of the...hurdles that are preventing you from moving forward in the organization. Or...at least identifying it and then bringing it to your attention and you can decide whether you want to or not. I mean...she’s always said that this is something you have to decide on. If this is something you don’t want, you don’t have to do it.

With regard to his coach’s training and other background information, he thought that knowing that “she was in an executive role at a number of companies” was important. “She brought some of that...background into her experience and I think that’s important, that you just don’t have like a consultant type of role, that you’ve actually played in it and you’ve been part of it and you know what goes on.” As an extension of this, Broncofan found that his coach was a role model in other things that she did. That is:

She also balances her life quite well too and I thought that was pretty important...She absolutely practices what she preaches and I think that’s important. I mean that’s important for me I know as a leader...that I wouldn’t expect anything of my staff that I wouldn’t do myself.

Broncofan’s coach started off the sessions by wanting to know what he felt were the issues he needed to deal with. He recognized that his coach “may have done some of her own homework...with the people in human resources or what have you...but she really wanted to hear from me I guess.” Broncofan determined that his coach was using this method of uncovering issues as a way to assess his willingness to identify the problem and work on the issues. They focused on issues one at a time and “she asked me to bring specific problems to her that I felt I was having to address with it...and she helped me with those.” It
was only after Broncofan had an opportunity to determine what the issues were that his coach then identified some of the problems he was having based on further exploration.

The format of the sessions then revolved around setting goals and developing action plans but taking an informal approach to the process. “...typically it’s really open about, you know, how did your week go? Anything happen? Any problems? Any issues? Anything...that you need some help with?”

A specific example of one of the goals that they worked on was about getting “feedback from a number of my peers and a number of my...bosses on, you know, what is it that I can improve on...And have they seen a change and is there anything I can do.” After examining and discussing the feedback, “what specifically did he mean and stuff like that,” his coach would “come up with...action plans.” In terms of accountability, at some point in the session, his coach would make a request that they would “try to explore a little bit more” on a weekly basis.

Broncofan recognized early on that his coach had the “ability to see through the issues and see through my own arrogance and stubbornness” and had no problem with being told that he would have to “get over it.” She also informed him that “this is something you’re going to have to deal with” especially when it came to dealing with others. In the same way, Broncofan’s coach helped him understand:

Not everyone is intentionally out there you know to do things intentionally wrong.
You’ve got to just understand that you’ve got to work with these people and get the best out of them...she also made me understand that I can’t control everything and I’ve got to be able to let people do their jobs more and then work with them more.

Broncofan’s controlling behaviour was a primary issue that he addressed with his coach. He related this behaviour to having “a type A personality.” That is, “I can jump to
solutions really quickly and I can assess solutions really quickly. My problem is, is that I want to jump too quickly to the solution without working with people and letting them do it.” His coach helped him in this respect by giving him “the opportunity to sit back and, you know, listen to them more and let them come up with it and maybe coach them in the direction where you want to go?” He also recognized “not always my way is the right way and some things I can’t control.” Broncofan also indicated that in cases where he did “not have the highest respect for some of the people”, he used to “question what they were doing.” His coach reminded him that he could not do that, especially since he was part of a team. She also helped him realize that he had to work with these people and be on the same side. She brought to light that this was especially important since he was in a leadership role and people looked to him as such. Similarly, she was able to identify “the behaviours of a real leader and she’s tried to get me focused out of me, me, me into….being a leader and I think that’s important.” Changing his perspective was instrumental in changing his behaviour:

[I’m] aware of everything I do now. I mean from emails that I send to people, just how I respond, what I’m saying. I was a bit careful with it, but I’m even more careful now because it’s not that I think I’m saying the wrong [thing] but sometimes how you say it may be taken the wrong way even though you’re positive about what you say but…people don’t necessarily take it that way on the other end.

He became aware that the written word should not be used as the primary means of communication, especially “if it’s something important….talk to the person. So….I’m doing a lot more face-to-face contact with people.” Broncofan found this insight very helpful as it made him more self-aware. “…talking to her just kind of refreshes that I should always be constantly aware of what I’m doing and why I’m doing it.” When a problem regarding the
issue of control comes up, Broncofan will tell his coach about a situation and his coach will
“create that self-awareness and ... she’ll tell me how to handle situations.”

Related to the issue of control, Broncofan learned some new skills. Specifically, he
spent time on the development of his listening skills. Broncofan identified that this had been
a “big problem” for him as his mind wanders when he gets “bored of what the person’s
saying,” especially when he knows what the answer is. In these situations, Broncofan has
thought to himself, “I’m not going to learn anything from that person prior to them finishing
their conversation and typically I’m so fast thinking that... I’ve already come to the
conclusion before they’re finished and I drift.” Through his coach, however, he has learned
and recognizes that he should “have more respect for what a person is saying and... not jump
to a conclusion.” He has also learned to refrain from saying anything until people are
finished.

Additionally, his coach has acted as a “resource” and has recommended and given
Broncofan some books to read to reinforce what he has learned from her which, in turn, is
tied into ideas of bringing his “whole appearance” and “whole vocabulary up to another
level.” With this increased awareness about self and the world, Broncofan has realized “you
can learn something from what everyone is saying” and “people might not have the whole
answer but they should have some contribution... to what it is they’re saying.” Broncofan
identified that once this understanding is in place, “feedback that you give them will be a lot
better if you’ve listened to the whole thing...” Broncofan also added that asking people a lot
more open-ended questions helped guide them to possible answers instead of “just giving
them the answer, which is what I used to do.” He also recognized that this approach was
more tactful.
Broncofan was aware that the changes he had made over the past five months were dependent on the type of coaching relationship he shared with his coach:

A trust level that you have with her...that she’s not going to go out and tell anyone. So I think it’s important that, that confidential trust nature is there and if you don’t feel comfortable with that then it’s just not going to work. You’ve got to be able to just let it go. And I’ve always felt that I could just about tell her anything and then, you know, for fear that it’s not going to come back through someone else.

He included that this feeling of trust was part of the selection criteria in the initial interview process. Even though both parties would eventually sign a confidentiality agreement, Broncofan felt that “you can sign an agreement [and] it means nothing.” Therefore, “...that’s something you look for too...I’m sure you can trust them all [the other coaches], but you’ve got to feel like you can and that’s something I had instantly with her. We just connected right away”.

After being coached for five months, Broncofan viewed his coach as someone who continuously reinforced what he had worked on so far. This reinforcement sometimes came in the form of his coach as “sounding board”. When Broncofan was feeling especially frustrated, instead of “sounding it off maybe to the wrong person,” he was able to do this with his coach. At that point his coach would listen and then try to give him some ideas.

With regard to her style of coaching, Broncofan has found “...she’s been good. She’s been tough when she needs to be tough. She doesn’t let me get away with my own preconceived notions and my own thoughts and my own biases...She let’s me have it when I need it. And that gets me thinking really quickly”.

Since the coaching relationship is ongoing and shows no signs of ending at this time, the “next step” or goal that Broncofan will be working on is “trying to emulate some of the
people that do...some of the things that we want to portray or the leadership qualities that we want to go towards.”

When asked if there was anything that his coach could have done to be more helpful, Broncofan thought that what his coach was doing was sufficient:

Without her actually being beside me day to day, which is really hard to do. I mean she talked about shadowing me for awhile. I’m just not so sure that would work with other people and that’s something we might pursue later on.

Broncofan had noticed that since he started coaching, the feedback both he and his coach have elicited with regard to if he should be doing something differently has been “really positive.” The feedback “from human resources and other management people” indicates “wow, Broncofan’s really changed.”

Broncofan’s coach had also challenged him to think outside of his present work situation and focus on some “future planning” that involved asking him about his goals. Specifically, “where do [you] want to go and how do you see yourself getting there?”

He has also recognized that coaching has had a positive effect on his personal life as well:

Even at home I find myself using it a lot more when I’m listening to my wife or...even my kids. And the quality of life, that was something I was already trying to change...she just reinforced that...You’ve got to have balance in your life and she continues to reinforce it which is something I really believe in. I think if you work too much and...I’m not sure that that’s a healthy thing either. So it has affected my home life as well.

Broncofan has noticed that he is progressing along but realizes he could be further ahead than he is and has acknowledged this as his issue and not his coach’s. He identified:
It takes time to really entrench it in the way...I mean I’ve been doing this for thirty...my way 37 years...and it’s not always instinctive. So I’ve got to make it more instinctive and that’s what I’m doing. It’s not because I don’t believe in it. It’s just sometimes my old practices come out and I think it’s just a matter of time that it becomes more and more instinctive and she sees it becoming more and more instinctive.

In the same way, Broncofan thinks that his coaching relationship will end when all that he has learned becomes “more instinctful.” “It becomes...instead of always thinking about it, it becomes just commonplace for me. And if...I think I can do that without her...then that’s probably about time.”

As a final thought, Broncofan spoke very highly of the coaching experience. “I certainly would recommend it to anyone...particularly when they want to improve the...above the line...the softer skills. And I think anyone who wants to pursue a management type of position and a leadership type of position has to do it.” He noted that he had already “recommended one person to my coach that I thought it would make a lot of sense.”

Em.

Em is a 40 year-old professional woman. She is married with two school-age children. At the time of the interview, she had been coached for a period of twelve months. Initially she was in contact with her coach on the telephone once a week for 30 minutes. The sessions tapered off to bi-weekly sessions and in the last two months, it was on an as needed basis.

According to Em, one of the challenges of being married, having a young family and building up a career was constantly trying to find balance. “…we’re just all so busy taking
the kids here and there, picking them up, keeping the house in order, want to get the career
going and want to still be able to...have a partner...and enjoy life as a couple.” Em
remembers that there were two significant times in her life before the coaching experience
where she consciously made a decision to bring some balance and order to her life.

The process started with “...I think one of the significant things in my life is shortly
after my daughter was born,...I suddenly realized that I couldn’t just sit around and ...let life
go by and that I had a life as well. And so I thought of doing a lot of things for myself...”
“So I did stuff on my own.” Em found that being creative and spiritually connected “broke
me out of my mold...” This creativeness was expressed through writing, specifically poetry,
and painting. Through courses that she took, she was able to connect spiritually with herself
and developed a capacity for self-expression through meditation and self-reflection. “...I just
really went towards the arts a lot...and a lot through meditation.” At present, she continues
to express this creativity through her writing. “...I take pictures and then I sit and write
about it...and I’ve just continued to do that and it’s something that I love to do and you
know, I probably will continue to do that for who knows how long, but you know it’s a part
of my life.”

Contributing to this process, Em made a point of taking time once a year to take a
holiday on her own away from her husband and children in order to focus “...on me as an
individual versus as a couple...and that was great and I continue to do that too.”

In terms of personal development, the other significant time in Em’s life occurred
when she attended a company-sponsored course called ‘Breakthrough Thinking’. “...it was a
workshop that looked at how you could take accountability of your own life and why it is
important and that really at the end of the day, you’re the one that calls the shots.”
It was shortly after this course that Em found out about coaching, which at the time of this interview was a year and a half ago. She was still experiencing imbalance and was open to other options. “Like I knew what I wanted to do, but I didn’t know how to get there.”

Her coach was a consultant with her company and worked very closely with the human resources department where Em works. “…she started talking about coaching and what it was about and…it was sort of an experimental thing.” She explained, “she was looking for people to coach…would I be interested, and I said, ‘yeah sure’. So that’s how it started.”

At the formative stages of the coaching relationship, Em found:

I was very vulnerable…because here I was, you know, opening my life and soul to somebody that is in the workplace…although I knew that there would be no breach of confidentiality…but still, you know, we see the same people, you know, sometimes we work together.

This emotional vulnerability was further heightened by an introductory exercise Em’s coach had her work through. That is, in order to get a sense of the imbalance in Em’s world and what areas she perceived to have more balance than others, her coach asked Em to identify them by using a ‘life wheel’. The ‘life wheel’ is a visual representation of the many aspects that make up a person’s whole life (e.g. work, family, time for self, finances, etc.). In this exercise, clients are asked to fill in each section according to how satisfied they are with each aspect of their lives. “You know going through each of those aspects and speaking on each of them….in some sense bordered on….it wasn’t counselling, but it was a very fine line.” Em did not elaborate much on this but gave another example of where her coaching experience was more counselling related. This specific coaching incident, however, occurred outside of her present coaching experience.
That is, Em found herself in a difficult coaching situation as she herself went through courses to learn more about coaching. Having experienced the coaching process, Em became very interested in learning more about coaching and had thought about it as a possible career. Therefore, with her interest piqued, Em enrolled in coaching courses. During one of the workshops that she attended, she "happened to be coached..." She found the person who coached her "was very rigorous with me and we went back to my childhood." Bringing up the past was very traumatic for Em. "I continued with the workshop, but I really wasn't even there because it had shaken me so much. It took me back to a period in my life during my childhood that was very ugly."

Feeling very vulnerable, Em found some strength to challenge the coach. "I said this is almost counselling and you've really gone into a tender part of my heart and now I'm left dangling and what are you going to do about it? There's nothing you're going to do about it." It became evident to Em that this coach was not equipped to process this painful issue. Besides realizing that they "just didn't jive," Em found that the coach's reaction to her challenge was unsympathetic and lacked empathy:

His attitude was...’it's fine, you've got to go through this...It's the process you've got to go through, and you're in a certain process...you're in a stage of the certain process right now. So it's fine to be there.' There was no warmth...and honestly, at that point I felt I needed to go to a...psychologist."

However, she did not. She commented:

I guess the one thing about coaching is that although you are to be quite removed, there are times when you've got to really be there for your client, and you've got to be there, you know, if sometimes even physically to hold them. And I wasn't getting that from ...this coach, ... this particular coach.
Instead, she talked to a senior coach who conducted the workshops and then she brought up the incident with her coach “...so we went through a coaching on that...it’s stuff...it’s some of the ugly stuff that you’ve gone through when you bring it up through coaching that is when it’s almost like counselling.” She explained:

We talked about...several things that I could do, and so she gave me...names of people that I could contact and workshops that I could go to...and she shared something with me as well that happened to her. And...I don’t know whether you’re supposed to do that or not as a coach but...anyway, she did. And it sort...of you know helped me. It gave me a different perspective that, you know, here’s a coach who’s gone through something as well, and I didn’t feel like, oh geez, you know the whole world kind of is laughing at me or pointing fingers. So she was truly able to empathize.

Em found that even after she discussed the incident with her coach, she still felt that she needed other professional help. However:

I didn’t go for it because I just didn’t want to...go down into the deep dungeon again because I knew I would have to go there. I would have to go there to get out of it. And I still know that now, but at this point in my life, I’m not prepared to go there.

Reflecting on this experience in our interview session, Em identified some qualities that she would look for in a coach. Empathy was very important. “...one thing about coaching I guess is you’ve really got to read your client...” Em mentioned that even on the telephone, support could be verbal. “...just to let the person know that you care and that you are there; and if you fall, well, you know, we’re going to fall together but it’ll be safe.” She added that she would look for a coach “who has had a lot of life experiences and therefore
[able to] empathize with you.” She found that if she were to define her coach’s role in
different ways, she would describe her as “...a friend, a confidant...and a help.”

In general, Em discussed how coaching benefited her as she went through the process.
She identified “two really significant things about coaching.” First:

It makes you really introspective so that you understand who you really are and what
is really important to you...the second thing in coaching is...holding yourself
accountable with the help of a coach so that you can report back to. And I found that
really helped me because initially I felt jeez if I didn’t do anything, I’m going to have
to report back to my coach next week. And if I haven’t done stuff, oh that’s going to
be bad...So for me...having that sort of...external accountability really, really helped.
Having identified that she was a visual learner, Em found that any visual tool that was
offered by her coach, “...helped me to be reminded of...certain things I’ve committed to or
who I say I am and stuff like that.” Furthermore, “...it just reinforces everything for me.”
Even her screen saver on her computer “...keeps it alive for me all of the time.” As a visual
tool, the ‘life wheel’ worked on at the beginning of Em’s coaching sessions was compared to
a ‘life wheel’ filled out near the end of her sessions. This tool’s effectiveness increased when
it was used to measure growth and change. “...when I compared [the] two wheels, I could
clearly see how I had grown as a person.”

She indicated that when she initially started out with coaching, it was intensive.
Talking to her coach once a week for 30 minutes “for quite some time” helped her realize
that “a passion was developing.” She explained “...if I committed to something, I was
committing to something that really meant a lot to me and it wasn’t sort of empty
commitments...” She also recognized that “...these patterns started to emerge in my life.”
That is, “...I’d say, okay, I’m going to do something but before I even said I was going to do
it, I really paid a lot of attention and thought about it before committing to something...to the point that the behaviour kind of changed.” This realization has helped Em transition out of coaching. In her words, “...I feel I don’t need the intensive coaching anymore because I’m on my way.”

When asked what she found particularly helpful about coaching, she related it to her whole personal development experience. “...you really have to know yourself. And...by knowing...yourself you can really believe in yourself and then you can...make the commitments and really commit to what is important and then be accountable for it.” She also found that coaching helped reinforce her beliefs and view of the world. “...if you have a dream, you can make it happen. You can, regardless of all the obstacles, you will make it happen.”

When asked if there was a ‘low light’ in terms of being coached, Em identified what she felt was an uneven relationship with her coach. That is, “...I felt she was elevated. You know, I’m looking at this woman and...she’s five foot if that. And...she is this magnificent person and I was looking up to that person and I always felt sort of inferior to her...” Em talked about the uneasiness she had with her coach. “...I said [to her] this is how I feel. I don’t know what it is. You know, I don’t know if it’s stuff you’re saying or is it just that I admire you so much that...I think you’re above everybody.” Her coach “was very sensitive...” and attempted to explore Em’s concerns. She asked Em “...it’s maybe the way I ask the questions or something...” However, Em could not pinpoint the reasons. Em reasoned “...maybe it’s just me.” Similarly, “I’d just kind of put it back in my mind saying...get over it.” As it turns out, this hindrance did not seem to be detrimental to the coaching process. Therefore, they continued on with coaching. However, Em identified another concern she had with her coaching relationship. Since her coach was also someone
she occasionally worked with quite closely, she found the nature of the dual relationship awkward. The decreased frequency of their coaching sessions may or may not have coincided with the fact that Em and her coach “...started working very closely on a project at work.” It was at this point “…I spoke to her again and I said, you know I probably see you more as a mentor now than as a coach.” When asked to explain the difference, Em said, “a mentor is somebody that you can learn from. A coach is somebody who helps you through a process and draws out the qualities in you. I mean a mentor does that too, but a mentor can show you things; but a coach doesn’t.” She further explained the difficulty she had balancing the two roles. “…I think one of the things for me is...to be truly a true coach for me is there can’t be any other relationships besides the coaching relationship.”

In addition to the role change, the coaching sessions became more infrequent when Em realized “…I needed her less and less sort of near the end when I felt I knew what to do.” “I’d commit to something and then I would do it...so then I just felt well...you know I don’t necessarily need a coach to be there for me all the time.”

Since the sessions had become less frequent, Em noted that she was very busy. Looking back on the last six months, she realized “I probably could have done more. But...I’m happy right now with my life and I don’t feel I want to take on more...I have a commitment to myself that I’m just going to take it easy.”

When asked if there was anything that her coach could have done differently, Em replied that she could have used more ‘in person’ contact:

You know, maybe once in awhile is to instead of having telephone contact is to have a longer session...at a...quiet place or like I’m thinking of...even at the beach...or a spot at the beach where it’s really quiet and spiritual. That’s it. Find a spiritual place where the two of us could be and do a coaching session at this place.
Em noted that this kind of interaction would be beneficial because “I need that physical touch or physical… [connection].”

Altogether, Em found that what she would take away from the whole coaching experience was “…to talk about the experience and to live it with other people.” She explained, “It’s particularly with the younger generation, with the…next generation and with children; and really talk to them and nurture them and help them through their growing stages because it’s so important.”

As previously mentioned, the central goal of Em’s coaching experience was to find balance. In the process, she became introspective, committed and accountable. This led to positive influences on other areas of her life. Her marriage benefited greatly from coaching, as it caused her to stop and think about the relationship she had with her husband. She would take a step back and ask “why we’re together.” She realized she needed to uncover what was really important. “You know it’s, forget about this rush, rush around all the time because you sort of get into ruts sometimes right?” “…let’s just stop and let’s look at the priorities.” She realized “sooner or later you know I would have come to that realization or my husband would’ve come to it.” However, she found “…with a coaching experience, it just sort of helps you prioritize sooner than crashing and then realizing, oh shit, you know I should have done something sooner before this happened.”

Coaching has also been useful in setting boundaries with her family. “…before, I was there for everyone all the time, every minute of the day; and you know, I finally said, that’s it…when the door’s shut, it’s my own time so please nobody come in and you know the family respected that…” Boundaries were also clarified within her other close relationships, particularly those with her parents and siblings.
I was superwoman who kind of thought I could be there for everybody. I did everything. And my parents are aging and anything that happened to them, I would be there, you know, in a flash. And it was kind of burning me out and I made a conscious decision to withdraw from that.

Em had to “understand that I can only do so much and then beyond that, there are other people who can also take on a...certain role.” She attributes her boundary issues to “...this whole control thing of mine...” Therefore, in order to deal with this, she had to come to an understanding not to “...be in control of everything” and understand “...that things will fall in place even if you’re not there.” Coaching was also influential in prioritizing who she could spend the most time with and who she could not. “...right now I hold as my core, you know, my husband and my two children.”

As an ending comment, Em found that throughout the whole coaching process, she experienced “...a lot of growth.” Even though her coaching sessions were winding down, she realized “...there’s lots of stuff to be coached [on] like well, what do you want more out of life? I don’t know.”

Grace.

Grace is a 35 year old professional with a post-secondary education. She is single, having previously been married. Grace has had coaching on two separate occasions with the same coach. The first coaching period lasted four months, and she was in her ninth month of her second coaching period when she was interviewed for this study. She connected with her coach primarily by telephone for an average of one hour per session. On a couple of occasions she has met with her coach in person.

Grace’s first exposure to coaching occurred eight or nine years ago when she was working at a company that brought in a consultant to analyse the organization. The
consultant subsequently "...brought in this new philosophy of empowering employees."

Once the company embraced this philosophy, Grace was "...astounded..." by the changes she witnessed:

I just saw people...having control over their own work. I couldn't believe the creativity and how much energy the employees had in order to do their job because they were so proud of what they were doing, and they were allowed to make decisions and the management group were supporting them...So that actually led me to go back to university...because that's what I wanted to do with organizations.

Then when I was finished and working [at a different company]...we had brought in a coach...

Even though Grace knew what coaching was, on the first day, the rest of the group was struggling to understand it. Subsequently:

On the second day, the coach couldn't make it and we brought in this [other] person...and I was just taken aback by her energy and her enthusiasm and the whole philosophy behind coaching...you could see a whole bunch of light bulbs going on and I remember thinking that if I ever have enough money and wanting, you know, [to develop my] leadership style, that this would definitely be the person that I wanted to contact.

She had already determined, without knowing her background that this coach was someone with whom she could work with:

It wasn't like I spent any time with her. It was just the way she modelled the coaching...she truly believes in coaching...she's so positive...She's succeeded in her career, which is something that I would like to emulate...I was so inspired by her.
Grace found out later other details about her coach’s background including her education. She found out that her coach had a business degree and was working on her master’s degree.

A few months later, things changed:

I felt kind of stuck in my job with taking on a lot of responsibility but still an assistant, feeling that I…was ready to take a leap. I was also struggling with my relationship with my boss and I wasn’t particularly sure I knew why or anything…We had, had a great relationship and all of a sudden, in the month of November, things were starting to fall apart…She was accusing me that I was withholding information and …stuff.

It was at this time that Grace started working with the coach whom she aspired to be like:

I can remember it very clearly…I phoned her. I was at a course downtown and I phoned her at the hospitality phone there. And I remember one of the first things was talking about the fact that I wanted to try and work on my relationship with my boss, that things were getting out of hand…I remember her questioning why and just talking a little bit. I did feel a little bit of judgment at that very moment…I think maybe just because I was vulnerable and the relationship hadn’t been established yet. But that quickly disappeared, I think the second time around…and she explained to me that I would feel this way, awkward a little bit, but it didn’t last very long…I guess my expectations were that…she had to be someone I could trust and that’s something that…takes a couple of sessions and she even identified that to me.

Undertaking some self-assessment exercises, aided Grace with the coaching process. “…what I did when we first started the relationship is, there were a couple of worksheets that we had to go through.” Grace was asked to write her autobiography and also answer
questions for the ‘Clean Sweep’ exercise. With this latter exercise, “...you have to look at
different aspects of your life, your financial, your personal...” and place each on a scale,
graph them and “...see where you kind of stand on each of them. And then basically, you set
the agenda. You are to...phone her, email her, or fax her three things that you want to work
on for that day. And you do that and you talk and you get on the phone and you discuss all
three of those...”

In the meantime, Grace “...ended up getting let go at the end of December.” So,
instead of working on her relationship with her boss, Grace ended up working with her coach
on how to deal with being fired:

I mean I was going through a whole slew of emotions...and I knew I was being set
up to be fired....I never thought that I would ever get fired because I have such a
strong work ethic; and I’ve always been extremely loyal to my bosses and such...I’ve
talked to some other people that have been fired and [it] took them a long time to
recover from it.

However, Grace’s coach helped her realize “…that this wasn’t about me. This was about the
organization and the boss that I was working with. And that really helped...she was there to
just keep me uplifted...” and “…she helped keep my head on straight.” Noticing how upset
Grace was, her coach disclosed:

She was put in similar circumstances at one time. And I remember that being a huge
sense of relief just because I knew that [my coach] has made a huge success in her
career...and I thought, okay, I can do this too. So...she was just an incredible source
of strength.
Grace also realized that her coach was the "...force..." behind giving her hope and keeping her "...spirit..." intact. She helped Grace "...to stay strong and see that I shouldn’t fear...going back out there trying to find another job."

After being without work for a couple of months, Grace decided to end the coaching relationship. "...she wasn’t letting me pay her, because I...didn’t have a job. And so I didn’t want to...take advantage of her kindness." After being in her new job after a few months, Grace decided that she wanted to work on her leadership skills again and she wanted to bring coaching to the company. So, she hired the same coach to continue the work that they had started.

An issue that Grace was struggling with prior to the formation of her coaching relationship was "...staying true to my values. I was an accommodator and was often...constantly doing things to accommodate people or whatever and not really meeting my own needs. And I think that got me sidetracked and got [me] into predicaments that I didn’t know how to handle." Grace’s coach helped her with "...a whole process of learning to be true to my values. That was probably one of the greatest things at the very beginning that I learned was if I stay true to my values, then I won’t feel like I’m always getting sidetracked because that seems like a theme in my life." She clarified, "...through my life, I just feel like a lot of times I got off [track]. I kept derailing or whatever, but I feel that I’m more on track than I’ve ever been before." She eventually realized "now I can just say, is this true to my values and if it’s not, then it’s a very easy decision and I feel like I’m on track."

Much of the work that Grace did with her coach involved situations that occurred at her workplace. From exercising diplomacy during meetings involving both employees and management to dealing with the relationship struggle between her boss and herself, Grace...
has been challenged. With regard to her boss, Grace has seen this situation as an opportunity for growth. “I think that I’ve got myself in a situation where I wasn’t totally true to my values and... I wish I’d identified it sooner.” She elaborated “...I’ve got myself in a bit of a predicament. I mean it’s... much more manageable and it’s not disastrous or anything like that.”

Similarly, Grace had been challenged by a performance evaluation “...that did not meet my standards...” Grace’s coach was there to bring some objectivity and expertise to the situation. Regarding the performance evaluation that Grace “…was extremely upset about...” her coach helped her “...stay on course...” and “…had one of her laser informing moments when she asked me if maybe I was in the wrong organization; and at first I said that that was not the case, but it obviously stayed in my subconscious....”

“...over time, things have come to make me realize that I am not in the best fit for an organization. And that’s kind of a neat feeling because probably I would stick it out longer and try to make things work because that’s the type of person I am.” Furthermore, “…it gave me a huge sense of relief just to finally make a decision. So I think sometimes she has that foresight to move me forward.”

At one point, Grace indicated that her coach was “…mentoring...” her while helping her with the preparation of a presentation Grace was to give the staff. Given her expertise in the topic, Grace’s coach gave her some advice, went through it with her, and just helped in general.

Grace especially appreciated that her coach had knowledge of several resources: I cannot believe every time I turn around, it’s something. I was creating a training room and happened to ask if she knew an interior designer and she did... when I was looking for a job, and I was doing information interviews, she gave me a whole list of
people to go meet and [I] met some really interesting people. She hooked me up to a facilitator for a communications course that I organized here for managers and supervisors....She’s provided me with resources and then actually through that, I got a person that is our local lawyer. So she just is a wealth of information.

As her coach got to know Grace better, she observed that Grace did not “…deal with conflict very well…” She had “…advised me to take a couple of courses at the Justice Institute for conflict resolution.” Grace followed through with the courses and was so “…impressed…” by them and “…had so many great experiences…” that she decided to get certified. She noted that she has applied the skills both at work and at home; however, she has approached the two situations differently. That is, she has been more conscious and respectful with her family and friends because “…it’s just a little bit harder dealing with those people than probably at work…” However, it has been highly satisfying. She observed, “…[I] have been able to resolve a lot of personal issues that have been haunting me for several years.”

Grace identified other goals she was working on with her coach. “…moving ahead in my career is one, would like to get into a healthy relationship…” and “…just trying to be the best individual that I can be.”

With regard to her personal life and “…looking for Mr. Right…”, Grace’s coach had her “…do up a wish list which was really neat…” because “…it was based on that person’s values more than on the material stuff….so, it was nice just to be able to actually look on paper and just say, you know, this is not unreasonable, and I should be able to find that.”

In terms of accountability for carrying out her goals, Grace noted that she was not accountable to her coach. Rather, “she’ll ask me how my week was and I can either have done it or not done it. And in some ways, that’s kind of what’s nice about the relationship.”
Likewise, “...if I didn’t get stuff done, it’s like I don’t feel shame when I get on the phone. It’s a relationship based on respect and...I get to set the pace. If I didn’t get it done, then that’s my problem.”

Grace identified other qualities that she appreciated in her coach. “I guess in the relationship, I mean she has been incredibly supportive of me. I have very few adult people in my life that I trust implicitly...” Furthermore, “I don’t like to be judged and I feel very safe with [my coach]. I can basically tell her anything, whether I’ve screwed up or not, I can expect a straight answer from her.” Therefore, “I want someone to be honest and to the point...and [my coach] is like that. She just comes right out and says it and I really appreciate that type of person.”

Grace also mentioned that she had a “…connection...” with her coach. “She is a mentor to me. I mean I see her succeeding in her life, so that’s something that I aspire to be.” In the same way, “…she’s a source of energy to keep me wanting to move in that direction, to get into a position similar to hers.”

In terms of others noticing a change in her since she started coaching, Grace said, “…nobody’s ever told me that...” except for her coach. “I don’t tell a lot of people that I do it actually. I think that’s my business.” However, Grace has noticed how much she has changed “…when I look at some of my journals, stuff or whatever, I see huge changes. So, I know I’ve changed lots. But I don’t necessarily hear from other people.”

When asked if she would have done something different in her coaching relationship, she mentioned, “…maybe I shouldn’t have formed this feeling of friendship with her. I don’t know. In some ways, it feels really nice.” “I almost feel like there’s a dependency on her like I can’t even fathom the thought of not having... a relationship with her. Which I’m not exactly sure that’s what coaching is supposed to be about.”
Related to these thoughts, Grace determined that her coaching relationship would probably end with a friendship between her coach and herself. That is, the relationship had become “...a little less formal...” as their friendship developed. “...in fact...about two or three weeks ago, she asked me if I was still getting value out of our coaching. And I think that was her way of asking whether this was really a coaching session.” At that point, Grace realized how informal their sessions were, “but I think you go through times where you do just kind of need to take a break...because you do change a lot in a week” and taking in all that information “...can be exhausting...”

Nevertheless, Grace has contemplated hiring a different coach. “...I like variety and I like, you know, people come from different angles.” Taking into account the friendship that had developed between Grace and her coach “...there comes a point where you need to almost have someone’s objectivity again and new insight.” These thoughts were reinforced when she encountered another coach. “I think he would make me think in another way...” Grace added not only would the variety in coaches satisfy her personal needs, it would also be helpful for her to understand different coaching styles if she should take up coaching as a career.

Regarding the future, Grace determined that coaching would probably be in her life, in one form or another, for a very long time. “...I don’t see ever not being part of coaching...” However, she had ideas as to the extent that coaching could help her fulfill her goals. “...I have to say that I would have to be in a position where I felt that I was successful in my career, whether that’s being a manager or ultimately, I would like to be coaching, being a consultant...and travelling, and to have a family. I guess that would be ...the pinnacle of coaching.”
In terms of what she would take away with her regarding her experience, Grace commented:

Oh nothing but positive things, great sense of confidence, a real connection to...my spirit or who I am, more of a risk taker than I ever was before...feeling more confident. Feel that I'm heading in a direction that is where I'm meant to be, and living probably life with passion I guess.

Grace's final thoughts about coaching were very positive. Coaching has had such a powerful impact on her life that she was thinking of becoming a coach herself. “It's been the thought of being able to influence people's lives in a positive way and being able to give off and receive all that positive energy. I can't think of a better way to spend my days...” Grace went so far as to take a workshop specifically designed for people to bring coaching into their organizations. “…it was just so neat to be amongst a group of people that are so introspective and wanting to learn, wanting to change, wanting to make other people's lives better.” Furthermore, “…as an HR person, that's what I'm trying to bring into the organization that I'm currently working in. I truly believe if you treat people with respect and you empower them that you'd be amazed by the creativity and ingenuity that these people have.” For Grace, this positive perspective was in large part, attributed to her coach:

[My coach] inspires me all the time...she makes me realize the strengths that I have, that I've always kind of kept at bay or whatever. She keeps bringing out more and more, so makes me feel good about myself; so you just want to share that with other people.

Helen.

Helen is a 35 year old professional who works in a management capacity for a public institution. She is married and the mother of one small child. She has a master’s degree in a
technical profession. At the time of this interview, Helen had been coached for approximately 15 months. Initially, she was in contact with her coach once a week for thirty minutes; however, that had decreased to bi-weekly meetings as the relationship began to wind down.

Helen did not initiate a coaching relationship. Rather, it was her boss who introduced her to coaching and asked her to be coached. “I didn’t actually think I needed a coach and I wasn’t even looking into it. I wasn’t exploring it.” She recalls, “I was basically invited into my boss’s office and told I was getting a coach.” Initially Helen was “…taken aback and I…felt that, oh boy, I must really be a screw up if my boss thinks I need a coach.” However, she was to learn later on that another person in her company was also told this. Her boss then informed her that the real reason she was getting a coach was so that the other person did not “…feel, I guess, picked on.” Helen reasoned that her boss approached her to do this since she was “…quite young compared to the other managers…” and “…thought, well I can get Helen into this…and that this will work out a little better.”

Shortly thereafter, Helen was introduced to her coach. “I wasn’t given a chance to pick my own coach either. I was just given a coach and…this other individual was given the same coach.” This set of circumstances did not help Helen feel any better about being coached. “…as I said, my initial whole feeling about this was one of…resistance and feeling that, oh you know, just feeling badly about it which was unfortunate but that’s the way it was kind of approached.” Helen did get some background information about her coach; however, “…I didn’t at the time question it and I didn’t really think, oh gee, I could get a different coach.” As it turned out, after Helen met with her coach a few times and did some exercises, a positive relationship was forming. “…fortunately for us, we seemed to click and gel….I think that was just really lucky that her and I clicked because the other individual and her did
not click and their coaching didn’t go anywhere.” Helen went so far as to renew her contract with her coach as, “…I was getting quite a bit out of it after I got over the initial...shock of needing a coach.”

At the time that Helen started working with her coach, she was “…feeling overwhelmed by work...” and she realized later on “…also by my personal life.” With regard to work:

…I had lost a couple of key people in our department and I was looking...to hire new people and so anyway, at that very moment I think my boss probably was quite smart about getting me a coach, but I just don’t think it was sort of presented the right way at the beginning.

Before she had a coach, Helen had some methods in place to deal with the imbalance she felt with work and her personal life. This was precipitated by two events. The first one was related to work. She mentioned that she had difficulty separating work from her personal life. “…even if I’m only working 40 hours a week, I’m still stressed out at home about it. I may not actually be working, but I’m...preoccupied and it wasn’t healthy...” As an example this realization was evidenced when Helen found herself with a tight deadline to get a proposal submitted:

…anyways it was a huge rush on for this project we were working on and we got it to the granting agency just in the nick of time....the next day I woke up feeling this major tightness in my chest....and I didn’t even clue in that it was related to the proposal....I went to my doctor and I said I don’t know if I’ve got a cold or a virus or what but...I don’t feel I can breathe...

Helen’s doctor then asked her what was going on in her life and so she told the doctor “…a little bit about work...” After checking Helen:
...she said 'I think it's a panic attack'...I'm like holy! And it took me about two or three days just to get back to the feeling like I could get enough air in; and so that was a really big flag that you know I'm taking life way too seriously and...it's affecting me...at those subconscious levels that will lead to sickness and illnesses.

She told herself, "...nothing is that important. So that was a good heads up."

The birth of her daughter was another significant catalyst in her life. "...it actually kicked me out of...that zone and...enabled me to balance and focus more on you know that...there [are] other things going on in life rather than work. And then the coaching just kind of pulled it all together."

Pulling it together involved Helen looking at her situation through a series of exercises that her coach gave her to do. "...I kind of got a grip on the fact that, yeah I was feeling overwhelmed..." To be specific:

We started with a 'Clean Sweep' [evaluation] and then we did a little bit of personality testing to see if my personality kind of fit my job and that was really great to find out that it did. So that wasn't the reason why I was feeling overwhelmed. It wasn't because it was a bad match personality-wise to job. And then I did a three-sixty feedback; and so I got feedback from my peers, from my clients, from my boss and that was probably one of the pivotal pieces to this whole coaching because I got a lot of feedback about what I was doing right and I [got] a lot of feedback about areas that needed improvement...I went from feeling like I was doing a really bad job to realizing that I'm hardest on myself and that actually people...and more than one or two but the whole group felt, overall, things were going really well....So I think just confidence-wise, I started feeling a lot better and it also helped focus on a couple of
areas that did need to be worked on and so that’s where [my coach] and I started, focusing in on the areas that we could...that I needed to improve.

In general, Helen and her coach focused on management skills since she never had any formalized training or experience in this area. “...my training is actually...in technical things, not people things...” One of the major management skills that Helen worked on was team building. “...I...started having one-on-one meetings with my staff which I’d never done before...” As well, “...that whole feedback loop started happening and we’d make a change and then we’d see how it went and then we’d talk about it again and...modify it again.” The process or teambuilding occurred over an eight-month period. In the meantime, new people were hired to the organization and the challenge “...was trying to integrate them into our team...” Previous to having a coach, Helen commented that her team of people did an exercise that determined people’s different motivation styles. As a team they decided that the newly hired team members “...needed to have this training and that we would all do it together and sort of team-build.” Helen’s coach was then brought in to specifically take them through a team-building exercise. “...the reason I bring this up in terms of coaching is because I don’t think these things would have really occurred to me as being necessary or how useful they are without [my coach’s] feedback and coaching.”

Another skill that Helen developed with her coach was the ability to build support: It took a lot of coaching to get me into the delegation zone, allowing people to take over and to do things...That was one of my big areas of improvement [since I] was coming from a technical background and also from the point of view I just like to do things myself.

Helen was especially pleased with the development of this skill. “...I’ve gotten very good at delegating and trying to utilize the resources I have to make myself more effective and then
to also make everybody else feel like they've got important jobs to do as well. So I'd say that was a very big bonus.” In the process of building support, Helen also hired an administrative assistant and:

...I got an office that’s...closed in....I can get work done and not be disturbed by, you know, twenty people and all their wants and needs on a...24 hour basis....So very practical things like that as well to support what I’m trying to do instead of trying to do everything myself.”

She also found that the closed in office helped her learn “...how to set...boundaries.”

Helen also learned how to “...be a bit more emotionally stable about work going right or going wrong.” That is, “....instead of wanting things to be fixed immediately, I just started realizing that things take time to achieve and so I look at things now as mountains to be climbed and that there is a goal at the top and that you know we’re moving towards it.”

Contributing to this emotional stability, Helen found she was “...not getting frustrated by the fact that, hey, we haven’t done it today.” She realized, “we’ve got to plan out.... certain things are going to take time and as long as we’re moving towards the goal, and making progress, that removes my frustration level.”

Interest in developing a clearer awareness and understanding of what was going on in Helen’s world started previous to coaching; and personal development was something that Helen was interested in previous to having a baby. She used to read inspirational books:

I’d spend a bit of time reading and reflecting and trying to integrate some of these things into my life....you think you’ve got it. And that makes so much sense and then you...go to sleep, Monday morning comes up and you know...when the, excuse the expression, when the shit hits the fan, how are you integrating what you’ve just read into how you are dealing with what’s going on....I think the coaching piece really
helped integrate from just sort of intellectually knowing what I should be doing and actually turning that into experience....it’s moved into being integrated into who I am and that to me has been a really valuable change because you can continually read and you can continually intellectually understand what you need to do. But to have somebody help you actually turn that into reality, I think is a very valuable piece that the coach, my coach, helped me do.

Subsequently, the insights and skills that Helen developed over the year, with her coach’s help, gave her a great sense of satisfaction. “...I really feel that although we’ve come a long way, I feel that...it’d be nice to have this group operating at the level it’s operating at for another year.” Helen observed “...just seeing what we can achieve instead of having spent all this time overcoming obstacles and getting us to a point where, okay, we’re functioning well...” was something she had been looking forward to.

Her coach, however, had Helen thinking of other possibilities. Even though Helen had successfully mastered some management skills, her coach thought that she should be “...ready for the next opportunity that comes up...” Her coach “...warned...” her that being prepared for that opportunity was “...being proactive about it so that I’m not sucked into somebody else’s idea of what it is that I should be doing...” Helen had seen this herself: I see it happening, you know, to lots of people where...you’re in a job and things are going well and somebody maybe sees that and tries to recruit you into another job that perhaps isn’t what you really want to be doing....So, anyway, that’s just kind of something in the back burner just to make sure I don’t take on a position that’s going to make me feel, you know, miserable or take me away from what it is that I really like to do.
Helen said that it had been really difficult to think about the possibility of another job, “…I’m really enjoying this opportunity and…what I’m doing sort of fulfills a lot of the needs I have…” Nevertheless, Helen had thought about the future and identified the kind of work she would like to do as well as to where she would like to work next.

Regardless of the hesitancy she felt at the time, the goal of being prepared for future opportunities became prevalent in several of the action plans that Helen worked on with her coach and colleagues. Helen’s coach had her think about “…finding a protégé, somebody that, if I do leave…I don’t want things to fall apart; so trying to ensure the whole team is on board and that we have systems in place so that if any one of us leaves, we’re still functioning.”

This plan had slowly taken shape in the form of a “…vision document…” which included the above-mentioned goal as well as another goal that included “…raising the level of [the] group…” with the aim of “…dealing with important issues and dealing with clients that have a chance of making our work go farther.” Helen and her coach did not work on the vision document on their own. “…this is also something that I’m soliciting input from the whole team on to kind of say, look, this is where we’re at, this is where we want to be.” Or, in other words “…where’s the gap and how are we going to bridge that gap? And so we’ve been looking at implementing various processes and it’s been extremely interesting because it’s gotten everybody thinking about that sort of thing…”

The vision document is “…the final piece…” that Helen would be working on with her coach before their contract ended. As in the beginning, Helen did not have input as to when she would have ended their coaching relationship. This was “…somewhat dictated by my boss just in terms of how much funding he wanted to spend on coaching for individual people.”
That is not to say that Helen’s boss did not find coaching beneficial. He:

...has said on several occasions that he thought that the coaching has been very valuable and he’s seen the changes that I’m making professionally and personally and he feels that...it’s been a very positive impact. He hasn’t really given me specifics. He’s just said, in general, on several occasions that that’s how he feels.

Helen had also received indirect feedback about the coaching experience from her team:

...I think that’s probably bigger than what my...boss has noticed. I would say what the team has noticed [is] I don’t feel as frazzled. I don’t feel as overwhelmed; and when a problem arises, it takes a lot more for me to be, you know, I’ve got a longer fuse.

This realization had been important in terms of role modelling:

That, I think, does have a spill over effect onto the rest of the team. I mean, you know, if you’re the boss and something goes wrong and you know you aren’t dealing with it very well, it’s pretty hard to ask other people to be dealing with it. So, yeah, that’s been a nice side benefit.

Helen also received other indirect feedback from her team, which she identified as a “...legacy...” from coaching. “...there’s several individuals that I’m working with now in my team that are getting coached.” She was certain that her experiences with her coach were related to their decision because “...if they didn’t see a difference [in] me, ...I don’t know what would motivate them to have coaching themselves...” The individuals who did get coaching did not use the services of Helen’s coach. Helen made it clear that “...they should check around and find a person that fits their personality.” Furthermore, some of these
individuals demonstrated their commitment to the process by using “…their own professional development funds to take this on.”

When asked about the nature of her relationship with her coach in terms of the coach’s roles, Helen found “what I really needed was somebody that was objective, not tied into my life emotionally…” Helen also found that her coach “…did do some mentoring as well and I think that’s again probably due to where I was coming…from.” She explained, “if I had been the one to actively seek out coaching, and I knew exactly what it was I wanted to work on…then I think it’s more of a coaching relationship. But in this case, it was my boss that thought I needed it.”

In this capacity, Helen observed that her coach gave her “…direction and tools to try and help me achieve what it was I wanted to achieve…” Helen initially found identifying what she wanted to achieve was difficult. She attributed this not knowing “…due to [her] lack of education and experience on…the management side.” In this respect, Helen observed that her coach “…provided some window of experience…that I didn’t have from anybody else, even my own boss.”

Coaching not only had a positive effect at work but also in Helen’s personal life. Even though Helen thought that things were going well at home in terms of arrangements for childcare (her husband looks after their daughter) and finances, her coach reminded her that she could not separate her professional life from her personal life. Upon further reflection, Helen discovered that:

…one of the biggest bonuses about this coaching has been…I used to come home sometimes from work and carry work home with me and be unable to enjoy [my daughter] because I’m, you know, preoccupied and stressed out about something going on at work; whereas, now …I guess it’s that emotional stability.
Helen realized that she had a "...shift in perspective that you know, work isn't everything....if something goes wrong with work, it's not the end of the world." She observed, "I can't remember the last time that I wasn't able to...ensure work didn't infiltrate in a negative way at home." Therefore, she was able to be present for her daughter not only "...physically but...mentally and emotionally..." as well. "There's a whole other scenario going on that requires my attention and I'm able to give it to her, which has been really nice."

Helen also found that since she had put things in perspective and she had a "...supportive situation going on at home..." she was able to take time for herself as well "...because you can't just be constantly working and then constantly contributing at home. You need to have that time to rejuvenate and renew and restore..." She did this by fitting some form of exercise into her routine. She found:

...that really helps smooth everything out, because if [I] did have a bad day, you know, going up and even just skiing for an hour would...really [boost] the endorphins and make [me] feel good and [I would] come home and have a good night's sleep and then get up and deal with it in the morning.

Additionally, she found that taking up the practice of yoga at the same time as coaching, particularly strengthened everything, and she attributed part of the shift in perspective to that.

For Helen, the experience of coaching had been very positive and even though her coaching relationship was nearing the end, she felt "...I've got a lot of things that I could spend a lot more time working on. Helen predicted:

There might be a time when I go and hire my own coach, but I feel that there's so much that [my coach has] given me in terms of tools and things to work on that I'm not needing anymore at the moment. So I think it makes sense to have this as an end point.
Mary.

Mary is a 48 year-old professional business woman. She is the single mother of two grown daughters. At the time of this interview, she had been coached for approximately 12 months. Coaching sessions were conducted three times a month for thirty minutes over the telephone.

At the time coaching entered Mary’s life, things were not great at home or work:
That was when I was having so much conflict with [my boss] and I was having a lot of conflict at home with my daughter. So things were not great and my life was definitely out of balance where all I really did was either worked or I took care of my daughter and focused on her.

With regard to work, Mary said “...I’ve always been a high producer. People trust me, people like me. People know they can give me a job and I will complete the job. However, unbeknownst to Mary, her confidence would be tested by the turn of events that would follow.

Just over a year ago, Mary had a new boss to whom she reported. It became quickly apparent, however, that this relationship was not working for either of them. “...there was this major disconnect between [my boss] and I...to the point...where out of the blue one day, she gave me a performance letter which absolutely shocked me.”

Mary was feeling a lot of pressure with her new boss prior to the performance letter. The “...disconnect...” was evident in the difficulty both Mary and her boss had in communicating with each other.

She would talk to me and give me directions on things that she wanted to have done, and I swear that I was in Germany and she was talking to me in German....she wasn’t
talking to me the way that I understood what it was that she wanted, so I was constantly failing her expectations, not meeting her expectations.

It was at this same time that, “a couple of my staff members came to her [Mary’s boss] and were very upset with me and didn’t feel that I was a good manager and all that kind of stuff.” Mary was bewildered:

[I was] shocked and hurt that my staff didn’t like me because I felt I bent over backwards for them. But upon reflection, I realize the amount of pressure I was under....my relationship with [my boss] caused me to be somebody who I really am not. So anyways, so that started the ball rolling with coaching. I knew and [my boss] knew that if I didn’t get some outside help, that I wasn’t going to make it at [this company], that I would end up losing my job quite honestly.

Mary knew a bit about coaching previous to the performance review she had with her boss. Her boss “...introduced coaching into the organization probably [in] January or February...” and was just completing her coach certification. At that time, Mary had difficulty understanding the coaching concepts, as the manner in which they were presented did not match her learning style. “ I couldn’t catch on to the concepts through reading a book, through somebody saying to me, you know, here are the five steps. Just do the five steps.” However, Mary knew that she had to do something in order to save her job:

In that conversation where she was telling me that she was unhappy with my performance, I said to her, you know, I want to do well. I’m committed to this company and to my growth. What do I need to do, you know, what about coaching? What if I said I’m not understanding the steps of coaching...I want to use coaching for my staff, but I can’t get it from reading a book. So would you be willing to hire
me a coach... So that was part of that conversation. I guess it was, you know, a mutual... thing.

The coach who was hired turned out to be her boss's coach. "You know... at the time [it] made me nervous because I thought, oh my God, I'm going to be telling her stuff about [my boss] that, you know, maybe she doesn't want to hear..." For this reason, "...the first conversation we had was kind of... a trial conversation and I just found her to be warm and inspiring and right from the get go, I really liked her..." Mary did look up her coach's background on her website and found out that "...she's got her MBA..." Mary found this advantageous "...with me being strongly business-minded, I liked that..." All in all, the beginning of the coaching relationship was very positive. "So I had a conversation with [my coach], explained to her, I put everything on the table and we started to move through it."

In terms of a format for the coaching sessions, Mary explained, "...in the beginning I had... this form that I always fill out, you know. What do I want to talk about, what do I want to achieve. All that kind of stuff. And that quickly went away." The format became less formal. "...I would call and she'd say, okay, so what's up? And it was just basically what's top of mind. What's going on for you right now that you want to talk about..." Mary found these questioning techniques very effective. "...there have been times where the 'ah-ha's have been phenomenal... where she just asks the question and like the penny drops and I'm like, oh my God! Look at what I'm doing." To further define this feeling, Mary commented:

I can't even tell you because when it happens, it's almost like it reverberates all through my body. Like I get it at such a cellular level... cause lots of times I'll end the conversation with her and I won't have a clue of what we talked about.

Mary gave an example of this occurrence:
If I’m talking to her about anxiety or where my fear is or something like that, when I have something pressing... her question will be something like, ‘so what’s the advantage for you having that anxiety in this moment?’ And I’ll go, oh my God, and then I’ll realize what it is... what I’m recognizing is the anxiety that I create at work prevents me from feeling the pain [in my personal life]. So she’s helped me recognize, you know, don’t hang on to that anxiety because it doesn’t help you at work.

While she was working on understanding herself better, Mary did a “…coaching communication style…” exercise that was essential to understanding what was going on between her boss and herself. “…probably one of the key turning points was when we realized that I’m a director and [my boss] is a mediator…” Mary’s coach then started to coach her with these two different styles in mind. For example, she would say to Mary:

This is how [your boss] is going to need information from you and this is where [your boss] is coming from, and put yourself in [your boss’s] shoes, and what do you think she needs and wants from you? She’s new in her role. She’s nervous too. She’s putting a lot of expectations on you. So what do you need to do... in order to help her fulfill her expectations? So she allowed me to have that mind shift and it didn’t take long.

Mary also found that having the same coach as her boss was not such a bad thing:
I think it actually worked to my advantage and maybe to [my boss’s] advantage and that [the coach] could hear from my side of the story, what was going on with me, so when she was talking to [my boss], if [she] brought my name up, I would assume that she had an opportunity to help [my boss] with me and vice-versa.
Eventually Mary and her boss were able to work out a system that fulfilled both of their needs:

What I started to do with her was, it was important to her that every time we had a meeting...I recapped the meeting in writing and that I recapped what my commitments were and what the move forwards were; and as long as I did that and I kept her in the loop, she started to relax and realized this person’s extremely competent and does a good job.

As part of the feedback Mary received from having gone through many changes, her boss told her “...[I] was her most challenging branch manager...and she had the most to learn from me...” Mary realized then “…in retrospect, I’ve moved more into a mediator style and she’s moved more into the director style which she needed to be in her job. She needed to be more laser and let’s just get to the bottom line...so it’s been interesting the way the transition has worked.”

Once Mary was able to improve the communication patterns between her boss and herself, she was able to translate this new self-understanding into other goals. She realized:

As a director, I was doing a lot of telling and not much listening. And through using coaching, I don’t do much telling anymore because what I realized is I want my goal...to be such that I coach myself out of a job, that my employees become so competent in their role that they no longer need me; but it’s never going to happen. But that’s my goal and if I always keep that in the forefront of my thinking then, you know, it’s up to me to make sure that they’re making independent decisions, that they have the support of me to make sure that...they follow through on those decisions.

A lot of the changes that occurred in Mary’s management style happened within a span of a couple of months and were noticed by people outside of her immediate work
environment. "...a significant turnaround..." occurred when she got a call from the director of the company asking if she wanted to go out of town for an extended period of time "...to help out the branch there hire a branch manager, train the people and really get things rolling there..." Mary rose to the opportunity.

In her own office, Mary observed that coaching helped her staff members and the company's retention rate. "...our industry has a very high turnover. Probably a branch will have 50 to 60 per cent turnover; and last year I only lost two people who resigned because if they didn't, they were going to end up getting let go." Given that set of circumstances, "we actually now...coach people out of the organization instead of letting them quit or firing them. It's just...easier; but that is an incredible feat that I've been able to coach my staff."

As another measure of success, Mary noted "...quite a few of my staff members last year got promoted...which I think says a lot for the growth of me as a manager and my ability to coach people and have them be comfortable..."

In the meantime, Mary has continued to access the services of her coach. She has found her coach to be very helpful in developing business formats for different projects that come up:

I'll call her and I'll say, I've got this huge project to do, don't know where to start.

I'm in absolute overwhelm...she's actually helped me to put things into smaller pieces or she's given me a framework or a structure to work within. She's helped me a lot in those areas.

As well, Mary's coach has helped her work through new "...business procedures..." that have arisen as the result of a new role Mary assumed. "I'm in a lot of meetings, boardroom meetings with 10, 12, 15 people...I'm the new kid on the block in this group..."

She told her coach:
I don’t get the politics that happen because you’ve got customers and you’ve got internal people and people at different levels right up to our ‘v. p.’s and president, so you know, I don’t want to get stuck into politics. So she’s kind of walked me through those issues...how do I find my voice in this really big group being the youngest...in tenure.

Mary had found that her coach’s experience and business acumen were very helpful. In the form of a “...personal frame...” Mary’s coach would say “...you know what, when I was in that situation, this is what I did.”

Mary determined that the coaching she received around such issues “...really helped me with...building my confidence...” That is:

Helping me to move from, I need the world to tell me that I’m okay to you know instinctively that you’re okay, and trusting that place and moving from that place which is a more powerful place...so that’s one thing that we’re still in the process of doing...but that’s one piece that she’s really helped me shift into. And I wasn’t even consciously aware of it either. So it...would have gone on undiscovered for a long time probably.

Closely associated with this discovery was the observation that Mary had become “...more consciously aware of what I’m doing, you know and why am I doing it.” Furthermore, “...I’ve really come to understand what my core values are and where I will and will not break them.”

Some of the goals that Mary worked on with her coach overlapped with situations that were taking place in Mary’s personal life. “...I tend to be a fairly controlling person, so regarding my daughter who’s 19, you know, she’s walked me through the steps of letting her go and letting her make her decisions...” thereby “...releasing me from the burden of
thinking that I need to do all of this stuff for her. You know, she’s walked me through that and I also correlate with my staff, as well, that strong sense of responsibility that I have.” Mary indicated that this sense of responsibility, “…if on a spectrum, it’s probably way off on the other end which is not a good place.” Her coach has “…been able to walk [her] through…” that as well.

Mary had noticed that her coaching experience benefited her personal life in other ways:

I was driving in the car with my youngest daughter and she says to me, so mom, what needs to happen in order for me to have a job at [your company] this summer? And I just looked at her and went….thinking she’s laughing, she’s joking about this, and she was dead serious, dead serious, so then we had this conversation.

Her colleagues made similar observations:

Even my staff members have told me that they now use coaching with their children. So it really has, within our organization, it’s really filtered through the organization and now it’s filtering into our personal lives and our family and friends and stuff.

In terms of highlights or lowlights experienced in the coaching process, Mary identified an incident with her coach that was a blend of both. “…one time I called and I was…sick, my kids were sick, things were crappy…” When Mary’s coach asked her how things were going, Mary began to talk about how unpleasant things were for her. Her coach interrupted Mary “…and she goes, stop right there. I only want to hear positive things…” Mary was taken aback by this response and thought to herself, “…you know what? I just want to fucking bitch, excuse my French. I just want to bitch for a minute and you’re not letting me…I was just like, this is mine and I pay for it and this is how I want it!” However, Mary acquiesced. “So I sat for a few minutes and then I got into some positive things and
then it was a great session. But, oh, was I mad!...at the end, I realized that what she did was probably the best thing she could have done...

Given all the coaching experiences thus far, Mary described her coach as someone who was “...definitely a mentor, supportive...when I talk to her, I let me guard down like 100 per cent.” She also commented on the uniqueness of her relationship. “...I don’t have anybody else in my life that I can say, okay this is how I really feel, you know....she’s my rock that I know I can rely on.”

In terms of personal outcomes, Mary observed, “...I would definitely say, you know, my confidence is higher....I’m definitely happier. I’m more content...sometimes I could have some highs and lows. I don’t seem to have those like I used to. I’m definitely more grounded.”

With this newfound confidence, Mary had been able “...to make outrageous requests” or in other words, take risks. For example, Mary explained:

We have a posting for a regional manager out in the Maritimes and I’ve applied for the position, which was scary because the last time I applied for a position a year ago, [my boss] was really upset with me and that’s one of the things that I think started this ball rolling between her and I. Anyway, this particular posting, she’s behind me on it. However, Mary thought that she could probably use some help with interview preparation. Therefore, she said to her boss who was familiar with the coaching language:

I have a real outrageous request....I’m going to be spending some time over the weekend preparing for my interview on Monday. Would you help me with those preparations from the regional manager’s perspective? And she just looked at me and she went, ‘yeah, I would!’
In terms of future goals concerning coaching and when her coaching relationship might end, Mary said, "...I actually asked her that a couple of weeks ago...I still think I have a way to go because I don’t have that life balance yet...I think I still need to work on life balance...and that’s what we’re working on right now...” That is, Mary’s coach would give her a homework assignment designed specifically to address life balance issues. "...she’ll say...make sure you have one outside contact a day. So like call a girlfriend or go and have coffee with somebody and you know...it’s a stretch...”

On a final note there Mary offered a particular observation she made regarding coaching in comparison to psychotherapy. Since she had some experience with psychotherapy, she observed:

Coaching is moving forward, kind of being in the moment and moving forwards; whereas, psychotherapy tends to be more about, well let’s take a look at this behaviour. Where did the behaviour come from? Oh yeah, mom used to hit me as a kid. Okay, well let’s investigate those feelings. We’ve got to get those feelings out and then we can move ahead.

She recognized with her coach that, "...I’ve moved more personally in my growth with her in a year than I have with some of my psychotherapists.”

Rainbow.

Rainbow is a 39 year old professional businesswoman. She is single and has two children. At the time of this interview, she had been coached for seven months with no indication of ending in the near future. Coaching sessions would occur once a week for 30 minutes over the telephone.

Rainbow was initially introduced to coaching by her coach. They had a former connection in that they “...did workshops together” unrelated to coaching. Realizing that
Rainbow was in the process of developing five businesses, her present coach suggested that she might need someone to help organize them. Rainbows first thoughts were “well I wasn’t really sure if it was going to be meeting my needs...” but decided to give it a try.

When she was first introduced to the design of the coaching relationship, Rainbow soon realized that it would be different from the relationship they previously had in conducting workshops. She found with her coach “…the very beginning of it was a bit offsetting because she has really strict boundaries and not that I think that they’re incorrect or anything, but I was just thinking, wow, they’re just really strict; and I don’t live my life that way, which is not to say that I don’t need to set more boundaries which I probably could.”

Rainbow also observed that her coach’s ethics were different from her own. For example:

If she doesn’t get paid for it, she doesn’t do it. And I’m sort of the person that if it’s my integrity, I’ll do it whether I’m getting paid or not. So it’s just a bit of difference, and I thought well maybe that’s going to come over and come into it and we’re going to have a little bit of difference.

Regardless of these observations, the relationship progressed since Rainbow pointed out, “well I don’t believe the first impression is anything. It’s not the end all, be all. And I thought, well I’m going to give it a try, an honest try because [my coach] is very open, honest, forthcoming.” Furthermore “…I didn’t feel it necessary to bring this up to her because those are my reservations going into it so I’m fully aware of them…that’s my responsibility.” Nevertheless, Rainbow was prepared to address her coach if she perceived that it interfered with their relationship. “…you know you can tell within two or three times how something’s going to go or not. And I do believe the first impression really isn’t the whole person.”
With respect to her coach's credentials and experience, Rainbow knew from their previous work together that her coach had a background in psychology. She made it very clear, however, that even though she appreciated her education, "...to me they [degrees] don't always reflect what you are and what your capabilities are." However, "I did like that she knew about [psychology] and we had some of the same background." After wrestling a bit more as to whether her educational background or her experiences mattered most in the coaching relationship, Rainbow chose the latter. "...it was just her practical experience that I liked."

With those thoughts in the back of her mind, Rainbow began working on the organization of her businesses with her coach. The challenge was to keep each of her businesses separate but at the same time realize that there would be some overlap in terms of the same services that were employed to run the businesses. In the same way, having five different businesses to tend to all at once required a lot of energy and concentration:

It was just making sure that I... was very organized, that I didn't spend my time doing one thing and then going to another to another. I would finish a project and then go on or [I would] set enough time that I could accomplish the individual [task].

Rainbow explained that it was important to have various businesses operating at the same time, as they were reflective of the need and desire for variety in her life. "I have to be balanced... I couldn't work in a bank and that's all I'd do. I could work in a bank if you let me draw all the posters and do the graphics or something." Therefore, for Rainbow, balance was synonymous with variety.

In addressing the major goal of organizing her businesses, Rainbow observed that the format for the coaching sessions followed a specific pattern:
Well she gives me a prep form. Then I fill out the prep form...She reads it. Then I call her and then we go through it and I think one question is, what do you want to focus on in our session tonight or today, and then I put something, and then we go on that. But we touch on...some of the other things that I’ve done and not done and then where am I going to go next week and do I want to set goals. Do I want to attain them and I can’t and can [if I choose].

As well, she appreciated that the prep forms did not need to be strictly adhered to or filled out in their entirety every week. Rainbow sometimes left parts of her prep form blank when she found there was nothing to add. In the same token, when she was busy with “...other stuff...” new goals were not added “...because the other stuff that I’m doing takes too much time.” Therefore, every week, Rainbow would “…focus on the most important [goal] and go from there.”

In between sessions, Rainbow only used faxes and emails with her coach when something important came up. “…she says I can do more if I want, but I don’t find it necessary…I don’t want it to become a crutch.” Rainbow also appreciated that her coach was flexible in rescheduling coaching sessions, especially if Rainbow had something important that she was working on that could benefit from coaching.

As part of her coaching experience, Rainbow came to realize that working on the goal of organizing each business would require acknowledging any past issues that might arise from this activity. “…I had a really hard time discovering or acknowledging what all my abilities were” since they were so closely associated with past traumatic events. “So that’s what we ended up working on.”

Upon closer examination of the abilities issue, Rainbow found that she was “…a little bit afraid to go out.” That is, since she was the sole proprietor of her many businesses, she
had to go out into the business world to market and promote them which was a bit
intimidating for her. Therefore, with regard to her abilities, “...I had to be sure that I could
use them” because it “...brought up a lot of things.” Eventually, with the help of her coach,
Rainbow decided it was “...just something I decided to get over.” She had to make the
decision to separate her abilities from all that had gone on before in her life.
Her coach helped her with this transition by providing a lot of “...validation...” in which
Rainbow was able to take more risks. Rainbow’s coach suggested that she “...open up and
just tell people the truth” after examining what would be “...the worst thing in the world...”
that could happen from doing this. After following through on this suggestion, Rainbow
realized that she could open up in a “...safe environment...” and that was dependent on
“...choosing the right arena.”

Rainbow’s work was further validated by the negotiated terms that she and her coach
agreed on for payment of services. “...instead of me actually giving her money, I exchange
what my abilities are.” For example, Rainbow would utilize her creative abilities to design
something that her coach needed for her business. In return, her coach would validate this
work with genuine comments such as “...that was great. You did really well with that. I
really like that. I know someone who could use that.” Rainbow found that this arrangement
equalized their relationship. “It’s not like someone saying...uh-huh, yeah, yeah. I’ve heard
it all before. In my opinion you should do this. It’s not that kind of thing...” That is, the
duality of their roles reinforced the genuineness and equality of the relationship.

Another issue that came up for Rainbow was realizing, with her coach’s help, that she
placed herself under a lot of unnecessary pressure. She would tell herself, “...oh God, I’ve
got to learn more. I’ve got to do more. I’ve got to keep running, running to catch up.”
Eventually, Rainbow realized “...there’s nothing to catch up with...”
These realizations were made possible by the type of relationship Rainbow and her coach formed:

I find that it's a professional relationship in the fact that there's boundaries. I respect the time. She respects the time that I call. It's not spoken to other people...and it's on the same level. I'm not spoken down to. I don't speak down to her. It's respectful...I like things to work smoothly and it always has. You know if I have a problem and can't make a session or something, [she will] say alright, we'll just redo it or rework it.

Rainbow also found that her coach was “...like somebody that you know that just let's you be what you'd be but also points out, 'you know, I don't think you're really getting the direction that you want to go in. I think you need to go a little over here'.” That is, her coach introduced her to different perspectives that, “you can't always see...yourself.”

She found these different perspectives easier to accept and think about because of the type of relationship she and her coach had with each other. That is, it was less personal than the other supportive relationships she had and therefore “...it works a lot better.”

One of the unique characteristics of this relationship was the opportunity for Rainbow to “...check in...” with her coach regarding what she was doing and what she had accomplished. She was able to say to her coach, “okay I've completed this, I've done this, I'm moving here.” It was an activity that she later identified as a highlight of her coaching experience. Additionally, Rainbow found value in the brainstorming and problem-solving activities that her coach introduced to help move her forward.

Upon reflection of the coaching experience to this point, Rainbow noticed that she had become “…a lot more directed.” Before she started coaching, she thought that she might have to concentrate on fewer businesses; however, “…I've figured out a way to do all of
them to keep myself happy and not apologize that I like to do five different things... It's funny 'cause I was pretty together before, but I think I'm really fabulously together now."

When asked if she would change anything, Rainbow thought that she could have used hour long sessions instead of 30 minutes. "If it was an hour long, then I would address a couple more things..." This length of time would suit her work ethic and productivity cycle as she would rather work than sleep. "...I literally wouldn't sleep if I didn't have to." "...even though I physically like to sleep, it just wastes time. I could be doing stuff..."

When she thought about other things that she might like to change, Rainbow spoke about the prep forms. Rainbow would try to determine whether her coach actually read these forms or not by putting something out of the ordinary on the form just to get a response. For example, on one of her prep forms where it asked what she accomplished that week, Rainbow would write "...had sex last night." She said that she had done this in the past with various individuals, but it was basically for the same reason. "...one of the things I like to do that for is to see if she's really reading it..." Then Rainbow went on to say "to be really honest, I don't think she gives the prep form enough time. She looks at it two minutes before she gets me on the phone, and I don't think she has enough time to absorb it. So that's what I would like changed. To be quite honest. It's not the time we have on the phone [as mentioned previously]."

When asked to identify any specific highlights or lowlights of the coaching experience, Rainbow spoke about the method of communication that was used between her coach and herself. She identified that the telephone had both advantages and disadvantages. In terms of an advantage, she gave an example. "...if I'm driving my girls to school and I'm not home in time, I can call her on the cell and go okay, we're starting. You know, I'm on
my way home... it's very convenient.” In terms of a disadvantage, Rainbow missed the physical connection. “...I like watching people's body language and the reactions.”

In terms of when she thought her coaching relationship would end, Rainbow was not sure. She realized that it might move into a different phase “...a natural progression to some other level” where “...she’s no longer coaching me...” but assumes a different role. Rainbow pointed out, however, that the different role would not be therapeutic in nature. She really liked the current relationship she had with her coach and found the support essential at this time. “...it's so neat to just say, hey, look I've finished this. I did it.” She found “it keeps me on track.”

Rainbow intimated that the coaching relationship would not change until she had some other supports in place such as hiring staff. Rainbow found that her coach’s “...unbiased...,” “...caring...,” “...nonjudgmental...,” “...neutral...,” “...logical...,” and “...supportive...” nature were qualities that she appreciated very much and therefore did not see the coaching relationship ending anytime soon. It “...may be years [before] the actual coaching would be gone but it would have developed to some other level. I don’t know.”

When asked about future changes and what that would look like, Rainbow commented that her businesses would be “...all running really, really well. Not smooth, ‘because that’s not...a reality but I mean on top of it.” With the help of her coach, Rainbow had come to the point where “everything’s all set. It’s already to go. But I just have to do it.”

Upon final reflection, Rainbow commented on the whole coaching concept:

I think the word coaching is new, but I don’t think coaching is new...it’s along the same lines as mentoring that a lot of other stuff people set up for themselves along the
way, you know, in life. It’s like if you ask a grandma or a great grandmother, they
would call it something else, but they would say we were doing that anyway.

She found:

The whole process is...to empower you; and my whole goal in life is to empower the
people around me. So it’s really cool to be empowered myself. So that’s what I think
coaching is. It’s empowering the other person to be the best that they can be.

Rainbow also went so far as to compare coaching to therapy:

I like it because it’s not therapy. It’s not, well you have to go through this hard thing
now, so just feel it, just go through it...I’m not mocking it....They’re not your
therapist, whether she has a degree in psychology or not, that’s not...I mean it helps,
[since] ...she can say, well you know what I’m going through, she can relate to.

However, Rainbow pointed out that coaching was “…on a much higher level.” She
explained that a coach was “…somebody that’s an intellectual...that’s the same level.
There’s no up or down...” Whereas therapy, she observed, did not share that equality.

All in all, Rainbow was glad that she started coaching. She said, “it’s worked out
really well. I’m accomplishing a lot.” As for others who might enquire about her coaching
experience, that is the message that she conveys to them.

The Comprehensive Narrative

The comprehensive narrative is representative of the common and unique
experiences of coaching as described by the six participants in this study. As each aspect of
the phenomenon of their experiences is portrayed, I have highlighted the themes that
emerged through the repeated process of scanning the transcribed protocols. The resultant
narrative is presented in a loosely chronological order signifying a beginning, middle and end
of the coaching experience. Direct quotes from participants have been used to illuminate the meaning of each identified theme.

**The Coaching Experience**

For the individuals who participated in this study, they experienced various levels of dissatisfaction with different aspects of their lives prior to coaching. "Things were not great, and my life was definitely out of balance where all I really did was either worked or I took care of my daughter and focused on her;" "as working parents, it's been pretty difficult to balance what we consider a really good balanced lifestyle;" "I was feeling overwhelmed with work;" "I'm preoccupied and it wasn't healthy;" "through my life I just feel a lot of times I got off track;" "you've got to have balance in your life. I think if you work too much, I'm not sure that's a healthy thing."

Correspondingly, participants' level of awareness of the need to change varied. "I was probably aware. I just don't know how much I was willing to accept it;" "In my personal life, I didn't have a lot of things I wanted to work out or issues I wanted to work out because things are going very well;" "I didn't actually think I needed a coach and I wasn't even looking into it;" "shortly after my daughter was born, I just suddenly realized that I couldn't just sit around and let life go by and that I had a life as well. And so I thought of doing a lot of things for myself;" "I knew what I wanted to do, but I didn't know how to get there;" "I felt kind of stuck in my job with taking on a lot of responsibility but still an assistant, feeling that I...was ready to take a leap;" "if I didn't get some outside help, then I wasn't going to make it at [this company], that I could end up losing my job."

Coaching had been introduced to all six participants in a work-related context. However, methods of introduction varied and were subsequently met with similar reactions. More specifically, the reactions were reflective of the amount of control each participant
had over the decision-making process with regard to being coached or not. In two cases, participants were given company directives to be coached and therefore had limited decision-making power. Having no inclination of what the company had in store for her, one of the participants was “taken aback” and thought “I must really be a ‘screw up’ if my boss thinks I need a coach.” This reaction was further exacerbated by the fact that she was not given an opportunity to choose her coach. On the other hand, the other participant understood that his company recognized his “raw talent...and they wanted to improve my skills above the water line.” He determined that it “was an opportunity for me to improve on things that I haven’t had a lot of time to spend time focusing on.”

The other four participants had more decision-making power with regard to being coached and by whom. Two of these participants were aware of the coaching process through company workshops and subsequently sought out coaching services, both with the aim of developing better working relationships with their bosses. The other two participants were approached by coaches who had previously worked with them in different capacities.

With regard to coach selection, five of the six participants had a choice as to who their coach would be. However, for all of the participants, the first few coaching sessions would reveal if the relationship were going to work. In various ways, participants expressed the importance of a having a strong interpersonal connection between themselves and their coaches. Participants’ recollection of their first impressions of their first meeting with their respective coaches was positive overall. “The first conversation we had was kind of a trial conversation, and I just found her to be warm and inspiring and right from the get go, I really liked her;” “there was a connection that I had with her [in the beginning];” “I was just taken aback by her energy and enthusiasm and the whole philosophy behind coaching;” “she made me feel relaxed right away...I was comfortable talking to her about some of the
situations that were concerning me or that might impede my progress;” “it was just very easy to talk to her and everything about her I guess made her personality seem a lot like mine;” “we just connected right away.”

For some participants, it took a bit longer to settle into the coaching relationship and establish trust. “After I met with [my coach] a few times and we did a couple of these exercises, I kind of got a grip on the fact that, yeah, I was feeling overwhelmed and I also started clicking with [my coach];” “I was very vulnerable. Here I was opening up my life and soul to somebody that is in the workplace [with me]. I knew that there would be no breach of confidentiality, but still we see the same people [and] sometimes we work together;”

I did feel a little bit of judgment at that very moment, I think maybe just because I was vulnerable and the relationship hadn’t been established quite yet. But that quickly disappeared I think the second time around, and she explained to me that I would feel this way, awkward a little bit, but it didn’t last very long; “you can tell within two or three times how something’s going to go or not. And I do believe the first impression really isn’t the whole person.”

As the coaching progressed, it became very clear that the nature of the coaching relationship was central to the effectiveness of being coached. Participants identified many different aspects of the coaching relationship that helped them address the issues they brought to their coaches.

For four of the participants, they observed the uniqueness of the coaching relationship. That is, they had never experienced a relationship quite like the one they had shared with their coaches. “I don’t have anybody else in my life that I can say, okay, this is how I feel. She’s my rock that I know I can rely on;” “I’ve never had a real adult person that
I totally trusted. I can basically tell her anything, whether I've screwed up or not, I can expect a straight answer from her;” “not tied into my life emotionally;” “she provided some window of experience on that, that I didn’t have from anybody else, not even my own boss.”

For two of the participants, they identified dual relationships they shared with their coaches as both a help and hindrance to the whole coaching process. One of these participants explained, “I did like that she knew about this [her issues] and we had some of the same background.” However, this same participant found that she needed to make a mental shift once this coach set her boundaries. “I found [it] really kind of at odds at first, not necessarily around coaching but just how I had known her.” She asked herself, “are these boundaries really going to come [between us] and is it going to be rigid?” For the other participant, it became apparent over time that the coaching role was becoming unclear as she continued to work in another capacity at work with her coach:

She and I started working very closely on a project at work and I said, you know I probably see you more as a mentor now than as a coach. So I think one of the things for me is to be truly a coach, there can’t be any other relationships besides the coaching relationship.

One participant mentioned that it was important to her that her coach and herself were in a relationship on the same level. That is, there was “no up or down, it’s on the same level. I'm not spoken down to. I don’t speak down to her. Its’ respectful.” Alternatively, another participant found the unevenness of the relationship with her coach important enough to mention. “There were times that I felt she was elevated. You know, I’m looking at this woman and she’s, I don’t know, five foot if that. She is this magnificent person, and I was looking up to that person, and I always felt sort of inferior to her.” Eventually she did
address these concerns with her coach, "put it back in my mind," and went on with the coaching.

Once the coaching relationship had been established, coaches initiated various external assessments and self-assessment exercises to identify specific coaching issues and determine how participants presently handled situations. This information gathering was an integral part of the coaching process as it also helped bridge the awkward introductory stage, where both coach and client were establishing trust and adjusting to the new relationship:

One of the first exercises she had you do is write an autobiography of yourself [and] there were a couple of worksheets that we had to go through. One was called the ‘clean sweep’ [where] you have to look at different aspects of your life – financial, your personal…

“You know the life wheel? You know going through each of those aspects and speaking on each of them in some sense bordered on…it wasn’t counselling, but it was a very fine line;” “she gave me some interesting exercises to do at the beginning. One was called the ‘Clean Sweep’;” “are you familiar with the ‘coaching communication styles’? My communication style is a director and my manager’s style is a mediator and they are diametrically opposed to each other.”

As part of the information gathering process, coaches also engaged participants in informal interviews where they identified and discussed other issues. “She tried to get from me what it is that I felt were some of the issues…and then she asked me to bring specific problems to her that I was trying to address.” Once coaches had a better understanding of the participants’ situations, they were also helpful in identifying their issues. As it turned out, the majority of identifiable issues appeared to be connected to intrapersonal development and/or interpersonal development and job performance. Issues of this nature were
identified prior to the coaching experience. "I was feeling overwhelmed by work...and also by my personal life;" "I don't deal with conflict very well;" "...went through a whole process of learning to be true to my values;" "[you go through] a whole slough of emotions when you're getting fired;" "I'm an accommodator and was often constantly doing things to accommodate people and not really meeting my own needs and that got me sidetracked and [I] got into predicaments that I didn't know how to handle;" "I'm still struggling with the relationship with a boss;" "they wanted to improve my skills above the water line which were more on how do I influence and work with other people;" "there were some areas of concern with how I got things done in certain situations;" "they wanted to see me progress in my career and the only way they saw me doing that, in leveraging the kind of skills I have, was to be able to improve that;" "I want to jump too quickly to the solution without working with people and letting them do it;" "I thought I could be there for everybody and it was burning me out;" "not be disturbed by twenty people and all their wants and needs;" "wanting things to be fixed immediately [and frustrated if they are not];" "unable to enjoy [my daughter] because I'm preoccupied and stressed out about something going on at work;" "keeping five things straight is not always the easiest task;" "I had a hard time discovering or acknowledging what all my abilities were;" "I was a little bit afraid to go out;" "how am I actually going to get over that and start doing it again?" "there was a major disconnect between [my boss] and I;" "I was constantly failing her expectations, not meeting her expectations;" "a number of staff members came to her and were very upset with me and didn't feel that I was a good manager;" "the amount of pressure I was under with my relationship with [my boss] caused me to be somebody who I really am not;" "I was doing a lot of telling and not enough listening;" "I need the world to tell me that I'm okay;" "I tend to be a fairly controlling person."
It is interesting to note that control appeared to be a behavioural issue characteristic of the majority of this group of participants. Since most of those who participated in this study came from leadership positions and hired their coaches in a work-related context, it became clear that the issue of control was something that each of them struggled with and for which coaching was especially helpful. Through coaching, participants were able to give themselves permission to relieve themselves of some of their self-imposed responsibilities. For example, one participant noted:

I like to do things myself. It took a lot of coaching to get me into the delegation zone, allowing people to take over and to do things. Now I’ve gotten very good at delegating and trying to utilize the resources I have to make myself more effective and then to also make everybody else feel like they’ve got important jobs to do as well.

For another participant, the coach “made me understand that I can’t control everything and I’ve got to be able to let people do their jobs more and then work with them more.” A third participant found that she struggled with this issue both at work and home.

I tend to be a fairly controlling person, so regarding my daughter who’s 19, she’s [coach] walked me through the steps of letting her go and letting her make her decisions...releasing me from the burden of thinking that I need to do all of this stuff for her. I also correlate [this] with my staff as well that strong sense of responsibility that I have. If on the spectrum, it’s probably way off on the other end which is not a good place.

A fourth participant observed that in her family:

I was a superwoman who kind of thought I could be there for everybody and I was there for everybody. I did everything and my parents are aging. Anything that
happened to them, I would be there in a flash and it was kind of burning me out. I made a conscious decision to withdraw from that, understand[ing] that I can only do so much and then beyond that there are other people who can also take on a certain role. I guess it’s this whole control thing of mine. You know, don’t try to be in control of everything and also understanding that things will fall in place even if you’re not there.

Regarding other issues, four of the participants noted that their coaches were available to help them with specific projects and personnel concerns at work:

I’ll call her and I’ll say, I’ve got this huge project to do. [I] don’t know where to start. I’m in absolute overwhelm. She’s actually helped me put things into smaller pieces or she’s given me a framework or a structure to work within.

This participant was also helped in another situation:

I’m the new kid on the block. I’m in a lot of meetings with ten, twelve, fifteen people. I don’t get the politics that happen. So she’s kind of walked me through those issues. How do I find my voice in this really big group being the youngest in tenure.

Another participant found herself in a situation in which “employees were upset about some business practices and I wanted to make sure that I did it, when I talked about it, in a respectful manner that was not discrediting the employee not was it discrediting management. She helped me in those kinds of areas.” Her coach was also able to be of assistance when this participant received a performance evaluation she was unhappy with. “She had one of her ‘laser informing’ moments when she asked me if maybe I was in the wrong organization.” The other two participants were engaged in team-building activities with their coaches in order to help run their departments more smoothly.
Most participants indicated that initially coaches followed a general coaching format to implement action plans once specific issues were identified and goals developed:

[I] do the prep form. She reads it. Then I call her and then we go through it; and I think one question is, what do you want to focus on in our session tonight or today, and then I put something and then we go on that. We touch on some of the other things that I’ve done and not done and where am I going to go next week and do I want to set goals;

“You set the agenda. You are to phone her, email her or fax her three things that you want to work on for that day. You get on the phone and you discuss all three of those.”

As the relationship progressed, for some, this format became less structured over time:

In the beginning I had this form that I always filled out. What do I want to talk about, what do I want to achieve. And that quickly went away, where I would call and she’d say, okay, what’s up? And it was just basically, what’s top of mind? What’s going on for you right now that you want to talk about?

For others, the format was unstructured from the beginning. “Typically, it’s really open about how did your week go? Anything happen? Any problems? Any issues? Anything that you need some help with?” Furthermore, one participant called the usefulness of the preparation forms into question. “I don’t think she gives the prep form enough time. I don’t think she has enough time to absorb it.”

In terms of what actually happened during coaching sessions, participants identified several skills and strategies used in the implementation of the coaching process. As one strategy, most participants experienced challenges from their coaches. “She asked me hard questions and I don’t have a problem with that. I want someone to be honest and to the point.
She just comes right out and says it; "having somebody ask me the right questions and really explore who I was and really identify the priorities in my life;" "ability to see through issues, see through my own arrogance and stubbornness;" "she’s been good, she’s been tough. She doesn’t let me get away with my own thoughts and my own biases. She let’s me have it when I need it. Gets me thinking really quickly."

Another method used to help participants through the coaching process involved a form of empathy, namely coaches’ self-disclosure. Instances of self-disclosure were particularly important for three participants who had difficulty moving through an issue. For one participant, the recalled experience was described in a general fashion. Her coach would say, “you know what, when I was in that situation, this is what I did. So she would frame it as a personal frame.” Two other participants, recalled specific examples:

She shared something with me as well that happened to her. I don’t know whether you’re supposed to do that or not as a coach, but anyway she did. And it helped me. It gave me a different perspective, that here’s a coach who’s gone through something as well and I didn’t feel like, oh jeez, the whole world is laughing at me or pointing fingers. So she was truly able to empathize;

[she] ended up informing me at one point because I was so upset... that she was put in the exact circumstances at one time. And I remember that being a huge sense of relief just because I knew that [my coach] has made a huge success in her career... and I thought, okay, I can do this too.

Two participants found that being held accountable regularly was very helpful in achieving their goals and moving them forward. “What I found really helpful and really good about it was the ‘check in’. Okay, I’ve done it, I can tell somebody, ‘oh look, I did it’ or ‘I was on board’ or ‘I was on task’ or ‘it’s completed’. It keeps me on track;” “that really
helped me because initially I felt, jeez if I didn’t do anything, I’m going to have to report back to my coach next week. If I haven’t done the stuff, oh that’s going to be bad; what I’ve learned so much from coaching is that you know you are accountable for what you do, everything you do.” For another participant, accountability rested solely with herself:

It’s a relationship based on respect. That’s kind of what’s nice about the relationship. If I didn’t get stuff done, it’s like I don’t have to feel shame when I get on the phone. If I didn’t get it done, then that’s my problem. If I say I’m going to do something, then I have to get it done more on my own.

For two participants, having coaches role model desired behaviours was significant. “I know that she’s succeeded in her career, which I guess is something that I would like to emulate. I feel she’s a source of energy to keep me wanting to move in that direction;” “she also balances her life quite well, and I thought that was pretty important. She absolutely practices what she preaches and I think that’s important.” Similarly, two participants realized for themselves the importance of role modelling for their staffs. “I know as a leader that I wouldn’t expect anything of my staff that I wouldn’t do myself;” “if you’re the boss and something goes wrong and you know you aren’t dealing with it very well, then it’s pretty hard to ask other people to be dealing with it well.”

Participants indicated that in order to help them through the process, their coaches assumed various roles and functions. Three participants noted that their coaches were resourceful. “We talked about several things that I could do and so she gave me names of people that I could contact and workshops that I could go to;” “she’s been a resource source, like I cannot believe every time I turnaround it’s something;” “I’m also reading. She’s given me some books. I’m reading one right now that is helping me with some of the behaviours that I’m doing and [alternatively indicating] what I should be doing [instead].
Other words to describe the coaching role included: friend, confidant, help and sounding board. Regarding the latter, this participant especially appreciated this role, as utilizing this function prevented him from “sounding it off maybe to the wrong person.”

With regard to mentoring in the context of coaching, one of the participants found that given the circumstances in which she was introduced to coaching, her relationship appeared to take on mentor-like qualities:

I do think she did do some mentoring as well. If I had been the one to actively seek out coaching, and I knew exactly what it was I wanted to work on, then I think it’s more of a coaching relationship. But in this case, it was my boss that thought I needed it.

For another participant, she readily identified that there were components of her coaching relationship that involved mentoring. “Right now she’s mentoring me.” A third participant made a much broader observation. “I don’t think coaching is new, but think it’s along the same lines as mentoring and a lot of other stuff people set up for themselves along the way in life.” A fourth participant distinguished the two by observing that, “a mentor is somebody that you can learn from. A coach is somebody who helps you through a process and draws out the qualities in you. I mean a mentor does that too, but a mentor can show you things, but a coach doesn’t.”

An added dimension contributing to the effectiveness of the coaching relationship and process was identified as noticeable qualities and characteristics of coaches. One participant found that her coach “has this incredible energy. She truly believes in coaching. She’s so positive.” Another participant found that her coach reinforced her belief that anything is possible. Other words describing coaches’ qualities included “source of strength,” “supportive,” “uplifted,” “non-judgmental,” “safe,” “flexible,” “open-minded,”
“intellectual,” “unbiased,” “caring,” “logical,” “encouraging,” “strong boundaries,” and challenging.

Participants also observed the importance of having a coach with experience:

She brought some of that background into her experience, and I think that’s important that you just don’t have like a consultant type role, that you’ve actually played in it and you’ve been part of it and you know what goes on;

“somebody who has had a lot of life experiences and therefore [able to] empathize with you. You know, because there’s that difference between getting sympathy and getting empathy;”

“she’s got her M.B.A. With me being strongly business-minded, I liked that;” “I don’t know if it was that she had a master’s [degree]. It was just her practical experience that I liked.”

Participants noticed, as a result of the coaching experience, significant learning occurred and subsequent changes appeared in the cognitive and behavioural realms. These occurred in the workplace since that was the origin of their coaching experience. However, it is noted further on in this narrative that other areas of the participants’ lives were also affected by the coaching experience, and accordingly yielded changes of their own.

For participants, a significant motivator to the change process was the development of new insight and new perspectives about self and others. With regard to self-perceptions, one participant described that “she makes me realize the strengths that I have, that I’ve always kept at bay;” “if I’m talking to her about anxiety or where my fear is or something like that, when I have something pressing, her question will be something like, ‘so what’s the advantage for you having this anxiety in this moment?’ And I’ll go, oh my God, and then I realize what it is; “realizing that there’s nothing to catch up with;” “you can’t always see it yourself;” “I had a really hard time discovering or acknowledging what all my abilities were. So that’s what we basically worked on;” “there have been times where the ah-
ha’s have been phenomenal, where she just asks the question and the penny drops and I’m like, oh my God, look at what I’m doing;” “[I] should always be constantly aware of what I’m doing and why I’m doing it;” “being more consciously aware of what I’m doing and why I’m doing it, I’ve really come to understand what my core values are and where I will and will not break them.”

One participant was able to take a step back and observe how gaining new insight fit into the scheme of things:

It makes you really introspective so that you understand who you really are and what is really important to you; you really have to know yourself and then you can make the commitments and really commit to what is important and then be accountable for it.

For two participants, it was especially important for them to realize that they needed to shift their sources of validation from an external locus to an internal locus, thereby recognizing the power of self-validation. “I think the thing that coaching has really helped me with has been around building my confidence and her helping me move from, I need the world to tell me that I’m okay to you know instinctively that you’re okay;” “she helped keep my head on straight; it [getting fired] didn’t destroy my spirit. [My coach] was the force behind that, making me realize that this was not about me, that this was other circumstances.”

From making big leaps in understanding their own thoughts and behaviours, participants were asked to look at situations in terms of how they perceived others viewed them and their behaviours. Again, this was an insightful experience and was a motivating force. For one participant, she needed to understand her boss’s point of view in order to have a better working relationship. Her coach helped her make the shift:
This is how [your boss] is going to need information from you and this is where [she’s] coming from. Put yourself in [her] shoes, and what do you think she needs and wants from you? What do you need to do in order to help her fulfill her expectations?

Another participant realized that, as a leader, he had to shift his focus. “I thought too much about myself and not about the organization” and “my way is not always the right way.” His coach reminded him that, “not everyone is intentionally out there to do things intentionally wrong. You’ve got to just understand that you’ve got to work with these people and get the best out of them.” This participant eventually worked out a system with his coach in order to continually develop his perception skills. “I’ll tell her about a situation, she’ll create that self-awareness and she’ll tell me how to handle situations.”

All participants noted that their overall experiences with having been coached were positive. For one participant, “I would definitely say my confidence is higher. I’m happier. I’m more content. Sometimes I could have highs and lows. I don’t seem to have those like I used to. I’m definitely more grounded.” Another participant found:

A great sense of confidence, [and] a real connection to my spirit or who I am. [I’m] more of a risk taker than I ever was before. [I] feel that I’m heading in a direction that is where I’m meant to be, and living life with passion.

Still, another said, “I’m a lot more directed. I’ve figured out a way to do all of them, to keep myself happy and not apologize that I like to do five different things.” She learned that, “the whole process is to empower you and my whole goal in life is to empower the people around me. So it’s really cool to be empowered myself.” Another participant learned “to have more respect for the person talking. You can learn something from what everyone is saying.”
One of the participants indicated that she could see the progress she made by referring back to her journals. Another participant redid the ‘life wheel’ assessment tool to measure how much she had changed. “When I compared the two wheels, I could clearly see how I had grown as a person. [It] helped me to be reminded of certain things I’ve committed to, or who I say I am.”

One of the participants was able to give a full account of what she had learned and how she had changed at work:

[I’m] a little bit more emotionally stable about work going right or going wrong. Instead of wanting things to be fixed immediately, I just started realizing that things take time to achieve. I look at things now as mountains to be climbed and that there is a goal at the top and that you know we’re moving towards it; but I’m not getting frustrated by the fact that, hey, we haven’t done it today. We’ve got to plan out, certain things are going to take time and as long as we’re moving towards the goal and making progress, that removes my frustration level.

Another participant was also able to thoroughly describe what having been coached meant to her:

A passion was developing. If I committed to something, I was committing to something that really meant a lot to me, and it wasn’t just sort of empty commitments and these patterns started to emerge in my life. I’d say okay, I’m going to do something, but before I even said I was going to do it, I really paid a lot of attention and thought about it before committing to something to the point that the behaviour kind of changed. And I would commit to something and I [would] hold to it and stick to it.
With regard to **specific behavioural changes**, two participants noted that they had developed new skills. “As a ‘director’, I was doing a lot of telling and not much of listening. And through using coaching, I don’t do much telling anymore…instead of coming up with the answer, coming up with questions that will lead the person to answers;” “helping them as opposed to saying they’re wrong or just giving them the answer, which is what I used to do. So being a little bit more tactful in the way I respond.”

Two other participants identified **specific new actions and skills** that strengthened their relationships with their co-workers. For one of the participants:

> It was important to her [my boss] that every time we had a meeting that I recapped the meeting in writing and that I recapped what my commitments were and what move forwards were. As long as I kept her in the loop, she started to relax and realized this person’s extremely competent and does a good job.

She also found that “putting comprehensive action plans together and following through to make sure those action plans are completed” reinforced her boss’s sentiments. This participant also noted that “I’ve moved into a ‘mediator’ style and she’s [my boss] has moved more into the ‘director’ style, which she needed to be in her job.” Similarly, another participant noted that, “I also started having one-on-one meetings with my staff which I’d never done before.”

In addition to the specific changes, one of the participants reflected more generally. “I just picked up a lot of management skills that I simply didn’t have from training or experience.” This same participant also **learned how to set boundaries**. “Having an office that’s private and closed in so I can get work done and not be disturbed by 20 people and all their wants and needs on a 24 hour basis” was significant in **building support**.

Another participant recognized the necessity to give support:
It's up to me to make sure that they're [my staff] making independent decisions, that they have the support of me to make sure that they follow through on those decisions. I think that was the shift, empowering these individuals to be the best they could be.

Receiving direct and indirect feedback was another important component of the coaching process mentioned by participants. Feedback occurred during the coaching process both formally and informally. For one participant, she noted that her coach would provide feedback in a safe manner that was clear of any judgment. For example, “I can basically tell her anything. Whether I’ve screwed up or not, I can expect a straight answer from her.”

Likewise, “she just said I was incredibly open about myself, and she used to tell me that I was one of her best persons [to be coached] because I made incredible leaps.”

Another participant found that feedback from her boss was very important considering the shaky beginning they had experienced. She found out from her boss that “I was her most challenging branch manager, and she had the most to learn from me.” Some participants and coaches used formal feedback forms such as the ‘360 degree’ feedback to find out what others thought:

So I got feedback from my peers, from my clients, from my boss and that was probably one of the pivotal pieces to this whole coaching because I got a lot of feedback about what I was doing right...and I got a lot of feedback about areas that needed improvement. So I went from feeling like, I was doing a really bad job to realizing that I’m hardest on myself.

Similarly, another participant found it useful for both his coach and himself to ask his colleagues informally for feedback. “[I’ve] gone and asked people have they noticed a change. Is there anything that I could be doing differently?”
Participants also recollected that they received indirect feedback, not so much from what people said, but from what they did. One participant observed:

The team noticed I don’t feel as frazzled. I don’t feel as overwhelmed, and when a problem arises, it takes a lot more for me to be, you know, I’ve got a longer fuse and that I think does have a spillover effect onto the rest of the team.

Likewise, this same participant noticed that, “there’s several individuals that I’m working with now in my team that are getting coached.” Another participant also experienced indirect feedback from her coach when she exchanged her business services for her coach’s services. “Instead of me actually giving her money, I exchange what my abilities are. So it’s a validation in that way.” A third participant received positive feedback for her coaching efforts by way of a special assignment she was given:

By the first week of July, I got a phone call from our director asking me if I wanted to go to Victoria to help out the branch there hire a branch manager, train the people and really get things rolling there, and would I like to go there for two months. So you know that was a significant turnaround.

This same participant noticed that coaching was positively impacting her company. “Our industry has very high turnover. Probably a branch will have fifty to sixty per cent turnover, and last year I only lost two people.”

For some of the participants, their coaches urged them to look beyond their current situations and look at future possibilities and goals. One participant commented, “she [my coach] has the foresight to move me forward.” Another participant indicated that, the “next step is trying to emulate some of the people that do some of the things that we want to do or some of the actions we want to portray or the leadership qualities that we want to go towards. Taking it to the next level and honing those skills.” He also indicated “we’ve done a bit of
future planning as well.” On more than one occasion, another participant mentioned, that her coach was getting her to think of her next step and her next job so that she would be prepared for it. “Being prepared for the next opportunity that comes up and also being proactive about it so that I’m not sucked into somebody else’s idea of what it is that I should be doing.”

Other participants also thought of future plans and where coaching fit into them. After going through so many changes, some were content to maintain their current situation, while others were thinking about other goals they would like to achieve. “I’m happy right now with my life and I don’t feel I want to take on more;” “I want my goal to be such that I coach myself out of a job, that my employees become so competent in their role that they no longer need me. I always keep that in the forefront of my thinking;” “moving ahead in my career is one [goal]. [I] would like to get into a healthy relationship [and] just try to be the best individual that I [can be].”

Even though the coaching experience occurred in a work-related context, it managed to positively impact other facets of participants’ lives. One of the participants recalled:

One of the biggest bonuses about this coaching has been...I used to come home from work and sometimes carry work home with me and be unable to enjoy [my daughter] because I’m preoccupied and stressed out about something going on at work; whereas now [I have] that emotional stability. [Therefore], I’m feeling a lot less overwhelmed about balancing work and home.

Another participant noted that, “I find myself using it a lot more when I’m listening to my wife or even my kids.” Regarding “quality of life. That was something I was already trying to change and she [my coach] just reinforced that.” For a third participant, the effects of coaching on her personal life took her by surprise. “I was driving in the car with my youngest daughter and she says to me, ‘so mom, what needs to happen in order for me to
have a job at [your company] this summer?’ And I just looked at her and she was dead serious.” This same participant noted that coaching had also affected the private lives of her colleagues. “Even my staff members have told me that they now use coaching with their children. It’s really filtered through the organization and now it’s filtering into our personal lives.” A fourth participant observed that:

[My coach] helped me some in my personal life. She’s helped me with my parents and my relationships with some of my friends…having me take the conflict resolution courses just gave me these huge skills. [I’ve] been able to resolve a lot of personal issues that have been haunting me for several years.

A fifth participant indicated that coaching has had a significant impact on her family relationships. With regard to her marriage, coaching has helped both her husband and herself “prioritize sooner than crashing and realizing, oh shit, you know I should have done something sooner before this happened.” With her family, in general, she has learned to set boundaries. “If I disappear into my study…and I shut the door, people know I do not want to be disturbed.” This same person also felt compelled to share her coaching experience with others:

To talk about the experience and live it with other people. It’s particularly with the younger generation, with the next generation and with children. [It’s important to] really talk to them and nurture them and help them through their growing stages because it’s so important.

In terms of suggestions for making the experience more effective, two participants expressed a desire to have more face-to-face contact:

Maybe once in awhile is instead of having telephone contact, is to have a longer session at a quiet place or like I’m thinking o even at the beach or a spot at the each
where it's really quiet and very spiritual. That's it, find a spiritual place where the
two of us could be and do a coaching session at this place. It's just being with
another person, I find I need that. I like the physical touch or physical connection.

Another participant echoed these thoughts. “I don’t always like it on the phone even though
it’s convenient. I also like to see people in person. I like watching people’s body language
and the reactions.” This same participant also commented that she could make use of a longer
coaching session as opposed to the current thirty-minutes per week that she did spend with
her coach. “If it was an hour long, then I could address a couple of more things.”

In terms of coach selection, one participant stressed, just find out if there’s going to
be a good personality fit there because, of course, it’s a very personal thing that you’re
doing.”

One participant noted that it might be helpful to take a break from coaching once in
a while in order to absorb all of the new information. “I think you go through times where
you just need to take a break from [coaching] because you do change a lot in a week or when
you take in all the information that you can from the coaches, it can be exhausting.”

The importance of friendship also surfaced as both a benefit and a concern of
coaching for one participant:

It’s become a little less formal. I almost think of [my coach] as my friend. In fact,
two or three weeks ago, she asked me if I was still getting value out of our coaching
and I think that was her way of asking whether this was really a coaching session.

Alternatively, this participant indicated some misgivings about this dual relationship:

Maybe I shouldn’t have formed this feeling of friendship with her. I don’t know. In
some ways, it feels really nice. I almost feel like there’s a dependency on her, like I
can’t even fathom the thought of not having her in the relationship, which I’m not exactly sure that’s what coaching is supposed to be about.

It is important to note that during the interviews, three of the participants made unsolicited comments about coaching in comparison to counselling and psychotherapy. One of the participants identified the ‘life wheel’ exercise as triggering an unexpected reaction. “You know going through each of those aspects and speaking on each of them in some sense bordered on...it wasn’t counselling, but it was a very fine line.” She later commented that, “it’s some of the ugly stuff that you’ve gone through when you bring it up through coaching that is when it’s almost like counselling.” Another participant, who had a psychotherapy background, observed both similarities and differences between coaching and psychotherapy: “Part of coaching is taking care of the personal side and a lot of questions [my coach] asks me are questions that I’ve asked clients. So there’s a really strong correlation between a psychotherapist and a coach I believe.” She also found that:

  Coaching is moving forward, kind of being in the moment and moving forward;
  whereas, psychotherapy tends to be more about, well let’s look at this behaviour.
  Where did that behaviour come from? Let’s investigate those feelings. You’ve got to get those feelings out and then we can move ahead.

She noted, “I’ve moved more personally in my growth with her [coach] in a year than I have with some of my psychotherapists.” A third participant whom also had some experience with counselling observed that, “it’s [coaching] on a much higher level. It’s not, ‘well you have to go through this hard thing now so just feel it, just go through it.’” She also observed that a coach is “not your therapist, whether she has a degree in psychology or not. I mean it helps. She can say [that] what I’m going through, she can relate to.”
When these interviews were conducted, participants were at various stages of being coached. Some participants would be **ending their coaching relationships** soon after the interviews took place and other participants were still actively engaged with their coaches. Some participants were clear as to when they would be finished coaching, and others were less certain. One participant said:

I would have to be in a position where I felt that I was successful in my career, whether that’s being a manager or ultimately, would like to be coaching, be a consultant, travel and have a family. I guess that would be the pinnacle of coaching.

Another participant determined that he would end coaching when the skills that he had learned become “more instinctful. Instead of just talking about it, it becomes just commonplace for me. And if I think I can do that without her [my coach], then that’s probably about time.” A third participant indicated that in terms of her coaching relationship:

There might be a natural progression to some other level. It might move into that she’s no longer coaching me but we end up [at some other level]. The actual coaching would be gone, but it would have developed to some other level.

As a final note, perhaps the ultimate compliment to the coaching experience would have to be one of **making the transition from client to coach**. For two participants, this had become a very real possibility. “The interesting part in all of this is that during the coaching session, we discovered that maybe coaching was something I could do as well.” Similarly, the other participant found that coaching strongly resonated with her desire to positively influence people. “It’s been the thought of being able to influence people’s lives in a positive way and being able to give off and receive all that positive energy. I can’t think of a better way to spend my days.”
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

This study was designed to explore the lived experience of individuals who have been coached. The research question that served to guide this study was: "What is the lived experience of individuals who have been coached?" In this chapter, the findings derived from the interviews conducted for this study will be compared with the existing coaching and counselling literature. This comparison is followed by a discussion of the limitations of the study, implications for both coaching and counselling practice, and recommendations for future research.

Given the meteoric rise in popularity of coaching, there are a limited amount of peer-reviewed articles on the topic of coaching compared to the many found in various trade publications and other print media. There are even fewer articles, that relate coaching to counselling/psychotherapy even though the two practices appear to share many similarities. To prove a point, in their review of articles appearing in various trade publications on executive coaching, Garman, Whiston & Zlatoper (2000) found that "psychology training is neither regularly nor universally recognized as useful or even relevant to practice in the field of executive coaching" (p.201). Therefore, the findings of this study will be compared to existing coaching literature (mainly executive coaching) and subsequently compared to current literature in counselling psychology.

Comparison of Findings to the Coaching Literature

In one of the only coaching studies available, Wilkins (2000) who interviewed coaches about the coaching experience mentioned that one of the reasons clients sought
coaching was due to dissatisfaction in one or more areas of their lives. However, there is insufficient literature investigating clients' thoughts preceding the coaching experience with regard to their level of awareness of the need for coaching. In terms of actual decision-making to obtain the services of a coach Giglio, Diamante & Urban (1998), identified the lack of control experienced by some executives. "The executive may feel angry and threatened about being chosen to work with a coach, may resist and deny out of fear or may respond very slowly in order to buy time to better assess the problematic situation he/she is in" (p.95). Koonce (1994) observed that, "many of the executives don’t understand what prompted the company to seek help for them in the first place" (p.36). With regard to process of coach selection, most authors provided checklists for future clients to refer to when looking for a coach (Brotman, Liberi, & Wasylyshyn, 1996; Hill & O'Brien, 1999; Peterson 1996; Thach & Heinselman, 1999; Wilkins, 2000).

Many of the authors mentioned that a strong interpersonal connection with the client was a necessary component to the coaching relationship (Brotman et al. 1996; Giglio et al. 1998; Hill & O'Brien, 1999; Kilburg, 1996; Peterson, 1996; Smither & Reilly, 2001; Thach & Heinselman, 1999; Wilkins, 2000). Rather than skill development, "coaches are more focused on the importance of the relationship with their clients. Coaches stress the value of connecting personally, of a good match or fit between coach and client" (Hall, Otazo & Hollenbeck, 1999). Other authors expressed the coaching relationship in this way: "the process must speak of credibility which is inextricably linked to the relationship between coach and executive. This relationship is the cornerstone of the change process. The presence of empathy and genuine concern enables the executive to listen and perhaps improve the current situation" (Giglio et al. 1998, p.102). Development of the coaching relationship was aided further by "a sense of reciprocity—there was a two-way relationship"
(Smither & Reilly, 2001, p.221). This was also supported by observations Witherspoon
(1996) made regarding working in partnership with the executive.

Self-disclosure, as a theme in the research findings, was rarely mentioned in the
literature. However, one recent article by Smither & Reilly (2001) explained that, "coaches
helped build the relationship, for example, by becoming vulnerable in some way (perhaps by
discussing feedback they had received about their own limitations or by discussing issues
they were facing)" (p.225).

The many variables identified as necessary to the coaching relationship, were only
representative of coaches' observations. Literature was not available describing clients'
accounts of the relationship. However, one author mentioned the likelihood of a client
forming a co-dependency with his or her coach (Tyler, 2000). Similarly, this was reflected in
the research study, as only one participant mentioned this type of dependency.

In the current study, dual relationships were considered as both a help and hindrance
to the coaching relationship. Hall et al. (1999) identified dual relationship issues particularly
with organizations that have internal coaches. Since these internal coaches are accountable
to both the client and the company, issues such as trust and confidentiality might arise. "This
dual role for HR, serving both the organization and individual employees from the data
acquired, is what one coach called a 'conflict of interest' for the internal coach" (p. 42).
Subsequently, these authors identified a need to address ethical issues that might arise from
the coaching process.

In terms of process, several authors (Bassi, Cheney & Lewis, 1998; Giglio et al. 1998;
Hill & O’Brien, 1999; Kilburg, 1996; Koonce, 1994) found that information-gathering
exercises provided an "assessment of the employee’s strengths and limitations, as well as
understanding the context in which the employee operates" (Smither & Reilly, 2001, p. 236).
Armed with this knowledge, coaches and clients were in a better position to identify issues, set goals and develop action plans. Many of the issues identified through assessments were reflective of the ones identified by participants in the research study. However, Judge & Cowell (1997) specifically found that, “the most common request by clients is for help in modifying interaction style” (p. 74).

Surprisingly, the predominance of control as an issue highlighted in the research study was only specifically identified in two coaching articles. Kiel, Rimmer, Williams & Doyle (1996) observed, “the typical senior executive in our client population scores one or two standard deviations above the mean on measures of dominance and need for control” (Kiel et al. 1996, p. 68). Saporito (1996) added that the “control issue is a dynamic, both in individual and in organizational terms” (p.97). Given that several participants who held management positions identified addressing the issue of control in their coaching relationships, it is surprising that the literature on executive coaching is not more reflective of this.

Interestingly, one of the comments a participant made regarding her managerial role was, because of her largely technical background and focus, she did not have the management skills necessary to smoothly operate her department. Kiel et al. (1996) mentioned a similar observation. “Weaknesses in leadership effectiveness are the result of required skills that have never been learned” (p.68).

As part of the process, the actual format for the sessions mentioned in detail in the current study, was only given minimal attention in the literature. With the exception of Wilkins’ study (2000), most authors spoke generally about format without much explanation. They simply mentioned goal setting and the development of action plans in order to move the
client forward with not much explanation (Brotman et al., 1998; Hill & Otazo, 1999; Kilburg, 1996; Koonce, 1994; Peterson, 1996).

The actual skills and strategies employed in the coaching process were mentioned in more detail by many authors (Brotman et al., 1998; Hakim, 2000; Kilburg, 1996; Peterson, 1996). Giglio et al. (1998) provided, as an example, an outline of strategies they found successful:

The coach should teach self-monitoring skills, and work on improving the executives' personal management skills so that he/she can cope with failure, reduce stress and learn from this challenging experience. Consider mentally practicing and responding to setbacks. Role playing and other counselling techniques can prove helpful here” (p.104-105).

They also described several skills they used to employ strategies. These included: clarifying, listening, questioning, self-disclosure, confirmation, and act objectively but with empathy (Giglio et al., 1998).

Given the delicate situation regarding executives who have been mandated to coaching, “The effective coach should not provide comprehensive feedback until rapport is established, trust has been earned and respect has been developed as a result of the investigative and clarifying work that has been accomplished” (Giglio et al., 1998, p.102).

Built into the coaching process was the accountability aspect (Wilkins, 2000). In the current study, participants spoke about being accountable to themselves and their coaches. In the literature, accountability was referred to inconsistently (Hall et al. 1999; Judge & Cowell, 1997; Kilburg, 1996; Thach & Heinselman, 1999; Wilkins, 2000). Hall et al. (1999) mentioned, “clients also find that trying out the coach’s suggestions and then reporting back was a successful learning tool” (p.45).
Similarly, Judge & Cowell (1997) found this type of accountability was more formalized. “Coaches generally insist on a contract that would include multiple meetings [for it] helps ensure a commitment from the executive” (p. 75). In terms of organizational involvement in the coaching process, Thach & Heinselman (1999) stated, “if there’s an identified development process outlined for the organization, the leaders should be held accountable for following through on that process” (p. 38).

Participants in the current study identified the importance of role modelling, on the part of their coaches and themselves, as a significant component of coaching. This was mentioned briefly in the literature for the most part (Hudson, 1999; Kiel et al. 1996; Kilburg, 1996; Zeus & Skiffington, 2000); however, Kiel et al., (1996) elaborated on this. In terms of role modelling on the client’s part, “we generally encourage clients to be open about their development plans, in order to model such behaviour to others and to be leaders in fostering a positive and relevant change” (p. 72).

Participants in the current study only mentioned a few roles that their coaches assumed as compared to what was found in the literature (Giglio et al. 1998; Kiel et al. 1996; Kilburg, 1996; Witherspoon & White, 1996). Witherspoon & White (1996), on the other hand, devoted an entire article on the many roles coaches assume throughout the whole coaching process.

Specifically speaking, participants in the current study and the coaching literature highlighted ‘resourcefulness’ as a major role (Giglio et al. 1998, Kiel et al.1996, Kilburg, 1996; Peterson, 1996; Thach & Heinselman, 1999; Zeus & Skiffington, 2000). Interestingly enough, one of the most common coaching roles mentioned in the study was that of mentor. It was only mentioned briefly in one coaching article (Judge & Cowell, 1997).
In terms of qualities of coaches identified by participants in the current study, there were many. Similarly, many were mentioned in the coaching literature (Brotman, et al. 1998; Giglio et al. 1998; Hall et al. 1999; Kiel, et al., 1996; Kilburg, 1996; Zeus & Skiffington, 2000). However, a few stood out in both cases. One quality that was important to building and maintaining the relationship was trust. The other was having the coach be unbiased and non-judgmental. More pronounced was the amount of support provided to clients. Wilkins (2000) found that “support was the foundation of coaching” (p. 109). That is, the success of the coaching intervention was attributable to “the degree to which the coach provides a supportive relationship” (Zeus & Skiffington, 2000, p. 71). Kilburg (1996) added that this supportive relationship “stimulated the client to think, feel and explore new ideas and behaviours; and assisted the individual in working through resistance to change” (p. 140).

In terms of executive coaching, the organization or company culture would also need to be supportive of the changes being made through coaching (Giglio et al. 1998; Judge & Cowell, 1997). Also with respect to coaching in a work-related context, according to the participants in the current study and the literature, it was important for the coach to have experience (Judge & Cowell, 1997; Peterson, 1996; Richard, 1999; Zeus & Skiffington, 2000). Richard (1999) states, “the *sine qua non* of doing successful coaching is understanding the background or the corporate culture of a particular workplace” (p. 27).

One of the major challenges and biggest rewards of coaching was the shift clients and participants made once they became more insightful and developed new perspectives. This has been mentioned at length in the literature (Bassi et al. 1998; Brotman et al. 1998; Giglio et al. 1998; Hall et al. 1999; Kiel et al. 1996; Kilburg, 1996; Koonce, 1994; Richard, 1999;
Smither & Reilly, 2001; Witherspoon & White, 1996; Zeus & Skiffington, 2000) as well as with participants during the interviews in the current study.

Peterson (1996) observed that, “people are motivated to work on their development when they perceive discrepancies between where they are and where they wish to go” (p. 79). Similarly, Giglio et al. (1998) found that when executives shifted from an external locus of control to an internal locus of control, change was inevitable in what Argyis (as cited in Brotman et al. 1998) referred to as ‘defensive reasoning’. “It is only when the executive realizes his/her connection to the problem that change can take place….without this acceptance of responsibility for the situation, there can be no growth.” Furthermore, “if an adequate comfort level is not reached, it is likely the executive will not accept the situation at hand” (Giglio et al. 1998). “In all cases, the executive coach is expected to provide an in-depth knowledge of how to help the executive learn—learn to listen, learn to be self-aware, learn to be a better leader” (Bassi et al. 1998, p. 60). Once this movement occurred, the learning and action could take place.

In addition to other goals, one of the goals mentioned by two participants in the current study and also by Witherspoon & White (1996) was to look at future possibilities. This was identified as having importance because it helped the individuals move forward. “Coaching for development focuses on a person’s future job. Typically, the executive needs to prepare for advancement by strengthening leadership skills and to address long-term developmental needs” (Witherspoon & White, 1996, p. 129).

Individuals in the current research study received various types of feedback once they started making changes. However, this type of feedback was not mentioned in the coaching literature. Most references to feedback were related to the type clients received when they performed external assessments (Judge & Cowell, 1997; Peterson, 1996; Richard, 1999;
Saporito, 1996; Smither & Reilly, 2001; Zeus & Skiffington, 2000). One article did address feedback differently in some respects:

Another example of what doesn’t work is when coaches provide exclusively negative feedback. Negative feedback is not viewed as constructive. Similarly, if coaches’ feedback deals primarily with how other people feel, rather than with data and results, this feedback is discounted as too ‘touchy-feely’ (Hall, Otazo & Hollenbeck, 1999, p. 44).

With regard to the termination of the coaching relationship, or when individuals knew ‘it was time,’ participants’ responses in the current study were varied. Some had met their goals and therefore were in the process of ‘winding down’. Still others saw the coaching relationship transform into a non-coaching relationship. Additionally, one person had to end the coaching sessions at a specified time, as money allocated by the company for coaching had been spent. Alternatively, there was limited mention of this part of the coaching process in the literature (Bassi et al. 1998; Kiel et al. 1996; Koonce, 1994). “The formal process generally ends when the client has adopted an attitude toward continuous improvement of leadership abilities and has developed an organizational support mechanism for ongoing growth” (Kiel et al. 1996, p. 70).

Regarding the impact of change on other aspects of individuals’ lives, this was a predominant theme in the current research findings. However, it received minimal attention when mentioned in the coaching literature (Hakim, 2000; Kiel et al. 1996; Kilburg, 1996; Richard, 1999; Zeus & Skiffington, 2000). Kiel et al. (1996) once again made the following observations:
When a client undergoes a development process and makes significant and deep changes in the way he or she responds to the world, it may have as much impact on the individual’s family system and friendships as on his or her leadership style (p.71).

**Coaching Literature Related to Counselling and Psychotherapy**

One of the interests of undertaking this study was to draw comparisons between counselling psychology and coaching as there appeared to be an obvious relationship between the two. In conceptualizing this study, there were no research studies from which to draw. The only literature available on this topic came from executive coaching. It is no surprise that mention of similarities and differences would be addressed here, as many of the individuals who call themselves executive coaches had had training in organizational or industrial psychology.

Having located seven articles describing the coaching and the counselling/psychotherapy connection, to a greater or lesser degree, I have highlighted the most salient aspects.

In their article outlining coaching competencies, Brotman, Liberi and Wasylyshyn (1998) presented this statement:

We believe that psychologists are uniquely qualified to define what is required to be an executive coach when sustained behaviour change is the desired outcome. As psychologists, we have an obligation to delineate those required competencies both to protect the integrity of this emerging field and to provide clients with criteria for evaluating the skills of coaching candidates (p.40-41).

Rotenburg (2000) supported these authors in his article comparing the overlapping paradigms of psychodynamic psychotherapy and executive coaching. He explained how
"psychoanalytically trained therapists have a knowledge base that predisposes them to be effective in working with people in complex organization" (p.653).

Judge & Cowell (1997) gave the most thorough argument for the psychotherapeutic connection:

The executive coaching process draws heavily on theoretical frameworks and practical skills developed by the psychotherapeutic community. As with psychotherapy, the coach and client focus on behaviours, attitudes and/or cognitions of the client executive. For the client, the similarities between therapy and coaching often include such things as: freely discussing delicate issues; exploring blind spots, biases and shortcomings; shedding defenses; and attempting to alter perspectives and gain new skills. For the coach, the similarities often include such things as: commitment to confidentiality; providing feedback; assistance in focusing attention; establishing clear boundaries between the professional and personal relationship; and support and challenge in development and change (p. 75).

However, each of their assumptions regarding the differences between coaching and psychotherapy could be argued by counselling psychologists for being too simplistically contrasting the two:

Important differences also exist between the executive coaching process and traditional psychotherapy. First, coaching is often predefined in length and short-term nature. Second, there is more of a systems focus in coaching than in traditional psychotherapy. Some coaching practices directly involve the coach, the client, and the supervisor or human resources manager; peers, subordinates, and even the spouse could also be involved. All coaching takes a holistic systems perspective, as opposed
to the relatively reductionist approach of traditional psychoanalytic thought, to frame
the problem and solution (Judge & Cowell, 1997, p. 75).

Even with the acknowledgment of the connection, Richard (1999) observed that “I
have found that the ‘executive coaching’ label is much more palatable than the terms
counselling and therapy because it has a more positive connotation and focuses on outcomes
(e.g. increasing the client’s job performance)” (p.30). However, Kilburg (1996) underlined
the necessity for specific psychological training given “the increased stresses with which
these individuals live and the need for practitioners to be in tune with their psychological
worlds of their clients” (p.136). Brotman et al. (1998) concurred with this observation and
added, “executive coaching, where specific sustained behavioural change is the goal, must be
psychologically based” because it “fosters greater clarity and authenticity, providing a sturdy
foundation for action planning and sustained behaviour change” (p.44). Additionally,
“executive coaching that fails to focus on intrapsychic factors produces a shallow result, a
recapitulation of the obvious with minimal guidance for behaviour change” (Brotman et al.

In contrast to the previous articles, the article by Howatt (2000) specifically outlined
his efforts to incorporate Reality Therapy and Choice Theory into coaching practice.
Similarly, the article by Foster & Lendl (1996) described four case studies in which they used
‘eye movement desensitization and reprocessing’ in the coaching context in which to treat
specific issues professionals face such as, alleviating performance anxiety, fear of cold
calling and separating personal problems from business challenges.
Counselling Literature Related to the Research Findings

In this section, the main themes and issues arising from the research findings are held up against current counselling theory and practice in order to more closely examine the relationship between coaching and counselling psychology. This, by no means, is an exhaustive comparison, but serves as a point of reference for those who wish to conduct further research in this area.

Preconditions.

According to Gross & McMullen, (1983 as cited in Hill & O’Brien, 1999), “people seek assistance from others when they become aware that they are in pain or are facing a difficult situation, perceive their feelings or situation as problematic, and believe that help could assist them in alleviating their distress” (p.7). Only one person in the current study was facing a difficult situation when she sought out coaching services. Two others did not have a choice and the other three participants demonstrated varying degrees of awareness with regard to needing support.

One of the underlying themes of the current study focused on the control over the decision-making process in initiating the coaching relationship. One out of the two participants, who were required by their companies to be coached, experienced similar thoughts and feelings as those expressed by involuntary or mandatory clients of counselling and therapy (O’Hare, 1996). In this case, Brodsky & Lichtenstein (1999) proposed that the ‘path of least resistance’ would be attained if the therapist did not ask questions but rather made statements. This is contrary to the coaching process for which questioning is a cornerstone technique utilized to move clients forward.
Relationship.

Kanfer & Goldstein (1991) indicate that there are “several distinct characteristics” that “consistently differentiate the professional or paraprofessional helping relationship from friendship or other helpful interactions” (p.2). “They are unilateral, systemic, formal and time limited” (p.2).

In comparison to the ‘evenness’ of the coaching relationship as mentioned in the current study, Kanfer & Goldstein (1991) describe the counselling/therapy relationship as one-sided. “It concentrates exclusively on the client” (p.2). Alternatively, the coaching relationship is less formal and may occur in-person in an informal setting or by other means of communication (eg. telephone, electronic mail, etc.).

Regarding the systematic nature of the counselling relationship, there are similarities and differences to coaching. In counselling, “the participants typically agree at the outset on the purposes and objectives of their interaction. The helper attempts to plan and carry out procedures that move in an organized fashion from a description of therapeutic goals toward resolution of the client’s problems” (Kanfer & Goldstein, 1991, p.2). A similar process is experienced in coaching; however, participants in the current study mentioned that goal setting was a continual process throughout the relationship and was not limited to the introduction of the process.

In terms of time frames, for both the coaching and counselling relationships, there are more similarities than differences. In the current study, usually participants determined that once they had reached their goals, they would no longer need coaching. Others could see the coaching relationship continuing indefinitely. This is similarly reflected in the counselling relationship, as some clients seek counselling support for immediate resolution of problems (Kanfer & Goldstein, 1991) and other clients would find they required long-term support.
One of the major themes that emerged from the current study in direct relation to counselling was the role that dual relationships played in the coaching relationship. Three participants had varying reactions regarding the nature of their dual relationships. For the participant who found that her coaching relationship was turning into more of a friendship, this posed no immediate threat; however, the participant did mention that she would have a difficult time if she were not to be in contact with her coach/friend anymore. Alternatively, another participant was having difficulty defining the boundaries between co-worker and coach. She concluded that she could not be in two simultaneous relationships where work dynamics were involved. A third participant had a reciprocal arrangement with her coach. They would exchange services with each other. At the time of the interview, this arrangement appeared to be working for both parties; however, during the validation interview this appeared not to be the case.

According to Brammer & MacDonald (1999), “multiple relationships (sometimes called a dual relationship) is one in which the helper has two or more overlapping roles with the helpee” (p. 156). They observed that, “all of the professional ethical codes urge caution about multiple relationships. Ethical difficulty arises when helpers fail to recognize of effectively respond to blurred boundaries in their helping relationships” (Brammer & MacDonald, 1999, p. 157). They suggested that a helper should ask several questions of before entering into a helping relationship: “Is there a power difference between us? What other role obligations do I have in this situation? How will my knowledge about you change our relationships?” (Brammer & MacDonald, 1999, p. 157). Additionally, Brammer & MacDonald (1999) emphasised that “sexual relationships of any kind are unethical in the helping setting” (p. 158).
Qualities of the Counsellor.

Participants in the current study identified many positive and helpful characteristics of their coaches. Similarly, Hackney & Cormier (1996) identified these and other characteristics to round out the profile of effective helpers. "They include: self-awareness and understanding, good psychological health, sensitivity to and understanding of racial, ethnic, and cultural factors in self and others; open-mindedness; objectivity; competence; trustworthiness; and interpersonal attractiveness" (p.15).

Process.

In terms of process, it was evident in the current research study that the domain of affectivity was not addressed to any degree. Rather, the coaching experience was geared toward the cognitive-behavioural realm, focused on challenging clients' current thoughts and behaviours and encouraging alternative perspectives and actions. Both Carkhuff (1980) and Hill & O'Brien (1999) mentioned that in order for true change to occur within an individual, it is important to understand those individuals' personalities consist of feelings, thoughts and behaviours. Hill & O'Brien stated, "we believe that people are born with varied potential in the psychological, intellectual, physical, and interpersonal domains" (p.20). Not to address each one of these dimensions would provide an incomplete representation of the client and therefore incomplete knowledge with which to help him or her change.

With these assumptions in mind, Carkhuff (1980) developed a three-stage model in the 1960s that provided a framework for addressing each of the affective, cognitive and behavioural domains. He proposed that the counselling process must include all three elements of exploration, understanding and action in order for a client to experience true change. Years later, Hill & O'Brien (1999) refined this process substituting 'understanding' with 'insight'.
Outcomes.

As mentioned in a previous section, termination of the relationship was met with varying responses. A closer look at this part of the process would indicate that clients of both coaching and counselling experienced mixed reactions when they perceived that an end was imminent. “However one wishes to describe termination, the emotional dynamics of letting go, trusting their gains, and facing future potential with only partially tested new skills present clients with multiple reactions” (Hackney & Cormier, 1996, p. 286).

Some ‘Final’ Observations.

After listening to a few interview participants, in the current study, describes their understanding of counselling/therapy and the coaching connection, it was no surprise that these perceptions were one of the driving forces behind the coaching choice. However, after more discussion, it was clear that these perceptions were based on the scope of their knowledge and experience regarding the counselling/psychotherapy experience and was not reflective of recent counselling practices. These participants’ thoughts were reflective, to a certain extent, of the general population. From my own experience as a counsellor, one of the main reasons people do not seek out the professional services of counsellors and psychotherapists is the stigma that is attached to it and perpetuated by the media.

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people do not seek out the professional services of counsellors and psychotherapists is the stigma that is attached to it and perpetuated by the media.

**Limitations of the Study**

This project was an exploratory study, as I intended to examine the client’s experience of the coaching process. As with any investigation, there are always inevitable trade-offs that accompany research decisions. Typical of qualitative research, the results of this phenomenological study lack statistical generalizability. However, according to Osborne (1990), the aim is to establish empathic generalizability of the participants’ experiences by conducting validity checks with other individuals, outside of the research study, who experienced coaching. This process has proved to be helpful in illuminating other people’s experiences.

A second limitation is that individuals who volunteered may have different experiences than those who do not participate in research studies. Since participants were recommended to this study by their coaches, it would appear that the results are indicative of positive bias. Other methods of recruitment may yield different results.

Finally, since the participants who were interviewed were representative of a specific homogeneous population, more heterogeneous populations with a more proportionate gender representation would affect the results.

**Implications for Further Research**

This groundbreaking study was exploratory and descriptive in nature, involving the experiences of a relatively small number of participants. Since the participants for this study came to know coaching in a work-related context, further research with a larger and greater
range of participants may be useful to further clarify and add to the themes that were identified in this study.

Due to the nature of qualitative methodology, the many questions regarding coaching cannot be realistically addressed with this one approach. Similarly, not all questions can be answered with quantitative approaches. Therefore, it is important to recognize the complementary nature of both methodologies in order to address the common goal of coaching research.

Quantitative studies would be useful in determining specifics about the nature of the coaching experience. For instance, participants in this qualitative study found it a challenge to think of all the roles that their coaches performed during the coaching relationship. If an extensive list were introduced to study participants on a likert-type scale, this might ignite further insight.

Furthermore, there are many avenues to pursue in order to answer the question of how coaching embeds itself in the profession of counselling psychology. One of the challenges of this study was comparing existing counselling theory and practice to the relatively unknown (in academic circles) practice of coaching. In order to correctly address this imbalance, more coaching research needs to be conducted.

Research is also necessary as an increasing number of people are utilizing the services of coaches, and even more people are calling themselves coaches. Therefore, it is necessary, more than ever, to provide information to the general public, so that they can make informed choices regarding the type of helping services they would be most suited to access.

Specific studies might focus on interviewing therapists-turned-coaches to get an understanding of how they differentiate between the two and how they address the issue of dual relationships if, in fact, they do both coaching and counselling with their clients.
Similarly, other studies could include interviewing clients who have been coached by therapists to find out what their experiences have been in comparison to clients who have been coached by non-therapists (as in this current study).

Since the practice of coaching is unregulated, a closer look is warranted to ascertain whether there is a need for regulation and whether existing ethical guidelines (provided by the International Coach Federation) and the structure to uphold them, if there is one, is adequate to address the many complexities of helping relationships.

Likewise, with regard to the background and training of coaches, program evaluations of coach training institutions would provide a wealth of information in order to determine the efficacy and legitimacy of such programs. For example, it would be important to know if there is a prerequisite set of knowledge, skills and experience required of a person before he or she can enrol in a training program. Given the personal nature of the coaching relationship, having some type of entry requirements (even though these are not fool-proof) would be helpful to the credibility of the program.

These are only a few of the many suggestions that should be considered for further research. As with any new technique, skill or profession, it is open for the scrutiny of others, just as counselling psychology has been for the last fifty years.

**Implications for Coaching Practice**

Coaches who continue to practice should become aware of the many responsibilities involved in helping other people. Since coaching is not regulated to any extent, the situation is 'ripe' for people to make errors in judgment based on lack of knowledge, skills and expertise. Without any specific training in ethics, coaches are bound to find themselves in a virtual minefield of litigation. Since there are no coach training programs in North America
that provide a comprehensive, theoretically-based approach to coach training, it behooves those who are serious about making this a career to do all that they can to safeguard against disaster.

One suggestion would be for coaches to align themselves with counsellors and therapists to learn more about the ethical issues they may face and how to handle them. One of the most common ethical issues that may arise out of a helping relationship is the likelihood of a dual (or multiple) relationship forming. It was observed in this study that participants experienced various reactions to this kind of situation. Therefore, having the necessary skills to address this issue would be helpful in establishing boundaries. At present, there are many coach training facilities that support dual relationships between coach and client. Therefore, it would be important for them to also incorporate a component on ethics in their programs.

Additionally, coaches may find that clients may bring up issues that they are not equipped to handle. It would be very important for coaches to have the knowledge and skills available to differentiate between a counselling issue and a coaching issue. Coaches should not attempt to ‘fix’ the problem when it is obvious that their client might need other support.

Likewise, coaches need to know the procedures involved should clients become a threat to themselves, to others and if someone is threatening them. There are strict guidelines that helping professionals must follow if a client presents one of these situations. It is important for coaches to know that under law, confidentiality at this point must be breached.

As a final note, with regard to helping skills, it has been mentioned in this chapter the importance of addressing clients’ feelings, thoughts and behaviours in order for change to become more “instinctful” (as one of the participants in the study phrased it). It is especially
important to recognize and process a person's feelings regarding whatever change they may face as these are attached to what they think and do.

Although there are many more implications that could be mentioned in this section, it is limited due to the scope and nature of this study. Therefore, it is important to reinforce the message to all coaches that they must seek out and understand their obligations as a helping professional so that above all, they do no harm.

Implications for Counselling Practice

When I first began this undertaking, I sorted through many different counselling theories and techniques in order to find a 'home' for coaching in my study. This was very difficult, as I came to the realisation that counselling is still a work in progress and thus finding a consistent definition with which to compare coaching was not that easy. Therefore, this led me to wonder if the crossover tension between counselling and coaching was similar to the crossover tension between psychotherapy and counselling. The definitions and differences are unclear, which brings to mind that perhaps energy would be better spent focusing on the kinds of processes employed by coaches, counsellors, and psychotherapists to create a more harmonious system of helping. Since the perceptions of the general public with regard to each of these processes is determined to a large extent by the media, it would be beneficial for all interested parties to provide to the media as much information as possible about all three helping professions altogether. In this way, the public will be able to make better informed choices by replacing confusion with clarity.

For those in the counselling profession, it is essential that they become aware and educated regarding this helping alternative, as it closely resembles counselling in many ways. Counsellors are in a prime position to assume the role of coach if desired, as they may find
they are doing a lot more coaching in their counselling sessions than they realize. That is, coaching skills most closely resemble solution-focused techniques to the point where one of the founders, Insoo Kim Berg, has incorporated, ‘solution-focused coaching’ into her present practice. Therefore, it is not much of a stretch in mindset for counsellors to understand and embrace the coaching philosophy.

In this regard, I am specifically thinking of the many counsellors I have known who have experienced some form of counsellor burnout. This may be just the incentive that is needed to continue helping people. Given coaching’s positive focus and energy, it would be wise for counsellors to embrace this emerging profession to help balance the demands of traditional counselling.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INITIAL CONTACT

Dear Coaches:

My name is Indira Dhaliwal. I am a graduate student at UBC in the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education. As partial fulfillment for the Master of Arts degree in Counselling Psychology, I am conducting a research study on coaching under the advisement of Dr. Bill Borgen (phone: 822-5261).

As coaching continues to grow in popularity, it is important that a solid theoretical foundation be established from which the coaching process can naturally grow. Without rigorously tested academic research to guide the coaching profession, it is in danger of becoming a fad rather than an extraordinary phenomenon. It is my intention, as a researcher, to contribute to the viability of the coaching process by engaging in research that can withstand the scrutiny of established professions and academe.

My study will focus on the experiences of clients who have engaged in the coaching process. The title of my research project is “A Phenomenological Investigation of the Coaching Experience: Implications for Counselling Psychology”. I am looking for participants (non-coaches) who have been coached within the past year and who have experienced at least three consecutive months (or nine sessions) of coaching time. Clients may be current or past.

If you think that your clients may be interested in participating in this study and they meet the selection criteria, please leave your card, phone me at 822-5259 (message) or email: indira_dha@yahoo.ca. I will follow up with you in terms of providing you with informed consent forms that explain the participant’s role in detail.

Please note: It is imperative that you contact me BEFORE you contact your clients so that you have the necessary information about the study to give to your clients.

It is proposed that, once completed, the results of the study will be made available to the coaching community at a date and time to be arranged.

Thank you for your interest and participation in this groundbreaking study.

Sincerely,

Indira Dhaliwal
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of the Study: A Phenomenological Investigation of the Coaching Experience: Implications for Counselling Psychology

Principal Investigator: Dr. Bill Borgen
UBC Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education
Faculty of Education
Office: 822-5261

Co-Investigator: Indira Dhaliwal, Master of Arts Candidate
Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education
Faculty of Education
Department telephone: 822-5259 (please leave a message)

Purpose:
I am conducting this research in partial fulfillment of my Master’s degree in Counselling Psychology at The University of British Columbia. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of your experience of being coached.

Study Procedures:
If you decide to participate in the study, I will ask that you be involved in one in-depth interview conducted by me. This interview will be approximately 1 to 1 1/2 hours and will be conducted according to your preference of either a telephone interview or in-person interview. If you should decide to be interviewed in-person, the interview will take place at a location that affords a sense of privacy and is comfortable to both you and me. The interview will be recorded by audio-tape in order to assist me with data collection and analysis. This interview will be transcribed verbatim. Upon completion of my analysis, I will contact you for a follow-up interview and provide you with a summary of the results. The total amount of time required for your involvement in this study would be approximately 2 to 3 hours. I will answer any inquiries concerning the procedures of the study to ensure that they are fully understood by you as the participant at any time.

Confidentiality:
The identity of all participants involved in the study will be kept confidential at all times. Participants will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. Pseudonyms will be used to assure anonymity, and any identifying information will be omitted from any direct quotes used in the final report. All documents will be identified only by a code number and will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Any data records kept
on a computer hard drive or on floppy disk will be password protected thus ensuring confidentiality. The audio-tapes will be destroyed following completion of the study.

Remuneration/Compensation:
Each participant will be provided with a summary of the research findings once the analysis of the data has been completed.

Contact:
If I have any questions or require further information with respect to this study, I may contact Dr. Bill Borgen at 822-5261.

If I have any concerns about my treatment or rights as a research participant, I may contact the Director of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, Dr. Richard Spratley at 822-8598.

Consent:
I have read the above information and I have had an opportunity to ask questions to help me understand what my participation would involve. I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences whatsoever.

I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records.

I consent to participate in this study.

_____________________________  ______________________
Signature of Participant        Date

_____________________________  ______________________
Signature of Witness           Date
APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. As you know, the material that you discuss in your interviews will remain confidential and the data presented in my master’s thesis will refer to you anonymously. I do, however, need some background information and would appreciate if you could take some time to answer the questions below.

1. Name: ___________________________  Age: ______

2. Preferred Pseudonym: ___________________________

3. Tel no: ___________ (work) ___________ (home) *Time: ________
   (*Please indicate at which phone number you would prefer me to call you as well as the preferred time that I can reach you.)

4. Education: Please indicate your highest level of education:
   (a) public school ______
   (b) high school ______
   (c) some college or university courses ______
   (d) college or technical school diploma ______
   (e) undergraduate university degree ______
   (f) master’s degree or above ______

5. Occupation: Please indicate your present occupation at this time:
   (a) professional ______
   (b) trades ______
   (c) full-time student ______
   (d) homemaker ______
   (e) other (please specify) ___________________________

5. Please indicate the amount of time you have spent in the coaching relationship:
   (a) Number of sessions _________ and/or Number of months _________
   (b) Approximately, how long is your ‘typical’ coaching session?
       ________ hour(s) _________ minutes
APPENDIX D

GENERAL ORIENTING STATEMENT

The following statement will be read to all participants at the beginning of the first interview:

*The purpose of this study is to learn about your experience of being coached. This study is considered groundbreaking in that no other studies of this nature have been conducted. Since coaching is a relatively new phenomenon, there is much to be learned from your contribution. Therefore, please take as much time as needed to reflect on what you feel and believe is important to you regarding your coaching experience.*

*To get started, you may want to talk about your experience as if it were a story, with a beginning, middle and end. Or, you may want to think of a specific instance, situation, or event that we can explore in detail. In any case, please speak in the first person (ie. using “I” statements) as much as possible.*

*During the interview, I may ask you for more information or clarification about something that you have said, as I want to be sure that I fully understand your experience.*

Do you understand what I am hoping to learn about your experience?  
Do you have any questions before we begin?
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

As the participants share their description of their experience, I will respond by reflecting and asking for clarification where necessary. The succeeding questions may be asked to help facilitate the description of the experience as well as to help discover any personal meanings associated with the experience. The questions are as follows:

(a) Can you tell me more about what you were feeling or what went through your mind when that happened?

(b) What effect did this have on you?

(c) What did you do when that happened?

(d) What was the significance of that event?

(e) Let’s see, if I understand you correctly, you said that . . . Can you explain this further?

(f) If you had to use one word to describe your coaching experience, what would it be?

(g) Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your experience of being coached?
APPENDIX F

VALIDATION INTERVIEW

A follow-up interview will be conducted with the participants upon completion of the preliminary analysis of data. The purpose of this interview is to share with the participants the themes that have evolved from the data and to provide the individuals with an opportunity to express their views or opinions regarding these themes. Each participant will be asked the following questions: (a) How do these themes relate to your individual experience? And (b) Do you have any particular thoughts and/or feelings that you would like to share regarding these themes? The participants’ responses will be documented during the interview.
APPENDIX G

EMPATHIC GENERALIZABILITY

Description of the task for theme readers:

Please read these common and unique themes and tell me, in your experience of being coached, how do these themes compare with your lived experience of the process?