

# BEYOND GOALS - YOUR COACHING MANIFESTO

A traditional way of starting a coaching programme is for the client to define their goals and outcomes. This language and focus can often lead clients to jump too early for something very specific and tangible, or for the specific "destination" of the goal to dominate at the expense of a broader experience and exploration. The goal or outcome becomes immovable, unrealistic, un-adaptable, and intransigent. Coaching is essentially exploratory, so it's useful to be able to adapt as the programme emerges, and to have that mind-set from the start.

## DETERMINING THE DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

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*“Remember how we used to dream as children of the delicious freedom and power of being grown-up?”*

Ben Zander

Often when I ask clients "what do you think this coaching is about?", they readily move away from a goals discussion to something more fundamental and profound. For many what's important is a desire to explore, and to discover potential and shift as a result. They want to build self-awareness, self-acceptance, discover what's possible, what's emerging. For these people a different or additional way of scoping a coaching programme is useful. One which can reflect a sense of trajectory and journey. One which considers *who or where you will "be", as well as what you will "do"*.

So, I offer the option of creating a *Manifesto* – to make manifest, a declaration of intent, motives, views - typically focussed on growing a (less tangible) capacity for "being", rather than "doing". A current (medium term) statement of shift, or direction of trajectory or travel. Most usefully written from the perspective of being there.

*Manifesto* sits in the camp of inspiration and passion. Bringing it into reality will often take you to places of discomfort, to edges of experience and boundaries of comfort. The idea has some similarity with the yoga tradition of *Sankalpa* – setting an intention or resolve. One of the beautiful aspects of the *sankalpa* practice is that it starts from the radical premise that you already are who you need to be to fulfil your intentions, you don't need to change who you are. All you need to do is focus your mind, your thinking, your action, your being.

In 'The Art of Possibility' by Ben and Ros Zander, the authors present the idea of *Giving an A*. Ben Zander only takes A students, giving each an A grade at the start of term, on the condition they write him a letter dated eight to nine months later saying why they deserved that A - describing who they will have become, what will have shifted. Zander's approach is partly in reaction to the less than helpful practice of fitting performance ratings to a curve, or similar sub-optimisation of the majority. Rather he quotes Michelangelo who apparently said that "inside every block of stone or marble dwells a beautiful statue; one need only remove the excess material to reveal the work of art within". Zander gives his students an A, to "transport ... from the world of measurement into the universe of possibility", to reduce performance anxiety, to enliven, and, I think, to allow a little magic to happen.

If this idea appeals, then I suggest you first give yourself a A , then write your *Manifesto* for this coaching programme as a letter to yourself, dated at the end of the programme, or 9-12 months from the start. Questions to consider (neither an exhaustive list nor prescriptive): what has the coaching been about, who have you become, what has shifted, what capacities have you developed, what capabilities do you have, what are others noticing and saying, ...? Write everything from the "future present" tense. There should be no hopes, or intend to's, or will's. Write it all from the tense of what you did, and most importantly who you became.

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## TAKING THE MASTERY PATH

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*“We fail to realize that mastery is not about perfection. It’s about a process, a journey. The master is the one who stays on the path day after day, year after year. The master is the one who is willing to try, and fail, and try again, for as long as he or she lives”*

George Leonard

An attitude of mastery is a useful one to adopt when attempting to learn any new skill, and I think when engaging in the kind of learning, growth, developmental shift and outcomes associated with a coaching programme. In his wonderful book ‘Mastery’ George Leonard defines the 5 Keys to Mastery as:

1. **Instruction** - get the best instruction you can in whatever you attempt to master
2. **Practices** - rather than a destination, it’s the experience of being "on the mat" that counts
3. **Surrender** - to the demands of your discipline and your current level of proficiency in order to reach a higher or different level; let go of limiting ideas about yourself from the past
4. **Intentionality** - the mental game; engage in your experience of yourself; be intentional about your practice, your actions and thinking
5. **The Edge** - be prepared to go beyond your comfort zone and self-imposed limits; be prepared to step over, across, beyond

## PRACTICES FOR SUCCESS

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The benefits and experience of coaching are increased and intensified through intentional preparation and reflection. Moreover, committing to specific steps or actions between sessions and throughout the programme both maintains your focus and promotes active inquiry and forming of new habits and capacities. Regularly write down, email or visualise what you plan to do, to practice, to explore, ... Make this as specific as possible – when and where. Consider what help or resources you might need.

It may be useful to think about orientation and navigation points along the way, resources you might want to call on, the edges or resistance of experience that might delay or hold you back, hurdles or challenges, and finally, how will you hold yourself to account? How can coaching or some other mechanism be useful?

## GETTING GOING

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Take some time to reflect and work on your own *Manifesto*, perhaps even use the start of your coaching to develop your thinking. The horizon of your *Manifesto* might align with the duration of your coaching programme, but it might go some way beyond. In those cases, it can then be useful to think of a *Thematic Goal* – a medium term priority or “good place to start” that holds the spirit, theme and trajectory of your *Manifesto*, and that also provides a useful focus to begin coaching.

Alternatively, if you’re facing something that seems to hold a lot of complexity or confusion, then it can first be useful to consider one small change, one very clearly defined change: *‘if only one thing was improved as a result of our work together, what would it be?’* Starting small, with very modest ambition, is likely to allow you to explore your own systems respectfully and with less resistance.

And when you’re really stuck my favourite question about a question is usually *“what question, if answered, could make the most difference to the situation?”*

*I look forward to beginning with you*