

UNLEARNING TO COACH

Clare Norman invites us to start recording our coaching sessions in order to uncover and reshape the mindsets that shape our practice without us realising.

Imagine for a moment that your mindsets, beliefs, paradigms and scripts are your operating system. Just like our phone upgrades its operating system periodically, we humans need to do the same.

During my time observing more than 250 coaches, conducting between them close to 1,000 hours of coaching, I have noticed that the operating systems that guide them are getting in the way of them being the best coach they could be.

I am looking out for the competencies that these coaches demonstrate, but underlying these competencies is a complicated operating system that can make or break the demonstration of coaching mastery.

So, while I can give feedback to these coaches on the way they show up externally, it's the inner work that is really necessary to get them to make those external behaviour changes stick. As the educator and author Stephen Covey says: 'If you want small changes, work on your behaviour; if you want quantum-leap changes, work on your paradigms.'ⁱ He goes on to say that when you change the way you see things (your paradigms, mindsets, beliefs, scripts), it influences what you do (your habits, your behaviours, your coaching) and the results you get.

IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT SKILLS

As I provide this mentor coaching to coaches, I challenge them to focus on the mindset that underpins the skillsets – all in the context of my definition of coaching: 'a joint endeavour to move beyond known thinking to discover new thinking that energises the thinker to change.'¹

This guides my philosophy that coaching:

- is a partnership;
- moves beyond known thinking, because that known thinking has kept the person stuck in place and will continue to do so if we stay in that space with them;
- is about discovery;
- leads to new thinking, because this leads to new ways of being and doing;

- and energises change – the very point of coaching – which makes it different from any other conversations we might have in life.

I share this because it underpins the mindset shifts that we need to make if we are to become extraordinary coaches.

If I were to lay out a few scripts or beliefs that are contra-indicators for the above, and ones that I see externalised in the way that coaches show up in their coaching, we might recognise some of them:

These are just a smattering of the 83 mindsets that I see playing out in coaching sessions, and that I have written about in my upcoming book. Those on the right of the table (opposite) certainly give the thinkers a feeling of being listened to like never before, but they don't necessarily support new thinking and sustainable change.

COACH OBJECTIONS

You might push back, saying that the people you work with expect you to give them ideas and solutions. Yes, perhaps they do, because that is what they are used to at school, at university or at work: people telling them the answers. According to research cited by Adam Grant in *Think Again*, when asked, students invariably say that they preferred the lecture format where they were given all the answers compared to experiential formats of learning, in which it was much harder for them to figure out the answers for themselves. But in terms of what actually stuck, they learned more when they experimented and thought for themselves.ⁱⁱ We know this to be true, and yet we still slip into the service provider persona.

You might also push back about interrupting, because your parents may have taught you that it's rude to interrupt and that the thinker will find it intrusive. But you are there to enable them to access new wisdom, and you can get to that wisdom without the backstory. That's something you need to believe in to make this behaviour switch.

HOW TO IDENTIFY PROHIBITIVE MINDSETS

One way to identify our own operating system is to listen to or watch recordings of our coaching and identify what mindsets underpin our words and actions. It's good to listen to how we match up to a set of

Useful mindset	How this shows up in coaching
We partner	We co-create and, within that, my role is to hold the process. Theirs is to do the thinking because they are creative, resourceful and whole. ⁱⁱⁱ
We move beyond known thinking	I interrupt their story to check whether it is useful to them to say it out loud, or whether they might wish to skip the story to get to new thinking.
We are on a quest to discover and neither of us know the answers	Everything I do or say suggests that this is a unique individual in a unique situation, which no one has ever encountered in exactly this way before. I am comfortable in them not knowing.
New thinking	My questions, observations and invitations to experiment in the present take them deeper, peeling the onion to get to new thinking. We move vertically beneath the surface and this provides us with answers that we would not have discovered had we worked horizontally towards solutions.
To energise change	Their new awareness (of the root cause, their beliefs, values, feelings etc.) will take them to new experiments. They are a scientist, testing new ways of being.

coaching competencies, but to sharpen that skill we must first decide which mindsets need to shift to enable us to make maintainable changes to our coaching.

Listening to recordings of our coaching is 'reflecting in action' (albeit still after the action) rather than 'reflecting on action' – on what we think we did.^{iv} Reflecting in action is more effective, because it gives us evidence of what we actually said or did rather than what we remember (or don't remember) we said or did.

Think of this as similar to video analysis by elite sportspeople. They will always watch themselves back to identify where they could fine-tune their mindset and their skill. If we wish to be even higher-calibre coaches, we can take a leaf out of sport's book and include this same 'reflection in action' within our reflective practice.

Even more powerful is to listen/watch with a trained mentor coach who can help us to identify those useful and not-so-useful scripts that we have learned from our parents, teachers, peers, workplaces and coach training. We may be blind to them as they are so ingrained in who we are.

When will you start recording your coaching and reflecting in action rather than reflecting on action?

It's likely that you have objections about privacy, but in my experience most people, when asked for their permission, are happy to be recorded and for that recording to be shared with a mentor coach.

The recording can be incredibly useful to them as well, to listen back to their thinking. So, I encourage you build this into your continuous professional development. You will be staggered by the amount of learning and growth.

Contra-indicated mindset	How this shows up in coaching
I am a service provider	Master and apprentice: I fill the gaps in their creativity, resourcefulness and wholeness. I (inadvertently) disempower them and infantilise them with my words and actions as I invite them to act like a consumer.
I must be a good listener	I allow the thinker to tell the story, the context, the chronology, even when they know it already and are simply filling me in.
They come to me for my expertise and my answers	I have answers. I ask leading questions that take the thinker to those answers. I may even give them my answers directly.
Talking out loud is goodness	We sit in dialogue, often going around in circles, getting stuck as the head's wisdom isn't enough.
To energise change (I [Clare] believe all coaches have this desire to energise change)	(As a result of all of the above and other limiting mindsets, the change is often not sustainable or transformational).

Think of this as unlearning, if you like. Unlearning the mindsets that are holding you back as a coach, and replacing those mindsets with new beliefs that allow you and the people you work with to shift up a gear or two.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



With over 20 years of coaching experience, Clare Norman is highly sought-after by other coaches and coach training companies as a master mentor coach. Clare looks to continually sharpen individuals' coaching edge and upskill mentor coaches so they can deliver high-quality feedback to their coaches-in-development. Her laser focus on mindset shifts and her knack for spotting marginal gains has made her a go-to person for coaches looking for mentorship. With an international following, Clare is making a difference to the world of work via the professional application of coaching.

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