

COACHING I

8. SELF-COACHING WITH POSITIVE THINKING

8.1. Brief Intro: The What's and Why's of Self-Coaching

Self-coaching is when you take the initiative in creating positive changes in your life *without* needing expensive one-to-one intervention from a life coach, counsellor, psychologist or other helping professional. What are the benefits of self-coaching? If you can coach yourself successfully without the intervention of a third party this has the following benefits:

- You feel empowered and realize your own capabilities
- You work towards and achieve personal coaching goals that you have set for yourself
- You develop skills and abilities which you can use in the future to make further progress in different areas of your life in personal growth and in professional development
- You save money! - A series of life coaching or counselling sessions can cost you anything from £250 upwards so self-coaching can be highly cost effective!

Self-coaching is suitable for anyone who wants to make changes in their life or address issues and now is prepared to try out in a sensible and committed way techniques that have been proven to work with others. You can coach yourself successfully but it's a bit like driving a car - you are unlikely to be able to coach yourself without learning the appropriate self-coaching techniques and applying them to coach yourself. Why Self-Coach? Why wait for depression to develop or for anxiety to slam you into a panic? Why go on plodding through life feeling frustrated and confused, always winding up on a hamster-wheel of repetitious disappointments? Why not recognize that the friction you feel in your life is a clue that you've drifted away from your natural and spontaneous center, your capacity for genuine happiness. Self-Coaching can bring you back to where your life begins to make sense, where you begin to flow effortlessly with life rather than desperately trying to control it. Self-Coaching is a revolutionary new approach to alleviating life struggles. Combining powerful, cognitive psychological techniques with a motivational coaching plan for personal empowerment, Self-Coaching will simplify the confusing science of psychology, allowing you to:

- Recognize that anxiety, depression, panic, unhappiness, lack of success, fear, and relationship conflict, are merely habits--habits that can be broken
- Coach, motivate, and empower yourself to recognize that true happiness is a choice--a choice you can make
- Change negative thought patterns while developing a healthy, adaptive way of living
- Understand that trying to control life isn't the answer--it's the problem
- Realize it's never life circumstances that bring you to your knees--it's your interpretation of these circumstances that does

8.2. Dr. Luciani (www.selfcoaching.net)

Dr. Joseph Luciani is a clinical psychologist and self-proclaimed former whiner. In fact, he credits his years of whining and complaining with helping him to realize the limitations of traditional psychotherapy and discover a new approach that encourages people to “let go” of their troubles. “I would go into therapy, week after week, with a litany of complaints. One day my therapist must’ve gotten fed up with me. He turned to me and said: ‘Yes, dear.’ I felt so humiliated and degraded,” Luciani recalls. “Then it dawned on me that I was acting like a child, whining and complaining. And, that’s where I had my conversion. Traditional analysis tends to be such a dissecting, a reiteration of the past that goes on and on. You don’t solve problems. You just learn how to become a better neurotic.”

Luciani took this experience during his training and analysis in the mid-1970s and began a quest for a philosophy and message that challenged the traditional model of healing. He eventually developed a cognitive behavior approach to help his own patients and many others. Known as “Self-Coaching,” his approach is based on the belief that unhappiness, depression and anxiety are bad habits that can be broken. It all comes down to accepting responsibility for your own happiness. “Self-coaching doesn’t give a hoot about whether your potty training was too strict or lenient. We are the end result of habits from our past; we don’t have to look at why. People waste so much time looking back over their shoulders, not addressing the problem now,” Luciani asserts. “All life requires responsibility. It doesn’t matter if you go to a yogi, guru, shaman or shrink, all healing comes from you. The sooner you realize that and accept responsibility, the sooner you can really tackle the problems in your life.” One important step in Luciani’s approach is to separate fact from fiction, and deal only with the facts. Don’t get caught up in the “what ifs,” he says, such as “What if I don’t pass this course?” Instead, focus on the facts. “You’ve done poorly on a midterm and need to do a bit more studying. Instead of getting

anxious, you start to deal more pragmatically with facts rather than letting fiction overwhelm you,” he says. Next, he encourages people to “stop listening to the noise”— the noise of reflexive thinking. Don’t listen to insecure thoughts that sometimes nag at you, such as “I can’t do this” or “this is too hard.” Everyone has tendencies that work against them, he says. The trick is to ignore them. “Don’t let insecurity drag you around like a dog on a leash.”

After you’ve separated fact from fiction and stopped listening to the noise, the next step is to “let it go.” Luciani compares this to ignoring the symptoms of a head cold, which always seem to feel worse when you pay too much attention to them. “You may be feeling anxious, depressed or overwhelmed. If you focus on those feelings and identify yourself with your anxiety or depression, you become it. By letting go, you turn away from it. You aren’t feeding those problems anymore.” Letting it go is like changing the channel on your radio, Luciani says. You can say “no” to a negative line of thinking, just as you can say “no” to a bowl of potato chips when you’re on a diet. “My grandmother used to say, ‘You can’t stop a bird from flying into your hair, but you don’t have to help it build a nest.’ That’s the essence of letting go,” he explains. “You can’t stop an idea from percolating in your mind, but you don’t have to add to it. You can say no to thoughts that produce anxiety or depression. It’s as easy as changing the channel.”

“I don’t subscribe to panic, anxiety and depression as mental illness, but as habits. People can deal with a habit. Habits are learned, and habits can be broken. That’s the simple truth,” he says. “The self-coaching approach comes in when you need to fire someone up about their life. Get them over the hump, convince them that the hump is doable. Allow them to see that they have choices. They have a choice not to be victimized by their insecurities.” Through his web site, Luciani has offered help to those in need around the world, often in places where people are oppressed and have nowhere else to turn. “I hear from women who are not allowed to seek help, people with such confusion and desperation, from homosexuality to depression and anxiety,” he explains. “Private practice is a tunnel vision way to work. To feel that I’ve helped people thousands of miles away with this technique has been very fulfilling.”

8.3. Essential Ingredients of Self-Coaching

The following factors are likely to increase your chances of coaching yourself effectively:

- Learn some basic self-coaching techniques

- Use coaching exercises and forms to guide, monitor, sustain and evaluate your progress
- Follow a sensible and clearly thought out self-coaching program rather than just trying to achieve change ad hoc or on an impulse.

Or they might just be things you can work out on your own, given the right guidance. The five essential steps of self-coaching can provide a useful road map for breaking the bad habits that prevent many people from living happily and spontaneously. Here's a brief guide to instilling a can-do fire that will enable you to live the life you want:

1. Chart Your Weaknesses - Creating your best life begins with an appraisal of how you get trapped by reflexive thinking – those automatic thoughts that hammer you with doubts, fears and worries. Control strategies, such as black-and-white thinking, protect you from the vagaries of life, which your insecurity has convinced you that you can't handle. Other common tactics include guilt trips, doubting, name calling, not caring, hostility, lying, manipulating, doom-and-gloom thinking, as well as:

Yes, buts ... which allow you to sidestep responsibility. If you're impervious to criticism, you're in complete control.

Have-tos ... which help you control yourself and others. When you're convinced you must do something, you eliminate all doubts.

What-ifs ... which soothe you with the belief that if you can just figure out what's going to happen, you can adequately prepare for it.

Can'ts ... which excuse you from possible failure. If you avoid failure, you're in control.

2. Separate Fact From Fiction - My private-practice work during the past 30 years has convinced me that most people don't think about thinking, especially the habituated kind of reflexive thinking that gets them in trouble. They simply react to their thoughts. It's time to infuse some consciousness into the picture. Simply look at any struggle, conflict or intense emotional experience, and ask yourself: "Am I reacting to facts or fictions?" Facts are objective, observable, here-and-now phenomena. Fictions are based on interpretations, judgments and prognostications about the future. Once you make this distinction – fact or fiction – scrutinize the thought. For example, if you think, "I doubt I can handle this job," ask yourself, "Is it a fact that I can't handle this job?" Since you don't know whether you can or

can't handle the job unless you risk trying, you have to conclude that this is fiction. Only if you attempt the job and fail can you say it's fact. This simple act of scrutiny casts a light of consciousness on your habits of insecurity. Habits prefer the dark. Once exposed, however, they begin to wilt.

3. Stop Listening to the Noise - Self-coaching teaches you that healthy thinking is a choice. Once you've figured out that fictions are steering your thoughts, you need to learn to stop listening. When my grandmother would catch me worrying about something, she'd say: "You can't stop a bird from flying into your hair, but you don't have to help him build a nest." Grandma was right; you can't stop a reflexive, insecure thought from popping up in your mind, but you don't have to feed it with a second thought and a third and so on. Recognizing the simple truth that you don't have to be victimized by your own thoughts can be an eye-opening experience.

4. Let Go - After you've learned to separate fact from fiction and to shut down reflexive, insecurity-driven thinking, it's time for the prize: Eliminating struggle from your life. "Changing the channel" is one simple, yet powerful practice that will help you learn to stop, separate and let go. Try this exercise:

- 1. Think about something negative** that happened to you (an embarrassing moment, a frightening experience).
- 2. Next, think about something emotionally positive** – a memory, aspiration or vision for the future – anything that evokes good feelings.
- 3. On one side of a piece of paper** write the negative experience; on the other side write the positive experience.
- 4. Now, for approximately 30 seconds**, look at the negative statement and allow yourself to think only about this thought. Think anything you want, as long as it focuses on the negativity of this experience.
- 5. At the end of 30 seconds**, turn the page over and force yourself to think only about the positive experience.

At first this may take a little practice and patience. Once you get the hang of switching from negative to positive, try this: Look at the negative statement and allow negatives to fill your mind. Then, at any point, impulsively flip the page and switch to positive thinking. As you progress with this exercise you will find that, in an instant, negatives can be flipped into positives. Once you realize how easy "changing the channel" can be, you're on your way to understanding the true meaning of empowerment. It's as simple as switching stations on your radio. If you don't like what you're thinking, change the channel.

5. Motivate Yourself - If you sense you're losing ground – whether on the job, in your relationships or in your ability to reach a particular goal – you may also feel you're losing your emotional grip and be tempted to just give up. Once you start grappling with doubt and insecurity, you're just one step away from asking, "What's the use?"

Motivation and momentum are two vital components to following through on your self-coaching practice. To sustain your efforts to break the habit of reflexive thinking, you need to maintain an empowered attitude and sufficient energy. Start collecting some small, early victories against reflexive thinking by accepting less risky challenges, such as ignoring a neighbor's rude remark. Rather than being a pleaser or yes-person, try being more honest, starting with the people you know best. The key is to safely begin building your trust and confidence with "small wins," so that you feel more competent about taking on larger trials.

In each of my own therapy experiences (and I've had a few), I expected to find answers, and I expected my therapist to have those answers. Years ago, my training analyst put my weekly session of chronic whining and complaining into perspective with an offhand, sarcastic, "Yes, dear." Mortified, shocked and embarrassed, I left his office in a huff. But in the years that followed, I came to realize that he was absolutely right. I really had been acting just like a child: whining, complaining week after week, looking not to take responsibility for my problems but to be rescued from them. That "yes, dear" remark became the seed that eventually led me to formulate three basic self-coaching truths:

- You must challenge the myth that anyone else can "rescue" you. Professional help can have huge value (and is essential for many struggling with severe depression), but you have to do the work.
- You must accept responsibility for personal change.
- You must be convinced that you really have a choice.

Whether you've had your own "yes, dear" experience or you can't (or won't) spend the time and money on therapy, self-coaching is a simple, straightforward practice you can begin on your own, right now. Rather than mindlessly feeding your fears, why not learn to starve them by liberating yourself from insecurity's reflexive thinking. Once you do, you – not your insecurity – will be steering your life.