

Are they really flourishing?

Goal achievement is not enough to ensure clients are flourishing and happy. Sue Hanley explains...

Your client has engaged you to provide coaching in preparation for a career promotion. To guide him, you establish solution-focussed goals: taking on more challenging projects, completing a short management course, seeking more feedback from supervisors and colleagues on current performance. The client successfully gains the promotion, effusively praises his coaching experience, and declares how happy he is in the new role.

Your client has achieved his goal and he is flourishing... or is he?

Unless you have specifically worked on identifying strengths, developing resilience and building optimism, it is unlikely that the immediate glow of happiness your client is experiencing will contribute to an enduring sense of well-being. This enduring

sense of well-being is what distinguishes a happy person from a flourishing person.

Martin Seligman, the inventor of contemporary positive psychology and author of "Flourish," has set a target of 51% of the world's population to be flourishing by 2051. The ICF's vision, to be in the service of humanity flourishing, reflects this big hairy audacious goal. There is much that is important and useful to the practice of coaching in Seligman's book.

Seligman uses the acronym PERMA to define the five essential and measurable elements of well-being: Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment.

Accomplishment is the achievement of worthwhile goals – the very stuff of coaching. However, to be flourishing, Seligman asserts that all five elements

need to be in place.

As coaches, we might feel we are on track to achieving the ICF's vision just by concentrating our efforts on the client's accomplishments. This might be particularly so in respect to solving particular problems around work performance or life's immediate challenges.

However, if you take the view that your client is a whole person

with underlying traits, talents and habits of mind, then you might prefer to work with your client on all five elements as the wellsprings of lasting change.

The platform upon which the five elements of well-being rest is that of

character strengths. Particularly, strengths are the supports for engagement. Almost all of my coaching assignments now include an early assessment of strengths. It is amazing to see how much energy the revelation of strengths brings to a coaching session. It is also a great starting point for the journey towards greater self-awareness. A fundamental coaching principle is that clients must generate their own solutions, and an understanding of one's strengths is a powerful tool for doing so.

The specific genre of coaching that most lends itself to the PERMA model is that of developmental coaching. To paraphrase Tatiana Bachkirova in *Developmental Coaching: Working with the Self* (2011), all coaching is developmental if the coach facilitates three changes: quality of perception, understanding of mind/body interrelationships (the unconscious, automatic, emotional mind, the body, and the self), and multiplicity of self models – a tall order which almost certainly requires specific training. This also touches upon one of the most important of the PERMA elements, that of meaning.

Seligman describes meaning as "belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self." In consulting to the US Army, Seligman teaches resilience based on measuring psychological fitness, including that of spiritual fitness. There is nothing theological about spiritual fitness; rather, it supports the "search for truth, self-knowledge, right action, and purpose in life."

Bachkirova has a chapter on 'Coaching the Soul' and John Whitmore addresses it in *Coaching for Performance* (2009) with a chapter on transpersonal psychology. Tony Grant, in his recent ABC TV series "Making Australia Happy," uses the 'eulogy letter' as a way of tapping into what makes our lives important.

Seligman's PERMA is such a simple acronym. Behind it sits a formidable set of well researched tools which coaches can adopt and adapt in their own practices. Coaches who embrace PERMA principles will be well positioned to flourish alongside their flourishing clients. ■

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Flourish as a Coach

Flourishing as a coach is the first step to helping clients to flourish. Josie Thomson explains how...

How comfortable are you in saying that you are a Life Coach (or other type of coach)? Are you concerned that people will judge you? What judgments are you afraid of?

Flourishing as a coach means fully embracing what it is you do and being confident in talking about it. In my experience, coaches are generally only concerned about the judgments of others when they are not confident in articulating what they do.

By fully understanding and articulating the reasons you got into coaching in the first place and how you can add value to your client's life, you will flourish as a coach.

To do this know, and be confident about your responses to these three key questions:

1. What is the vision, or your mission for your business?

What is your business about? What's your vision for your business? You need to be able to identify and articulate for yourself - and therefore for others - what your business actually is.

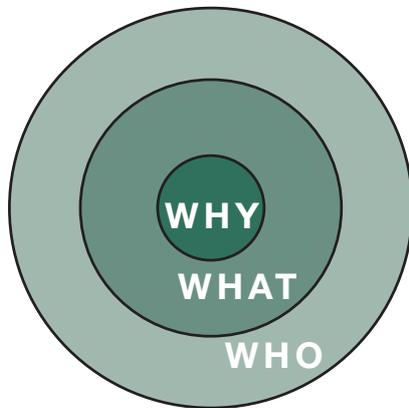
2. What are the key customer issues or problems that you seek to support or solve through your coaching?

Every coach goes about it quite differently. Coaches are unique individuals and it is your individuality that is your unique gift to the world. Understand who you are. Get clear on the specific client issues you seek to solve through your coaching.

If you are new to coaching or unsure what issue you seek to solve get some coaching yourself. The value you derive from your coaching will help you determine what value you could bring to your clients.

3. Who specifically is your ideal client?

It's not enough to say, "I coach executives". Get specific about who you are targeting. What outcomes could your clients expect to achieve by working with you?



When most people go out and promote their practices or themselves as coaches, they generally start from the outer circle: "this is who I am, this is what I do, and this is why you should work with me."

Although this may work with some potential clients, it's also the story most people will hear from every other coach who is promoting their services.

Instead, reverse the model to promote yourself from the inside out. Explain to the person the big 'why'; the reason they should partner with you?

Then talk about 'what' you do as a coach. Finally, tell them a bit about yourself and 'who' you are as a coach; ensuring they know you are a great coach.

Get really clear about your strengths, your passions and your reasons for becoming a coach. These will also assist you in overcoming the fear of being judged.

Being a successful coach, who is able to speak authentically about it, is also about 'walking the talk'. Look at your own story; how you have evolved over the time you've studied as a coach or through coaching clients. Understand how coaching has 'enabled' you in various parts of your life.

Also, as a tip for maintaining your confidence as a coach, always clarify with clients their understanding of coaching. For example, if you're a workplace or executive coach, be very clear with clients that coaching is a process for development and improving performance, not a remedial exercise. If you set the right expectations its easier to meet them and gain confidence in your abilities as a coach.

As a final tip, in selling your coaching services, embrace the brain's default network by minimising threat and maximising reward. Before launching into a big sales spiel, ensure you have your potential client's permission. Otherwise, you could be creating an unintentional threat response in the person you're communicating with.

You will find there are huge rewards for you and for others if you can step up and be an authentic expression of yourself in the world. You are your gift to the world. Embrace you and flourish as a coach. ■

Josephine Thomson is an internationally certified master coach and sought after global speaker. A senior associate, coach, trainer, assessor and mentor with Results Coaching Systems for over 10 years, Josie coaches leaders to achieve sustainable change.

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