

INTRODUCTION

A definition is a description or statement that enables shared understanding and agreement of the meaning of words. It serves to make something known, creating clarity, mutual understanding and, more importantly, meaning. When this is experienced in any form of communication we don't even notice. When it doesn't work, often it takes a while for us to understand that we lack shared meaning. In some cases, we may not even realize that although we were using the same words we were not actually talking about the same thing. Coaches traffic in words. They are the primary tools of the coaching conversation. We pay attention to words and meaning and the meaning behind words. We listen to what is said, how it is said, and when it said. Words are powerful and dynamic. The interesting thing is that with words being deeply essential to the coaching conversation, you may think that the definition of coaching would contain a significant level of clarity. However, there is no globally accepted definition of coaching. As you may expect, this creates confusion and is a key challenge for the profession. This is amplified by the lack of a unified governing or regulatory body. Anyone can simply say they are a "coach", regardless of what they are doing even remotely resembles coaching. Many coaches are not able to define coaching with clarity and every coaching organisation seems to define it differently. Getting to a definition of coaching is a difficult proposition. There are a lot of reasons why. Please don't misunderstand. This is neither good nor bad. It is the current state of the profession. In fact, the purpose of this pre-reading assignment is to stimulate your thinking and enable you to define coaching for yourself and others.

THE CURRENT STATE OF COACHING DEFINITIONS

There are a great variety of types of coaching, expressions of coaching and understandings of coaching. Many of these are previously held positions. Some are grandfather-based perceptions of coaching designed to cling to the same original vision of coaching. Some are experience-based definitions, anecdotal in nature, with a high level of emotional attachment. Some are targeted at a specific audience for a specific purpose. Some people say they are coaches but what they do is completely misrepresenting the practice of coaching. It is evident that the two contributing factors are the agenda of the person creating the definition and the intended audience.

Coaching is an unregulated profession. Coaching is an emerging profession. Coaching can closely resemble other interventions. Coaches use words and phrases in different ways.

In a 2004 study by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 81% of Human Resource Directors polled in the UK felt a key issue was - “lack of clarity in defining exactly what coaching is and what it isn’t”¹.

This document is not meant to create a definitive world-changing definition of coaching. We expect you to create one that reflects your perspective, interpretation, and practice.

It is the privilege and responsibility of the individual coach to define what they do and what it means to them in the way it makes sense to them and the audience they are sharing the definition with. This will result in personalized definitions. This is good. Every coach is different and as coaching becomes increasingly specialized this will be even more important as coaches carve out niches and differentiate themselves from other coaches. There are generally accepted themes, ideals and standards that mark the coaching profession. There is a great degree of similarity between definitions.

It is our desire to invite you to wrestle with this task throughout your experience at the Transcend International Academy of Professional Coaching. This paper and ensuing assignment are the first steps toward creating multiple definitions of coaching that will frame your understanding, perception and practice of coaching built upon a solid foundation of coaching definitions and frameworks. When you receive your Advanced Certificate in Professional Coaching, at the end of the program:

- You will be able to define what you do when you are coaching, for yourself.
- You will be able to tell others what you are doing when you are coaching, in a way that even the most coaching ignorant person will understand.
- You will be able to define what you do clearly to a potential stakeholder or client.
- You will be able to differentiate coaching from other interventions with clarity.

¹ *Taming the Wild West of Coaching*, Blakey, Barry and Jackson. March 2005

A TRANSCEND GLOSSARY OF TERMS

A large part of the challenge of defining coaching is a lack of agreement on popular terminology. What follows is a short glossary of some of the key coaching terms, and how Transcend will use them throughout your coach-training journey. You may choose to use them differently, however, for the purposes of the program we will use them as follows:

Coach - this refers to the person contracted to assume the role of a coach in the relationship.

- this is the “person being coached”. Some organisations refer to them as the “coachee”, “coaching counterpart”, “leader”, etc. It is an incredibly difficult word to define and even more so when we consider the cross-cultural interpretations and nuances of the translated phrases. The phrase “the person being coached” is perhaps the least ambiguous definition of this person, however it is unwieldy and impractical. Thus, the choice of the word “client” implies a person who is the recipient of a contracted professional service. In this case, a coaching client.

Sponsor - this is the person, organisation or group of persons who has contracted the individual coach or the company that provides coaching as a service.

Stakeholder – this refers to anyone who has a “stake” in the development of the coaching client and may not be the same as the “sponsor”.

Professional - Transcend Academy has chosen to define the scope of our coach development as “professional”. Professional coaches desire to practice coaching according to the highest standards of the profession, are committed to attaining excellence in their abilities and mindset and assist in creating a realistic and impressive representation of coaching in Asia. We expect Transcend trained coaches to define the scope or niche of their practice in a way that represents their experience, capacity, and passion. We feel strongly that most coaches needed in this region in the future are coaches equipped to develop people within the context of organisations.

HOW COACHING IS CURRENTLY DEFINED

There are many different styles of coaching definitions depending on the intent of the definer and the audience they are addressing. In general, definitions seem to follow some distinct patterns and hopefully, you will notice this as you research how other coaches define coaching. You might see they tend to define and view coaching through several lenses such as:

- How it works
- What the results are
- What the client is experiencing or doing
- What the coach is doing

The detail and depth of the definition will reflect the agenda of the organisation or the individual creating the definition.

CONCLUSION

This assignment is designed to expand your thinking, move you toward your own expression of this thing called coaching. We are excited to hear what thoughts this has generated, and how you are processing this information. As we have said, it is your privilege and responsibility to define coaching in a way that creates shared understanding and meaning.