

## Brief Coaching: “Dad, can you coach me?” by Dr. Peter Szabo, MCC

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One evening my eldest daughter, Anna-Julia (13 years old) was standing in the door of my study and asked: “Daddy, can you coach me?”

Since I generally coach managers and not my children, you can imagine my surprise. Especially when the question comes from a teenager! Yet, the conversation has turned out to be a touching and memorable professional experience even though it only lasted a few minutes. (This is rather short even by my standards of being brief as a coach).

Are you curious about how to conduct a brief coaching session with your daughter?

- read **paragraph A.)** (page 1-2) and find a verbal transcript of the coaching (proofread by my daughter)

Are you interested in scaling questions as a coaching tool?

- read **paragraph B.)** (page 3-6) for a simple four step procedure which seemed to work in this case.

Do you wonder how brief coaching can be brief and yet effective?

- read **paragraph C.)** (page 6-7) with some thoughts about the background of effectiveness.

In fact, what is it that we are trying to influence as professional coaches?

- in **paragraph D.)** (page 7-10) you’ll find answers from the perspective of several coaching models

Also let’s look at the context: how does being involved as a (father) and coach make a difference?

- in **paragraph E)** (page 10-11) we’ll take a look at some of the implications with mixed roles.

Finally there is a happy ending in which the father gets coached by his daughter.

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### A. The Real Case Example:

Anna-Julia: “Daddy, can you coach me?”

“You mean, really coach you?” I asked with some surprise.

“Hmm ... I’m just not getting on with my project for this quarter ...”

“What should I coach you on, so that you can get on with it?” I wanted to know.

“You know, I have to write this paper on Rumania. We have to hand it in in six weeks and I don’t have anything, yet. I really don’t know what to write. I did not find anything useful on the internet, and there will be so much stuff going on in the next few weeks. Four tests, French, maths, history, and German that I have to study for, and then there are so many English words that I need to learn, and then on the 23rd I have a violin concert that I need to prepare for ...” Tears were running down her face.

“That is really a lot going on at the same time”, I remarked with a sigh. “I’m sorry, sweetie, this is really not easy. Let’s go down to your room, and then we’ll have a look at what we could have a coaching on.” She leaned her head on my shoulder; I put my arm around her and asked what was most important of all the things that lay ahead of her. “Actually, it really is the project for the quarter,” she said. When we got to her room she handed me a pile of paper.

I leafed around in it and asked:

“Help me understand this thing with the project a little bit better. Let’s take a scale of 1 to 10. 10 means that you are holding the fully completed project in your hand and 1 means that you haven’t done anything in this matter. Where are you in the moment?”

“Maybe at a 3”, she said hesitantly.

“What, already at a 3?” I shouted surprised (and I could barely manage to withhold a remark about the length of the period of the remaining six weeks). “What have you already achieved, so that you are at 3 and not still at 1?”

“Well, you can see, I have all these print-outs from the internet!” She pointed at the pile in my hand, and as I was looking at the pages some more, she explained: “I have already talked to my classmate how we will divide the parts, but, you know, I haven’t found anything on sports.”

“Ok, there is nothing on sports yet – and what else have you done to get to 3?”

“I marked all the passages that are interesting, then I collected headings for the table of contents, but I really don’t know what exactly I could write about Rumanian music.”

“Sure, there’s still something missing!” I leafed on. “What else have you done?”

“Well, we recorded the documentary that was on television, we still have to pick the scenes that we could show.”

“And all of this together is a 3 on your progress scale?”

“Well, actually this is more of a 4 because I did type a draft on “culture” and “geography” into the computer.”

After a short moment she gave me a big smile, poked me with her elbow and said:

“Hey, Dad, I am already at a four, cool!”

“Well, you’ve already done a lot to come to a four, young lady.”

She was smiling on as I was thinking about a smart coaching question:

“Suppose you make some more progress, and somehow make it to a 5 on the scale.

How will you notice that you are already at 5 and no longer at 4?”

“O, Dad, you and your stupid coaching questions. I’ll do the draft for music now, and then I’ll google again on sports”. Thanks for the coaching and bye.”

She was gone and I had just started to warm up!

I had almost forgotten our short conversation, when Anna-Julia came to lunch a week later, with a huge smile and proudly announced that she was at 7 on the progress scale for her quarterly project. “By the way, I hadn’t thought that coaching works so well, this is really cool!” she remarked. “I even told my classmates that my father is coaching me about the presentation.” My coaching heart blushed and my father’s heart was melting.

“What was it that you discussed with Anna-Julia?” my wife was interested to find out after lunch when the children had already left again.

“As far as I remember, I only asked a few scaling questions.

And I didn’t even get to clarify the goal properly – we really only surfed around on the progress scale a bit that’s all.”

## B. The Tool: Very Simple Scaling Questions

When you look at the tools used in this short conversation, you notice that we only worked with scaling questions: four very simple interventions with four functions.

- Determining the starting point (“Where are you now on a scale of 1 to 10?”)
- Reinforcing what is already there (“What have you already achieved between 1 and 3?”  
“You have already done a lot to come to a four!”)
- Staying on the surface of progress, when the client says “but”  
 (“Ok, nothing on sports, yet, **and** what else is there at a three?)
- Making next small signs of progress noticeable (“How will you notice that you are already at a five?”)

Although scaling questions have been my favorites for years now, I never cease to be impressed by the effect that these simple questions can produce. It obviously became possible for my daughter to resume her work with pride and a feeling of contentment within a few minutes, even though she had felt hopelessly overburdened shortly before. For me as a father, using scaling questions helped to stick to my daughter’s explicit desire to be coached and to be reminded of my role and capabilities as a coach.

In the following, I would like to share some thoughts on scaling questions which were relevant in the example described above (more in BERG/SZABÓ, 2005):

### a) Determining the starting point

“Let’s take a scale of 1 to 10. 10 means that you are holding the fully completed project in your hands and 1 means that you haven’t done anything in this matter. Where are you this evening?” When asking a scaling question, it is useful to decide which title describes the deployed scale best. The progress scale used here is the most simple and therefore most often used scaling question. It was quite evident to use it here because Anna-Julia had explicitly asked for support with regard to her being stuck and with regard to progress in her project, respectively. Additionally, I wanted to find out at the beginning how threatening or non-threatening the situation was.

After our initial conversation, it would also have been possible to use a pressure scale (e.g. between “No problem – I can deal with it” and “I can’t stand it any longer”) or a scale of hope (e.g. between “There is no light at the end of the tunnel” and “I will definitely manage without a problem”) instead of the progress scale which I chose. However, in this case, we would have worked towards a helpful state of mind as a prerequisite for continuing her work, and less on the project directly.

How to phrase the beginning and end point of the scale is another point to consider. If possible, I try to define the scale in such a way that it has room for some confidence, so that the expected answer is at least a little bit above 1. As I know my conscientious daughter, I could assume that she had already actively undertaken a lot. If this had not been the case, I could have also chosen the starting point as being the first small initial considerations and ideas and the endpoint finishing the mental plan which would enable her to start acting.

In general experience, the number that is mentioned most often is statistically a three. However, already with numbers above 1.1, it can be very rewarding to have a careful, resource-oriented look at what the differences are and what is already present in comparison to a 1 on the scale.

**b) Reinforcing What is already There**

“What have you already accomplished so that you are at a 3 and not at a 1?”

Working with scales in a resource-oriented way means focusing on what is present and not looking at the deficit or the gap between what is and what should be there. The clients most often are already too aware of what is missing. Anna-Julia, too, had mentioned her perception of the problem and what she thought was missing. Asking her what was already there made it quite possible for her to look at the same issue in a different – and in her case in a relieving – way.

“If something works, do more of it.” Steve DE SHAZER

Since it had been rather easy for my daughter to mention one thing that she had already accomplished, the repeated question about “and what else is already there at a 3?” was sufficient to broaden her view on what had already been accomplished and make her more aware of it.

“Hey, Dad, I am already at a four, cool!”

“Well, you’ve already done a lot to come to a four, young lady.”

Another possibility to reinforce what is already there is the simple, rather obvious small compliment I gave Anna-Julia near the end of the conversation, when the evidence for Anna-Julia’s clearly visible confidence was so strong that she had to admit it joyfully herself.

Above all things, appreciation is probably a crucial contribution to the success of coaching. Not only between father and daughter – although here it is maybe most obvious: Dad is listening with undivided attention; I can tell him what I have accomplished and what I am able to do. Just this appreciative attention would probably have been sufficient for her to be able to continue her work.

**c) Staying at the Surface of Solutions**

One challenge in the conversation was that my daughter came back to what was still missing three or four times in the conversation.

In my experience, clients often come back to looking at the problem when the coach has invited them to look at things from a resource perspective.

“... I haven’t found anything on sports.”

“Ok, there is nothing on sports yet – and what else have you done to get to 3?”

I perceive scaling questions as an especially helpful tool for staying clear of the swamps of problem focus during the normal ups and downs within a conversation.

The scale offers a safe and steady board. Just like a surfboard which enables us to use the power and energy of the waves to move forward on the waves of the ocean. Surfing on the surface of solutions is different from being swept here and there by the waves and also different from taking a dive into the underlying depths.

The number 3 which Anna-Julia mentions is only the visible surface of a multi-layered event. Naturally, the scale implies the whole differentiated depth of all emotions and details which lie beneath. Anna-Julia was probably aware of many more details that are actually comprised in the number 3 than she would ever be able to make me understand. Nevertheless, I was able to utilize her number as a secure point on the surface to move forward (What else is there at a 3?) without having to understand what is hidden beneath it.

**d)** Making next signs of progress noticeable (“How will you notice that you are already at a 5?”)

“Suppose you make some more progress, and somehow make it to a 5 on the scale. How will you notice that you are already at 5 and no longer at 4?”

As you know, I did not get an answer to this carefully thought out coaching question. In the meantime, my daughter had answered a much more evident and simpler question which was: “What do I need to do immediately to move closer to 5?” And thus, the conversation ended itself in a very elegant and quick fashion.

The deliberations which had led me to the careful phrasing of the questions, which ended up not fitting in the end, were the following:

- If Anna-Julia comes to me, because she has too much to **do**, I just cannot ask her about the next necessary **actions** after 10 minutes.
- One elegant solution to start a conversation on the next signs of progress without exerting pressure to act is to skip the next actions. “**Suppose** you are somehow already at 5 ...” This way, it also becomes possible to continue with questions on concrete effects. (This is the same question pattern as the miracle question. It also bridges to the effects of the reached goal without going into which concrete steps, if any, are necessary for attaining it.)
- It has proven useful for the sustainability of the coaching to focus on next signs of progress in this phase. Once the client has become aware of his or her previous successes and signs of progress, it would be a shame if he or she missed the ensuing signs of progress by not noticing them consciously (you might say: “again not noticing”). This is why the question asks for a perception focus: “How will you notice one step higher on the scale that you have made further progress?”
- The question is consciously directed at the next **small** step and not at large steps toward the end goal of 10. Sometimes it is even more helpful to ask about steps of 0.5 or 0.1. The next step should seem as feasible and concrete as possible.
- Furthermore, I was also thinking about increasing the number of choices and leaving them open. I can ask several times: “and how else are you going to notice that you are making first small steps?” The more ideas and options arise here, the higher the probability that one or more of the many options start realizing themselves as if on their own in the daily life of the client. In contrast to an action plan, the choice of possible next steps is not reduced and condensed but is consciously kept open and manifold.
- And then there is the possibility of changing perspectives: “How will your best friend Lisa notice that you are making progress?” This additional question can be useful because it translates changes on the inside (for example a feeling of relief) into concrete actions that are visible from the outside (I will go to the cinema with Lisa tomorrow, I won’t have a bad conscience instead of doggedly continuing work.)

Comparing the length of the paragraphs a), b), c) and d) as I am writing them, I notice that I obviously have much more to say about this last paragraph d) than about all other aspects of the use of scaling questions. The fact that my dear daughter did not answer this one of all the questions is all the more interesting.

Apparently, I had failed to reckon with the most important person in the interaction: my daughter was already at a very different point than at the beginning of the conversation. In terms of numbers on the scale she had already reached a 4. Six weeks before the deadline for the project, this seemed a number that was sufficiently high to be able to resume her work with motivation.

And she was already clear on how she will realize the next small step: She would end the conversation with me and would start working again.

Also with my “real” coaching clients, my experience is increasingly that my carefully chosen “coaching-expert questions” are often less relevant than my other spontaneous questions.

In this context, I am often reminded of the urgent plea with which Tim GALLWEY ended his presentation on the first European Coaching Conference in Grindelwald, 2001: “Please, I beg you, please keep it simple!” Scaling questions, more than anything, are most effective when they are modestly simple.

Let me tell you a recent story: My son came home for lunch and was crying bitterly because he had fallen off his bicycle and had hurt himself soooo badly. I took a packet of Kleenex from my pocket to dry his tears and asked whether one packet of Kleenex was enough for all of his misery. “No”, he said, he would need at least seven packets. When I returned with seven packets, he laughed and his tears dried up. Ever since, we have been using a wonderful way to scale misery by the number of packets of Kleenex between one and infinity (more creative examples of scaling questions in EBERLING/HARGENS, 1996).

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### **C. The Focus: Observe (the Client) as an Observer**

In my terminology, I would call the short conversation that I had with my daughter a solution focused brief coaching.

The term “solution focus” is often misunderstood in connection with brief consultancy. “Ah, yes, solution focus, sure, I also always work on a solution”, is what people say when I try to help them understand what I do. In the meantime, I have given up on these attempts. I also did not explain to Anna-Julia in advance that as a coach, I am not working on the solution of the outer realities but on the perception of this reality.

“To see clearly, it is often enough to change the direction of your gaze” Antoine De saint Exupery

Before our conversation, the cross-section of reality that Anna-Julia perceived was still defined by what was missing.

Insoo KIM BERG (BERG/SZABÓ, 2005) describes what we do as coaches as a “tap on the shoulder”. I am figuratively standing next to my daughter, I look at what she perceives as the reality, tell her what I see, “Ah, yes, this is probably not easy!” (The missing things between 3 and 10), and then I give her a tap on the shoulder and point in a slightly different direction asking “and over there, tell me what’s over there?” (between 1 and 3).

Coaching invites us to change the direction of our gaze, or the way we observe and perceive. During the ten minutes of our professional conversation, I invited my daughter to have a look at another part of the same reality which is just as real and which she has lost track of in her desperation. While she is stuck, her angle of perception is focused on one small cross-section of reality. It is not about negating what she perceives but about making it possible for her to have a look at a larger piece of the same reality and then be able to decide freely whether she wants to look at what is missing or at what is already there or at both next to one another. As long as she was stuck, she did not have that choice; there only seemed to be what was missing.

“No problem can be solved by the same kind of consciousness that created it” Albert Einstein

The consciousness of what was still missing (sports ...) obviously was not very useful for my daughter in her attempt to continue working confidently. Becoming conscious of what was already there was more helpful.

The professional approach to the way my daughter is observing herself and her work is probably also the most important difference to what I had done in the role of her father. As a father, I might have tried to convince her with some verbal pressure that she had already accomplished quiet a lot. Or I would have presumed that she was actually saying “Dad, please help me”, and I would have rolled up my sleeves and would have started to solve her problem in fatherly “feasibility” and would have written texts and researched information.

Maybe this is also an explanation for the brevity of the conversation. As I coached, I made myself superfluous quicker and more effectively because Anna-Julia had separated herself **from** the (original) problem rather than both of us trying to solve **the** problem together. I probably simply assumed that she was merely stuck at the moment, and that she had kept the responsibility as well as the ability to get on with it herself. This is probably also the explanation for the sustainability of the coaching in spite of its brevity. The solution is left where the resources are in the long run, which is with the client. One could probably say that the ability is not only left with the client, but that it is actually reinforced. During the coaching, the client remembers that he or she already has everything he or she needs to be able to move on.

“Learning is finding what we know; consulting is reminding others that they know it as well as we do.”

In this sense, the term “solution focus” is misleading. Coaching is not concerned with seeing to it that a solution to the problem is found, but sometimes much more concerned with making a different view of the problem possible. Anna-Julia and I focused on her awareness of a solution, therefore we were solution (awareness) focused.

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#### **D. The Intention: What can I Influence as a Coach?**

When I sat down with Anna-Julia, at the beginning of the conversation, I was much more conscious of my intention than with many of my professional coaching conversations. How do I hear what she is telling me? What should I do differently than in a normal “father-daughter conversation”? What do I want to accomplish, now that I am sitting next to her as a coach? What is **my** intention, while in professional restraint I leave the goal, the path, and the solution to my client as the expert.

##### **a) What can I influence?**

The aforementioned Timothy GALLWEY (2002) suggests asking yourself about what you can control as a coach every once in a while by posing the following questions:

- What is it that I cannot influence?
- What am I trying to influence?
- What could I influence that I haven’t tried before?

In the authority of a father’s role I allegedly should have more influence than in the role of a coach. How often have I tried to influence my children to get them to clean up their rooms or stop bugging one another (with limited success, by the way). As coach, I am more aware of the fact that I cannot and do not want to influence the volition of my counterpart.

So which possibilities of influence remain for the coach to stay helpful in a professional conversation?

The Chilean coach Julio OLLALA defined three fields of possible influence in a simple formula. In his view, the probability of the clients actually implementing what they want can essentially be increased by three relevant factors:

- How attractive the goal and the effects of reaching this goal are
- How confident the client is about the feasibility of his or her project
- How clear the client is about concrete next steps

I recently worked with a client on the topic of work-life balance and consciously used these three strategies to increase the probability that the client actually manages to start implementing the desired changes:

First: the longer and more intensively the client can design the **desired state after reaching the goal** and draw a concrete picture of it, thereby enjoying the positive consequences before the fact, the more probable it becomes that he or she will find it rewarding to take up the drudgery of necessary changes.

In the conversation with Anna-Julia, it would also have been possible to follow this strategy and ask her, for example: “Suppose you somehow manage to move one essential step ahead in your work tonight; how will that positively affect the further course of the week? What will you do differently during the week?” This might have helped my daughter to imagine what was unimaginable at the moment (which means that she is taking a first step to move out of her desperation). And possibly it would have motivated her to continue working the very evening. We cannot know, and I am not really sure why I did not decide to go that way, but decided for the following second option.

Second: as attractive as the imagined achieved goal might seem, it will not cause a forward movement as long as there is no trust in the feasibility of the project. As long as, for instance, my work-life balance client doubts the possibility of the practical implementation of his desired state, he will justifiably do nothing. The pressure and the competition in his work situation seem too overpowering to allow him to give himself some slack. The trust in the feasibility of implementing some of what he had planned only grew after we had managed to identify small partial steps in the right direction which the client had already been able to take in spite of the challenging environment. For instance, there were weekends on which he had not taken any folders home, and he had also rejected an internally-assigned task successfully once. Discovering such signs of progress already functioning kindled his hope that he did not have to start at point zero and that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

In the conversation with Anna-Julia, this second strategy was the one that I pursued the most. We worked together to re-establish her trust in the feasibility of finishing her project. “What is already there? What have you managed to do so far?”

Third: Clarity of the Next Small Steps

Increased work-life balance can probably not be achieved other than via concrete small steps. As long as our client is not clear on a realistic, possible next step, he will not start moving into the desired direction toward his goal even though the goal is very attractive and he trusts that it is feasible. Ideas for next steps often pop up in the description of real daily activities which arise during the exploration of the other two strategies (for example “if I reach my goal, I will sleep longer at least once a week”). Maybe it is possible to implement a little piece already now. Or maybe this is again possible next weekend. With Anna-Julia, I did not get to pursue this third strategy. She probably noticed herself how she had managed to get on with her work before and

that she would consequently merely have to do more of what was already working. What impressed me was the fact that she obviously wanted to concentrate on small steps that she could implement this very evening.

**b) How** can I be Most Useful as a Coach?

I am very fortunate to get regular lessons on that question by coaching colleagues from all over the world. As part of the assessment team of the ICF (International Coach Federation), I have the opportunity to observe colleagues from various cultures and with various coaching models in their practical work. The most obvious similarities can be found in the starting phase of goal clarification and in the end with concrete discussions of the implementation.

What should sensibly happen in between, however, is rather different depending on the concepts and assumptions the coach has about what is helpful in coaching.

In Ben FURMAN's book "Pickpockets on a Nudist Beach" (FURMAN/AHOLA, 1992), we can find a refreshingly conciliatory description of this diversity. FURMAN describes how our clients come to us naked. We as coaches figuratively tailor clothes according to our taste so that we can elegantly conjure up solutions out of the pockets. Luckily enough we have clients who are able to learn and who then help to construct pockets and solutions collaboratively and thereby make the success of the coaching possible.

After almost 100 professional conversations over several years, I devised a small order of (admittedly simplified and generalized) categories of how we as coaches helpfully try to pick the pockets of our naked clients.

- aa)** Finding and creating goals along the way
- bb)** Finding and creating root causes
- cc)** Finding and creating solutions and their signposts

**aa)** One of the most common ways of being helpful by finding and creating goals and steps along the way can be recognized by the following questions:

- What could you do to solve the problem?
- What is your next step?

In the example with Anna-Julia, we would probably have devised an action plan with a well-proportioned and realistic list of activities. We would have carefully weighed the options she had to create more free space for herself and to facilitate her work. We could have looked at other existing options to get more information on Rumania, and we would have drafted a contact list with the people that she could ask together.

In Sir John WHITMORE's (2006) widely spread GROW-model (**G**oal, **R**eality, **O**ptions, **W**ill) these are the steps "creating options" and "committing to activities".

Assumptions that could be at the basis of this procedure:

- Very precise ideas about concrete steps are more than half the way towards an implementation
- Coaches usefully accompany the client in his or her thinking aloud about concrete possibilities for solutions.

The business model that fits with this kind of coaching often comprises a regular accompaniment until the goal has been reached.

**bb)** Another way of being helpful can be recognized by the following questions:

- What is keeping you from solving the problem?
- What is the root of your block?

With this understanding of finding and creating root causes, Anna-Julia and I would probably first have analyzed what was causing her the most trouble at the moment. Maybe we would have discovered that it is the relationship with her classmate, or that she is overly perfectionistic, or something else that was blocking her. And then we would have treated the root of the problem in some appropriate way.

Assumptions that fit this way of proceeding may be:

- Treating root causes is more sustainable than fighting the symptom
- Coaches help to find the masked aspects of blockages and solve them

Usually 5-10 sessions are scheduled to allow working in the necessary depth.

**cc)** The conversation I had with my daughter can be sorted into the third category, finding and creating solutions and their signposts. Typical questions in this way of being helpful may be:

- What is already working?
- Suppose you had a solution, what would you be doing differently from what you are doing now?

Assumptions behind this way of proceeding are, for example:

- No problem happens all the time, and it is worthwhile to look closely at what happens in the remaining time.
- Talking about problems constructs problems, and talking about solutions constructs solutions.

“Problem talk creates problems, solution talk creates solutions.” Steve DE SHAZER

According to my understanding of being helpful as a coach, I helped Anna-Julia focus on what is already working in the conversation, supported by my experience that it is not necessary to tackle the obstacles in order to make desired behaviour possible or to accompany the implementation. With regard to the project, Anna-Julia finished it herself. She has not asked for coaching since. This is something that is also reflected in my experience with my professional clients: One or two sessions and very rarely an additional coaching on a different issue. The feedback I get is often: “The problematic situation surprisingly did not happen again or has lost its relevance.”

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## **E. The Context: Role as Father / Coach / Manager**

In my coaching trainings, I am often asked by my participants whether I coach my friends and family at home. The answer I give then is, of course, a decisive “No”.

So far, being reluctant to use professional instruments in non-professional conversations has worked well for me. Therefore, I need very clear and explicit signals like my daughter’s “Dad, can you coach me?” in order to be able to activate my coaching-reflex. I want to be very sure of the fact that my counterpart is addressing me in my other quality. If not, I enjoy being able to simply give my daughter a big hug as her father if she is worrying about something. As a coach, I do not have that option. And being able to wallow in one’s sorrow and commiserate with a colleague or friend without any impulse to be helpful is also a very valuable thing for a relationship between friends.

In a seminar in Zürich, Steve DE SHAZER answered this question like this: “I never use these

questions with my friends – that would not be ethically correct. What I do, however, is to **refrain** from asking or saying certain things that other friends might ask because I found out that these things are not very helpful.”

“As a coach, control what you can control: your mouth.” Timothy W. GALLWEY

Naturally, I also met the challenge of not saying things with Anna-Julia. Because I know how diligent and conscientious she is, it was very hard for me not to contradict her at the beginning of our conversation: “But Anna-Julia, have a look, you already are very far in your work, especially since you still have another full six weeks!”

In hindsight, I am very happy that I managed to be helpful in my double function as father and coach more by my not-knowing questions than with my “knowledge”. I also found it wonderful to be able to combine my being a father with my being a coach.

In Anglo-Saxon countries, coaching was taken and used as a leadership instrument at first, and is still used primarily in this manner. People are obviously less afraid of combining the role as a leader and that of a coach.

A leader can naturally put on the manager’s hat and communicate the economic requirements clearly and definitely and then put on the coach hat and ask: “Now, from your point of view, what do we have to learn to be able to reach these goals?”

At the coaching congress in 2005 in Frankfurt, the British management coach, Sir John WHITMORE illustrated brief coaching in a leadership position by a very nice example. Two things impressed me the most:

- On the one hand, I was surprised that Sir John’s understanding of brief coaching is even briefer than my own. He was very right in mentioning that there is no time for one hour coaching conversations in daily management. Coaching should be effective after a few minutes.
- On the other hand, I was flabbergasted by the simplicity with which he is able to explain the effect of helpful coaching: “Awareness and responsibility”, are the key words. Coaching is supposed to create awareness of the client’s options for solving the problem, and coaching is supposed to place the responsibility for the solution where it belongs: with the coachee.

This is Sir John’s example: The director of an industrial company enters his office in the morning to see the shift manager of the night shift waiting for him. Very agitated, the manager tells him about a technical problem and its dangers and effects. The director listened carefully, and then asked one short coaching question only to resume listening:  
“Imagine I wasn’t here for some reason. How would you solve these difficulties?”

The essence of coaching and the long sustainability of brief coaching is possibly as much in what the coach refrains from doing as it is in what he or she does: Creating awareness and leaving the responsibility where it belongs. Full stop.

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## Post-Script

When I came home the other night, very exhausted and shaking my head after working with a very strange group, and was venting my frustration rather loudly, my daughter Anna-Julia asked me with a big smile on her face:

“Hey Dad, would you like me to coach you?”

“I am not so sure whether that would be helpful with something like this”, I sighed. “I would probably need a miracle. But since you are asking with such a big smile on your face, why don’t we give it a try.”

“Ok. So imagine, we are having dinner and then you watch the movie, and after that, you go to sleep. And tonight, as you are sound asleep, a miracle happens, a real miracle. And in the morning, when you wake up, how are you going to start to discover that a miracle has happened?” I just had to give some thought and a decent answer to such a beautifully-phrased miracle question (at the same time asking myself where she had learned to create her question by picking up a clue that I had just said).

“Great”, said my daughter after I had replied. “And what of all the stuff that you mentioned after the miracle could you already start doing now?”

There is nothing better than being a father and a coach.

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