

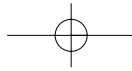
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Collaborative Coaching: Introduction

Thus far we have explored the idea that coaching is about 'helping people to help themselves'. This is not a case of the coach 'doing it' to the client. This is a collaborative partnership whereby both players engaged on a shared journey to ensure that the client achieves their perfect picture.

If the coach and client are to collaborate then they need a shared understanding or map of the journey. I am a big fan of maps. Have you ever been the passenger in a car where both you and the driver know where you want to get to but don't have a shared map? They might have a plan of how to get there (or not!) and you probably also have a route you think should be taken. This can (and often does) lead to quite a tense time, with the following emerging:

- 1** You have to trust they have a route in their head and they're not just guessing.
- 2** You have to trust that the driver knows the best route (especially if you are heading for a wedding that starts in a few minutes).
- 3** There can be tension if the driver is less experienced than the passenger.
- 4** There can be a subtle power battle (note the problem with back seat drivers) as you are putting your life in their hands and just maybe you want to exert some control over the journey.
- 5** You might believe that the driver is lost, but decide to sit back, arrive at the wedding late and then wallow in the pleasure of blaming the failure on them.



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- 6** There can be different interpretations in the directions – does turn left at the roundabout mean first exit, left as the crow flies or left off the slip road as you leave the roundabout?

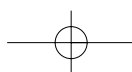
Since driver and passenger don't have a common platform by which to have a conversation, the relationship can be fraught with problems. Imagine how much simpler it can be when both have a simple map in front of them – a chart that indicates where they are, where they are going and the route they will follow to get there.

I would suggest that when the coach and client don't have a shared framework the same issues would arise and in many cases lead to abandoned outcomes that leave both players worse for wear. For example, imagine the coach and client who are working together without any common map or language:

- 1** The client has to trust the coach and hope they are not bluffing.
- 2** The client has to trust that the coach knows the best approach to help resolve their concern (especially if being interviewed for promotion in a few weeks).
- 3** There can be tension if the coach is less experienced than the client.
- 4** There can be a subtle power battle as the client might be putting their career or personal life in the hands of the coach and just maybe the client wants to exert some control over the journey.
- 5** The client might believe that the coach is wrong, but decides to sit back, fail their interview and then wallow in the pleasure of blaming the failure on them.
- 6** There can be different interpretations in the directions being offered – does 'take a risk in your life' mean smile at a stranger, swim a wild river or resign from your current job?

The Collaborative Coaching framework aims to help address many of the issues raised – not by giving a solution but by giving both client and coach the shared language by which they can agree the journey to be taken, allowing sensible conversations to occur through a shared language and offering the client a greater say in the way their coaching engagement is managed.

“There can be tension if the coach is less experienced than the client.”



Choosing the choice

Once the idea of coaching as a managed process of helping is clear, we can start to understand how this help is offered. Clearly coaching is being used in a multiplicity of places and many of the broad coaching themes can be seen below:

- Spend less
- Earn more
- Save more
- Become financially secure
- Change careers
- Get promoted
- Reduce work hours
- Reduce travel time
- Improve specific skills
- Create work schedule
- Do work that is authentic
- Reduce stress
- Improve health
- Improve a relationship
- Find a new relationship
- Close a relationship
- Become more assertive
- Generate revenue
- Manage conflict
- Grow self-esteem
- Make better life choices
- Make a big life change
- Reduce addictive tendency
- Manage self-motivation
- Define new strategies
- Boost personal productivity

One common theme sits under all of these coaching topics – someone acts in a certain way and they want to feel, think or behave differently. Having recognized that their current journey does not get them where they want to be, they need to alter the journey – and the coach is there as a partner to help them deliver a change that will stick.

We may liken this to Figure 2.1, where the person is following a direction but then reaches a choice point where they decide to alter the route and do something different. So the smoker chooses to give up smoking; the team member decides to get promoted; or the person with low self-esteem decides to make a change in how they view themselves. All of these examples indicate someone who wants to change their journey and hence the end destination. However, the moment this change in direction takes place, a rubber band will kick in to try to pull the client back to the original trajectory. The new team leader yearns to give up all their new responsibilities and be one of the team again, the born-again runner wants to stay in

bed, and the newly assertive manager tries to avoid confrontation and go back to being nice to people.

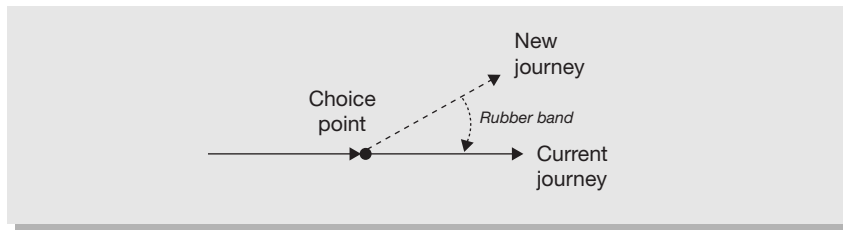


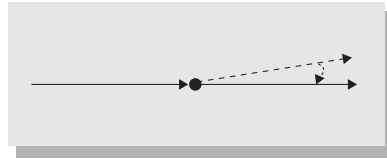
Figure 2.1 Choice point

“The tension between sticking with the new and reverting to the old is always there.”

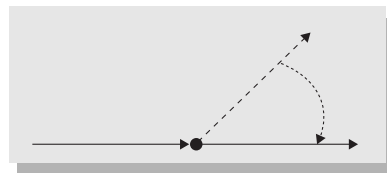
The coach’s role is to help them (a) make the change in their journey and (b) stick with the new direction – even when times get tough and they yearn for the comfort of the old way they knew and understood. It is important for both coach and client to understand that there will be forces that strive to pull the client back into the comfort zone. Like a huge rubber band that tugs incessantly, the tension between sticking with the new and reverting to the old is always there.

The coach and client need to consider the nature of the tension and how it may impact the sustainability of the planned change. One way to do this is to look at the change and the angle of deviation from their normal path. Is the client after help with a relatively small deviation from the norm, such as correcting a faulty golf swing or helping to fine-tune their presentation skills? Or is the deviation more of a major diversion, where the client wants to completely change how they operate, to the point that it might be viewed as a complete reversal in direction? This might be the smoker who wants to quit, the senior executive who plans to give it all up and open an almond farm in Spain, or the committed atheist who wants to seek a faith. All these are significant redirections that require pretty serious support and understanding from the coach.

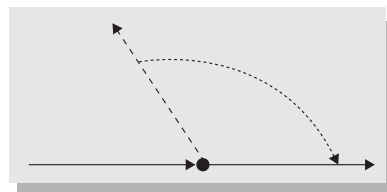
As we think about this idea of redirection and the level of deviation from the established patterns, it can help to map the angle of change using the following examples:

**Divert**

In this case the angle of deviation is marginal and will have a relatively small level of impact on the person and their life. This might be akin to someone who wants to improve their time management skills. Because the energy is still broadly in the same direction with just a slight deviation, there will be a relatively low amount of energy in the rubber band as it tries to pull the client back to the old habits. However, because the gap is so narrow, drift can occur as people slip into old behaviours without realizing it. When the manager misses one goal-setting session it is not noticed, but they then miss it for a week and then a month, until eventually the behaviour has reverted to the original direction.

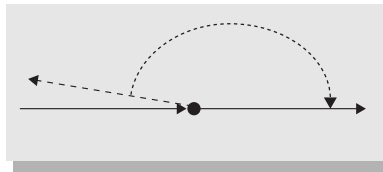
**Corner**

This is where someone makes a significant change and turns a corner in how they want to behave. In this case, the change has a larger deviation than a simple diversion from the normal behaviour. This might be the debt-ridden compulsive spender who decides they want to buy clothes only once a month and from a budget store. The shift from the norm (for the habitual fashion shopper) is quite large. The rubber band will kick in a lot more heavily (especially as they walk past their favourite high street store).

**Break**

In this case the change is a significant variation from the normal direction. This might be likened to the person who plans to get fit by spending time at the gym. Hence time normally spent watching TV now has to be given over to exercising. The rubber band is really kicking in now, as every time they have to go to the gym each step is full of pain as the TV screams at them to stay at home and relax. In this case drift will be quite obvious because the new action is directionally different from the established behaviours.

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**About turn**

This is a major change in direction, where the new action is the complete opposite to the old behaviours. This is what happened when I decided to give up drink. This was a complete reversal away from my established comfort zone. At first the emotional,

mental and physical energy required to counter the pull of the rubber was quite draining. But over time the band lost its energy and I was able to maintain the velocity and momentum of the new direction with some ease.

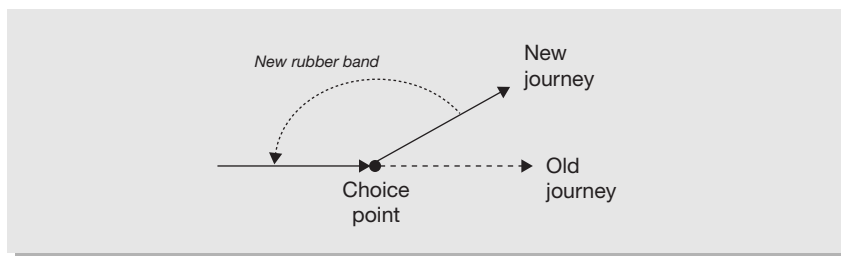
By working together on these issues the coach can agree with the client what action they will take to help ensure that the rubber band does not snap into place and cause reversion to the comfort zone.

Hence when first working with a new client it is pertinent and important to consider:

- 1 What is their current direction?
- 2 What is the new direction they wish to take?
- 3 How different is the new from the current (degree of variation)?
- 4 How strong will the reversion rubber band be?
- 5 How strong are the forces pulling someone in the new direction?

In many ways the role of the coach here is twofold: first to help cut the old rubber band and second to anchor a new one that pulls the person in the desired direction, as seen in Figure 2.2. Once they are confident that the old band has been eliminated and that the new one is exercising sufficient pull in the new direction, in many ways the coach's job is done.

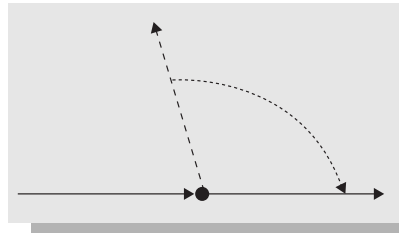
The 7Cs framework is carefully designed to offer a collaborative framework that will help deliver these two processes. Through building trust, giving feedback, challenging perceptions, highlighting limiting beliefs and

**Figure 2.2** New rubber band

surfacing shadows the coach is able to cut the rubber band that pulls the client in the unwanted direction. Then, using techniques such as directional setting, creativity tools, rich measures, choice management and planned withdrawal processes, the coach can help the client lock in the new rubber band and so eliminate the risk of reversion.

John's journey

After the introductions and questions, Julie asks John to explain about himself and to give an introduction to the thing he would like coaching on. At this point Julie is not looking for detail, depth or a decision on whether to take John on as a client. She just wants to understand the nature of the issue that he requires help on and in particular the degree of change that he will need to make and sustain.



Choice angle

John briefly describes his background and the fact that he has worked for 19 years for a large petroleum company, for the last ten as a manager. He describes how redundancy may be looming and how this will give him a chance to make a change that he has often thought about. Julie talks briefly about the issues of redundancy, but then moves to ask John about the goal of what he would like to achieve. He describes how for many years he has been dabbling with the idea of becoming a personal fitness trainer. He has always been interested in sports and has kept himself fit. He has been doing some background studying around the technical areas of health and fitness and would be keen to gain a qualification in this area.

At this point Julie is interested in working with John, but she first needs to understand the nature of the choice that John wants help with and in particular the strength of the two rubber bands. She needs to understand what forces will be acting on him as he attempts to make such a change.

After a ten-minute conversation Julie begins to see that the forces pulling John to this new way of life are a desire for freedom, a wish to turn a hobby into a living and the idea that he would be able to spend more time with his children. Conversely, the forces that would pull him back into staying with the current firm are the need for security to pay the mortgage, the kids' schooling and university fees, and the strong company pension plan.



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Julie spends some time talking with John about these two opposing forces and in particular how the shape of his choice angle (about-turn) means that he would face considerable pressure to either remain in his current job or give up the dream and get another job as a mechanic somewhere else.

She feels that John is serious about the desire to change, but before agreeing to a coaching contract wants to understand further both what he wants to achieve at the end of the change and why he has come to her for help.

