

## Being and Coaching Mastery

Many will tell you that the keys to being a great coach have all to do with a specific set of skills such as listening, artfully offering feedback, reflecting back well, etc., and I might agree. Still further, many will offer you a wonderful set of tips for how to market and sell yourself, how to give a powerful elevator speech, or how to “land” the client, all of which might be quite useful. All of those things might be good for being a good coach, but not will evince mastery. In my view, mastery has all to do with one’s quality of being and little to do with the skills.

Being is an elusive concept. It cannot be objectified. One cannot touch it, smell it, taste it, or see it. Moreover, because so many branches of science, psychology and philosophy deal with the concept of being, it has been defined in a variety of ways. For example, Martin Heidegger, the 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, refers to being as a fundamental state of existence in the world. He was interested in the “is-ness” of being. He also believed that living an “authentic life” had something to do with discovering and expressing one’s natural state of being. Looking at being from a slightly different angle, many eastern philosophies refer to being as the innermost core of one’s self, that which is connected to all things. Each of these views clearly have merit, as do so many more.

While many have wrestled with the concept of being, and clearly have differing points of view, we need a concrete definition. When I refer to one’s *being*, I am simply referring to where one’s consciousness is located at any given moment. My consciousness, in this case, has to do with the content of my thoughts and my awareness. It is where I come from when I take action. When a friend is troubled by my angry expression and says, “Hey Keith, take a look at where you’re coming from,” she is asking me to look at my attitude with regard to that particular situation, or at the thoughts that produce the anger. She wants me to see where my anger derives.

At any moment, I can come from any of a number of places in my inner being. Sometimes I am in touch with my core self and feel connected to all things. Sometimes I am the wounded child of my deeper self and act petulantly. Sometimes I express myself through my outgoing personality and am playful. In every case, my behavior is driven by some part of my inner being.

Defining one's being with precision helps us appreciate the thoughts that distinguish masterful coaches from others, and to understand where these thoughts derive. Indeed, looking closely at the process by which we think and act becomes a powerful teaching tool. It is insufficient to suggest to an eager coach in training to adopt a certain being. This is too elusive an instruction, and like asking a novice tennis player to "be more fluid." It doesn't work that way! It is often more instructive to suggest that the developing coach adopt a particular thought process. This is something that can be more easily received and acted upon. Eventually, repeated thought processes begin to shape—or reshape—one's being.

A brief example might be instructive. A colleague of mine recently was invited to a senior executive staff meeting in a new consulting situation. It was hard for her. In addition to garden-variety performance anxiety, she was aware of a deeper distress. She was working much too hard to impress the client with her abilities. This desire to impress was driven by worries that she might not be fully accepted, part of a deeper issue she had with rejection—a repeated life concern that shaped her overall *inner stance* in life.

Because she wanted to impress, she spent a lot of time and energy thinking about what would dazzle the client, what would show them how bright she was. The possibility that she might be rejected also weighed on her. These thoughts produced actions that came across as showy, pushy, strained and unnatural. In the end, instead of impressing the client, she had the opposite effect. The client experienced her as needy, disconnected from the group, and not confident. During the meeting, the client's feelings and perceptions were not immediately obvious to her. Yet afterwards, as the members of the executive team discussed their feelings, they reported to each other that they felt she did not belong in the culture of the business and were concerned that she was not the "right fit" for them.

While initially unaware as to why the client decided not to work with her, the reasons became much clearer when she later reflected upon her *inner stance*. She realized that she had not felt quite right within herself when making her presentation. Had she felt solid, truly connected to who she was—to her deeper capabilities—and had she trusted herself fully, she would have felt much less of a need to impress. She would have known she was perfectly fine just as she was, naturally. Had she been in a more solid *inner stance*, in other words, she would have more likely been successful. I know her as a marvelous consultant. What came out, however, was less than that.

If I were to coach her on how she could have been more effective, I probably would not have said something like “Trust yourself, you’ll be fine.” Although generally true, this does not help her know the factors that prevented her from trusting herself, nor does it guide her on where or how to come from a solid capable place in her being throughout the meeting. Instead, my coaching would have more likely gone down a path that looks more like the following:

- a. How were you feeling going into the meeting?
- b. How were you feeling throughout the meeting?
- c. What thoughts were driving these feelings?
- d. Where do those thoughts come from?
- e. What alternative thoughts would have been more productive?
- f. What mindset or belief would best produce those thoughts?
- g. How can you best stay in that mindset throughout the meeting?

This process helps her locate more precisely the *inner stance* that will help her become more effective. Although I might offer suggestions along the way, the nature of the inquiry invites her to get clearer for herself and assumes that she already has the knowledge and ability to come from a solid place inside herself. This is often the case.

I believe almost all great coaches go through the same process of asking similar questions. Their self-reflection is designed to help them discover and learn ways they can be even more effective by being more solid in themselves or in their being. The term *centered* has all to do with this same notion, and it is in being centered, calm and relaxed that is the goal so that one can bring one’s best to any given situation.

So, while I honor the importance of good skills and good sales approaches, none of them hit the mark when one’s state of being are off. By way of contrast, when your state of being is pure, open, present, available, heartfelt and warm, you can be off in your skillfulness and easily recover, for the quality of your being will shine and that is what will make all the difference in the world.