

What's the difference?

Carol Wilson and Gladeana McMahon explore the differences between coaching and its related disciplines

Coaching draws its influences from, and stands on the shoulders of, a wide range of disciplines, including counselling, management consultancy, personal development and psychology. However, there are a number of core differences which distinguish coaching from its related fields.

Origins and history of coaching

Coaching has its roots mainly in psychology and sports coaching. However, early psychology, up to and during the time of Freud and Jung, was largely remedial, and remained so even when it later developed through behavioural and cognitive therapies. Therapy was about identifying what was wrong with the subject and attempting to fix it.

Humanistic psychology developed in the Sixties; the key figures were Abraham Maslow, renowned for his 'Hierarchy of Needs', and Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt therapy. These psychologists started to look at what was right with people rather than what was wrong – focusing on their best potential rather than their problems. The Hierarchy of Needs places 'self-actualisation' at the end of the human evolutionary journey (figure 1 below).

Maslow focused on the top of the triangle: how to reach the pinnacle of achievement and satisfaction. He believed that the process of reaching upwards would solve problems lower down along the way.

In the 1970s a tennis coach applied the principle to coaching. Tim Gallwey was no ordinary

sports coach: he explored psychology, was a devotee of an Indian guru, and his key breakthrough was to understand the value of enabling people to learn about themselves, or to become 'self-aware'.

Gallwey found that when he taught his tennis players how to learn, they performed better than when taught how to hit a ball over a net. He defined the 'opponent inside' as being more limiting than the one standing behind the opposing baseline. What made the difference was that, as well as awareness, Gallwey understood the significance of directionality: awareness of where you are now is not enough to bring about change; you have to know where you want to get to.

He wrote a series of books called *The Inner Game*, applying this self-directed learning to people's lives and work, and named the process 'life coaching' to distinguish it from his sports coaching. This term causes confusion to this day for the uninitiated, who equate 'life coaching' with regular sports coaching, a practice which is remedial and better described as instruction. The conventional sports coach spends the lesson time correcting the player's technique, directing the player and highlighting what is wrong – the opposite of Gallwey's principles of life coaching.

Executive, business, career, personal and other types of coaching are all based on the principles of Tim Gallwey's life coaching, which were redefined as performance coaching by Sir John Whitmore during the 1990s. Coaching is a

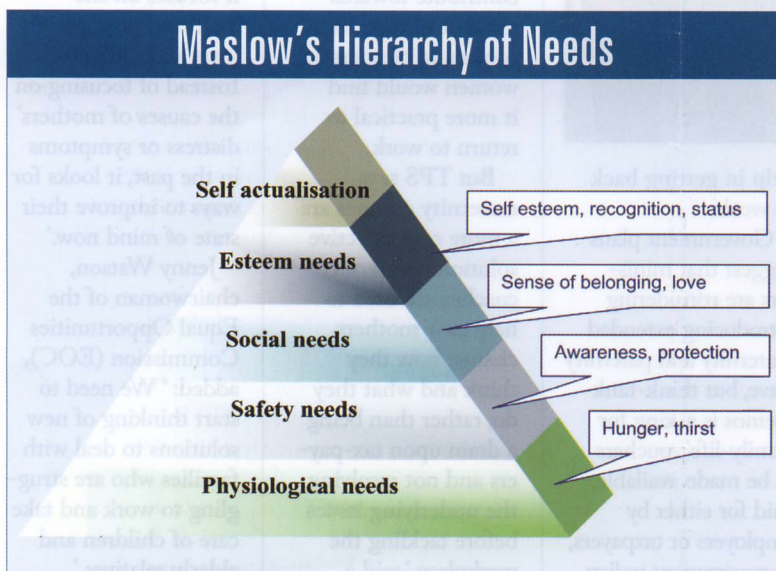


Figure 1

process, like accountancy, and the process remains much the same regardless of which type of coaching is taking place.

Other practices have grown from similar roots, such as positive psychology, neuro-linguistic programming, management training and personal development.

Types of practitioners in related fields

Let us now take a look at the different practitioners and what they do:

Performance coach

A performance coach (or 'life coach', to use Tim Gallwey's term) will work on improving the performance of an individual by helping that individual set goals, strategies and actions. There are currently three major bodies for coaching: the Association for Coaching, the International Coaching Federation and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council.

Psychiatrist

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor with further specialised training in the field of psychiatry but, surprisingly, not necessarily any training in psychological therapies. Psychiatrists are concerned with diagnosing mental illness and prescribing drugs to treat it. A psychiatrist may have undertaken training in psychology and therapy or may refer a patient on to a therapist. The UK professional body for psychiatrists is the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

Psychologist

A psychologist will normally have an academic degree in psychology plus additional training in a specialist field to become, for example, a clinical psychologist or an educational psychologist. The specialist body for psychologists is the British Psychological Society.

Counsellor

A counsellor practises one or more different types of therapeutic intervention. The training extends from a part-time diploma up to higher-level degrees. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) is the main professional body for counselling and psychotherapy in the UK.

Tennis star Andy Murray coaches an aspiring youngster



Humanistic psychologists started to look at what was right with people rather than what was wrong – focusing on their best potential rather than their problems

Psychotherapist

A psychotherapist will have received training to work with deep-seated emotional difficulties. There are a number of bodies that represent psychotherapy in the UK, the two lead bodies being the BACP and the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP).

Mentor

A great deal of confusion is caused by different uses of the term 'mentor'. In some organisations, the word is used to describe performance coaches as defined in this article. I would define mentors as people who impart their own experience, learning and advice to those who have less experience in the particular field. In modern business, the practice of delivering mentoring in a coaching style is on the increase.

Consultant

A consultant is someone who brings additional knowledge and processes to an organisation and who may carry out work on behalf of that organisation.

Definitions of coaching and its related fields

The various practitioners fulfill their roles in these ways:

Performance coaching

Performance coaching is about improving the performance of an individual or group, not by *telling*, but by questioning in order to facilitate awareness and self-directed learning. There are a growing number of categories in coaching, such as life, executive, team, group and career coaching, but the process is largely the same and can be generically defined as performance coaching. Just as the more successful an athlete is, the more likely he or she is to work with a coach, performance coaching is not necessarily about fixing problems but about helping successful individuals and teams to become more so.

Coaching is positive, non-judgmental, solution-focused and challenging.

Although the control of the process lies with the coach, the content always lies with the client, making the coaching experience an empowering, productive and enjoyable one. Coaching can be practised either one-to-one or with groups