



Presence and Coaching

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Three Integrated Structures for Development

Presence-based coaching accelerates the development of authentic leaders by providing three critical structures for an integrated development methodology. The structures themselves have been around for millennia in traditions that value the cultivation of character and leadership. We can think of coaching as simply a modern form, relevant to our times, for providing those structures.

The first structure is *engagement with a competent partner* (coach, mentor, teacher, elder) who can expand what we are able to observe and act on. The partner lives in a world distinct from ours and is deeply committed to our development. This partner offers a different perspective and constructs a relational process that places our challenges and opportunities in a developmental context. The partner offers assessments and invites us to engage with him in new ways that require new awareness and more generative responses.

Generative practices, consistent, ongoing practices that increase our self-awareness and the ability to self-regulate, provide a powerful foundation for presence and self-generation. They are the means through which we come to master our inner state and a “commitment to a way of being in the world.” Generative practices serve us wherever we are. Centering ourselves, for example, will help us be more present in our marriage, when having a difficult conversation at work, and when preparing to go on stage for a major speech.

Outcome-specific fieldwork complements generative practices with targeted and specific learning activities. Fieldwork, like generative practices, is done between coaching conversations. It includes exercises, practices, and experiments that develop and stabilize the actions and behaviors we require for competence. Fieldwork is the means for training ourselves in specific skills in the domains of our commitments. Performance coaching generally focuses on fieldwork, omitting the underlying generative practices.

These three integrated structures focus and accelerate the often sluggish developmental impulse, which is easily sidetracked by our own attachments and the hypnotic effect of the systems around us. Presence-based coaching delivers the three products of coaching in an integrated and coherent approach.



Integrated Development Structures

The three critical structures for development . . .

- engagement with a competent partner
- generative practices
- outcome-specific fieldwork

produce . . .

- observable competency in fulfilling commitments
- the capacity for self-generation
- the experience of greater aliveness

Presence-Based Coaching: Foundations into Methodology

Up to this point, we have been addressing the nature, core structures, and products of developmental coaching. We now have a solid foundation on which to build a methodology.

Fundamentally, presence-based coaching is the means through which we deliver the three development structures. We provide these for the client. Simultaneously and inextricably, we pay consistent attention to our own development, remembering always that we too are works in progress.

- In coaching, we are a competent development partner for our clients. We create intimate conversation with our clients, in which our presence and our coaching moves reveal a new world and energize new actions and self-generation. *To do this, we must be constantly engaged in our own learning. We work with teachers and coaches who can help us by revealing our own learning edges. We experientially develop mastery in the territory of development.*
- We challenge our clients to engage in generative practices. With them, we design practices that are both relevant and sustainable in their lives. *We are consistently in our own generative practices as well, recognizing that they are integral to embodying who we want to be in the world.*
- And our presence and coaching moves engage our clients with fieldwork to develop specific competencies tied to their outcomes. Their fieldwork changes their context; in turn, they are required to listen and respond differently. *Coaching is our fieldwork, in which we practice the skills and presence required to be a useful resource. We are always learning through our coaching, and this in turn shapes who we are.*

Now we shift into a thorough exploration of the inner moves, generative practices, and conversational moves that comprise presence-based coaching. All of these are rooted in presence and evoke presence.

To disillusion you of the notion that you are in control of what happens in coaching, I primarily use the term *move* rather than *tool*. The distinction is important. A tool is something to carry out an operation on something or someone “out there.” The recipient of this operation



is distinct, separate from us, an object. A move is simply that: a shift, a change, something that we do. It's an action, taken with certain intentions. However, we are never in control of our clients. We are in relationship with them. We make moves that change the dynamic and invite, or evoke, a particular response. A move is an invitation.

A move produces something useful when we are present and attuned to the client. Our coaching moves do not change our clients; rather, they change the field within which the client perceives, interprets, and chooses. A skillful coaching move makes presence and new insight more likely.

We differentiate between an inner move (primarily intended to shift the awareness of the coach) and a relational move (primarily intended to invite a shift in awareness in the client). The line is gray, of course, and because we're connected with our clients, our inner moves often produce a shift in the client as well. In some sense, everything is relational.

As a necessary prerequisite and to earn the privilege of guiding others on the path, we are deeply committed to integrating the three structures into our own development. We find competent partners, coaches, and teachers who can challenge our own assumptions and hold us as learners. We engage in generative practices in mind, body, and heart that enable us to bring a crystalline presence to our work and to be self-generative in our own lives. We do our own fieldwork, using coaching as our own laboratory for self-cultivation. Our self-cultivation is the foundation that allows everything else to work. The centrality of this cannot be overstated.

Inner Moves and Generative Practices

Inner moves in coaching are the means by which we work with our own inner state to be the best possible resource we can be for our clients. These moves require a level of mastery that is produced by practice. These inner moves can be described as "orienting" or "holding" moves, and will be described in detail in Part Two of this book.

It should also be apparent from the examples that ongoing self-awareness and self-regulation are part and parcel of the inner work required to coach. The quality of the relationship proves the primary factor in whether a coaching intervention is likely to produce the desired outcomes. Coaching is a relational activity, and our presence is fundamental to the quality of our relationships.

While presence is an awareness that is always available, our conditioned ways of being limit our access to it. Our constant efforts to prop up our identity in the world have produced the collateral damage of living, much of the time in a reactive, constricted way. This deprives us of much of the rich sensory and creative experience that comes with the state of presence.

It is essential to rediscover our capacity for presence. It is necessary for our efficacy as coaches and for experiencing the aliveness that is our birthright. We can cultivate our presence through



the three primary doorways of mind, body, and heart. Each offers a set of generative practices that, when done regularly, greatly increase our access to the state of presence.

Practicing in all three areas is central to the premise of presence-based coaching. The generative practices offered are the bass note on which we build the fundamental capacity for presence in our lives. Practicing to be present is about living life fully and recovering our own aliveness. Clearly this is relevant, indeed essential, for coaching at a deep level. It is also ontological, in the sense that the capacity for presence will show up in every aspect of our lives. Part Three explores specific practices for accessing presence through each of the doorways.

Relational Coaching Moves

Within the field created by these inner moves and the structure of the coaching conversation, we also make relational moves that are visible to the client. These specific coaching moves both depend on and evoke presence. They tend to evoke new ways of seeing, expand the client's world to include new distinctions, and provide in-the-moment experiences relevant to the client's commitments.

Relational coaching moves are generally correlated with the components of self-generation. No matter the specific content and focus of our coaching, we remember that self-generation is one of the fundamental products of coaching. We are fostering self-generative leaders who, regardless of their job description, are maximally capable of responding to the demands of any circumstance with self-awareness, resilience, resourcefulness, and vision.

Part Four provides a detailed taxonomy of relational moves that evoke presence and build the capacities for taking significant new actions in an embodied, authentic way.

Doug Silsbee is a leadership coach, author and master teacher in Asheville, NC. His most recent book is *Presence-Based Coaching*, from which this article is excerpted. More information on Doug's work, and on the book, is at <http://dougsilsbee.com>.

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