

CoachNet – EXECUTIVE AND PROFESSIONAL COACHING

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Coaching a la Sherlock Holmes © by Judy Feld

We study, practice, appreciate, and get tested on the ICF Coaching Competencies as we focus on our development as coaches. It's also beneficial to observe the competencies at work elsewhere—outside of our usual coaching venues.

In May I attended (and did some hands-on sleuthing in) the *"International Exhibition of Sherlock Holmes"* at the Perot Museum of Science in Dallas. The experience was both enjoyable and instructive. Here's a brief excerpt from the exhibition guide: *"...The legendary sleuth of Baker Street...used seemingly trivial observations of evidence that others missed to solve the most baffling mysteries imaginable...."* I was reminded once again about all we can learn about leadership, management and coaching from Sherlock Holmes. Certainly not what is usually labeled "people skills" or humility or self care. It's the brain-based, deductive stuff I found interesting, described in the book, *Mastermind—How to Think Like Sherlock Holmes*, by Maria Konnikova.

I'm a big fan of the fictional Holmes and his associate Dr. Watson (in the traditional literature). As I read the author's approach to thinking like Sherlock it led me to focus on what we could borrow from the Sherlockian lore to add or reinforce our coaching models, tools, approaches—and core competencies.



Coaches focus on their clients.

In a coaching conversation the agenda belongs to the client, not to the coach. Coaches listen much more than they speak—listening for what is said and what is not said, and picking up clues in multiple dimensions. We continue to check in to make sure we are focused on what is important to our client. We don't multi-task during a conversation with a client.

Konnikova points out there's actually no such thing as multi-tasking: "Our brain cannot do two things at once and what we believe is multi-tasking is really the brain switching quickly from one task to the next...The more you learn to filter out irrelevant distractions, the better your brain can monitor [your] environment--both externally and internally."

Concentration is self-reinforcing. The more you do it, the better you get, as in "practice, practice, practice". That's what Sherlock does. This means that focusing only on the current conversation will help you notice or remember details or large concepts that are important to your client. This focus also enables the coach to formulate those powerful questions that lead the client to greater awareness.

Quote from Sherlock~~

"Having gathered these facts, Watson, I smoked several pipes over them, trying to separate those which were crucial from others which were merely incidental."

Related resource~~

You can find some specific suggestions to improve your ability to focus in the article: *Multitasking Myopia and Joyless Juggling* © (D-3), at <http://www.coachnet.com/business/resources-articles.html>

Coaching creates awareness.

Coaches have the ability to integrate and accurately evaluate multiple sources of information, and to make interpretations that help the client to gain awareness, take action, make changes and achieve agreed-upon results. The coach's role is that of an explorer (without conclusions)— in partnership with the client.

Quote from Sherlock~~

"It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence. It biases the judgment."

Related resource~~

You can find some specific suggestions to evaluate and synthesize multiple inputs in the article: *Stop, Look And Listen — For Market Research* © (A-4), at <http://www.coachnet.com/business/resources-articles.html>

Coaches ask powerful questions.

Curiosity is a valuable trait. Coaches ask questions that evoke the responses that provide maximum benefit to the conversation, the coaching relationship and the client. Powerful questions are clear and direct questions -- leading to new insights that move the client forward. The coach asks open-ended questions that help the client create the future rather than focus on past or even present issues. Our questions are more often "How?" and "What?" than "Why?" questions (which keep the client in the past).

Quote from Sherlock~~

“Nothing clears up a case so much as stating it to another person.”

Related resource~~

You can read more about creativity and inspiration for powerful questions in the article: *Metaphorical Magnifying Glass* © (D-6), at <http://www.coachnet.com/business/resources-articles.html>



Coaching is evidence-based

Sherlock had a lot to say about clearing the clutter in your brain. He used the metaphor of a “brain-attic”, defined as follows, “I consider that a man's brain originally is like a little empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose.” He goes on to point out, “It is a mistake to think that little room has elastic walls and can distend to any extent. Depend upon it -- there comes a time when for every addition of knowledge you forget something that you knew before. It is of the highest importance, therefore, not to have useless facts elbowing out the useful ones.” Coaches clear the clutter in their own brains, as well as supporting clients in recognizing what is truly important in order to make optimal decisions and choices.

Quote from Sherlock~~

“It has long been an axiom of mine that the little things are infinitely the most important.”

Related resource~~

You can read more about nurturing your brain power in the article: *Boomers, Refuse to Decline!*© (A-6), at <http://www.coachnet.com/business/resources-articles.html>

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