

# Synergistic Relationships

Moving towards positive coach/client communication

By Patrick Williams, EdD, MCC

**C**oaching at best is a co-creative, interdependent relationship. You as the coach should focus your attention on the client's stated goals and all the interconnections from other areas of their life. But you are also part of the conversation, and communication is not always received the way it was intended. The coaching relationship is synergistic and uniquely intimate and because of this, conflict or miscommunication can occur. The following article, adapted from *Total Life Coaching*, Chapter 19, offers some guidance and tips to enhance the quali-

2. To learn what synergy is.
3. To become comfortable with all three types of personal relationships: cooperative, collaborative and synergistic.
4. To learn how to create the kind of coach/client relationship that works best for your clients.

## Framework needed for coaching your clients

A recent TV commercial tells us, "When companies compete, the consumer benefits." Indeed, competition between enterprises and businesses form the basis

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ty of your communication in coaching and to alert you to possible communication breakdowns.

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## Objectives

1. To understand the distinctions between competition, cooperation, collaboration and synergy.

of the entire American economy. In fact, winning a competitive relationship generally determines how successful we are in business.

All sports are based upon competition, either with yourself or with another player or team. Winning in a competitive game is fundamental to success in organized sports. Competition is everywhere—but there is a personal cost. Many times competition is destructive. It is always divisive and separating.

What happens if you don't want to compete? The

difficulty with competition is that except for the single winner, everybody loses! When you are afraid of losing, you rarely compete. And when you do compete and lose, you feel lousy. In the National Football League, every team save one ends the season with a loss. At the end of the football season, every team feels lousy except the winner of the Super Bowl. In a competitive society, the vast majority of people feel lousy because the ‘winners’ are so few.

In a coaching relationship, competing with your clients is always destructive. It sets up a win/lose relationship. And when your clients lose, the coach/client relationship loses, and the coach loses as well. A competitive relationship with your clients is never beneficial to the clients. Authentic coaches always keep their clients’ best interests in the forefront of their minds. As such, creating a competitive relationship with clients is ‘off limits’ for life coaches. In fact, it is not coaching. If you engage in competitive relationships, you will probably not be hired as a coach.

By the time we are in Kindergarten, we begin to learn about the benefits of cooperation. But cooperation on a test is called ‘cheating.’ So we usually don’t understand what the ‘benefits’ of cooperation really are.

### Messages Within LIFE LESSON 19

- 1. Life coaches do not compete with their clients.
- 2. A competitive coach/client relationship is the poorest kind.
- 3. A collaborative one is better.
- 4. A synergistic relationship is the ideal one between client and life coach.

After we learn to compete and cooperate, we need to learn how to collaborate. Collaboration differs from cooperation in that it results in a brand new relationship. You can cooperate with someone and never change, but when you collaborate with someone you are *always* changed! You grow!

Collaboration means you and your clients function as a team, as a single unit. You can cooperate and still function as an individual, but when you collaborate, you become someone bigger than you were before. Collaborative teamwork is by far the most productive of relationships. It defines the most effective and

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As beneficial as competition is in some situations, you cannot be competitive unless you first learn to cooperate. In business, cooperation between employees and employers is crucial. In team sports, cooperation is essential to winning. Cooperation with the rules of the game is critical to playing. What would happen to a basketball team if there were no cooperation among the team players, or no cooperation with the rules of basketball? Would such a team be successful? Without cooperation, there would never be competition. In any setting, the fiercest competitors need to cooperate within an agreed-upon framework. Otherwise competition does not occur. The key for coaches is to create a cooperative relationship while avoiding a competitive one—but this is not an easy task!

authentic coach/client relationship.

A cathedral is something much more than a pile of rocks stacked on one another. When the result is greater than the sum of its component parts, we call this a ‘synergistic’ outcome. When a life coach and a client form a synergistic relationship, the outcome is greater than the contribution made by each person involved in the relationship. Working alongside others is less creative than working synergistically with others. When you work synergistically with another, the outcome is never quite known until that outcome is created.

The most creative and beneficial outcomes of human endeavors have been those in which synergy has been involved. When you combine your coaching contribution with the client’s contribution, the out-

come is greater than either party's contribution. That is synergy in action!

If you want to leave a great coaching legacy with each of your clients, always strive for synergistic relationships with them. Not only is it important that you become the best you can be, it is even more critical that your relationships are the best they can be. Without quality relationships, your individuality shrivels and you never realize your potential as a human being. Develop superior relationships with others and you will grow into the person you were born to be...truly great in 'who' you are!

### A coaching exercise to share with your clients

Following are several tips for developing collaborative and synergistic relationships. Competition exists and is useful at times, and cooperation is a useful human strategy, but we believe that within collaborative and synergistic relationships your clients will move to greater purposeful living, and toward the efficient creation of their desired outcomes. We are not meant to go through life alone! That is a myth brought to our culture by Alexis de Toqueville when he wrote of America's 'rugged individualism' and praised us for the 'pioneer spirit' that birthed our country. Yet, rugged individualism is also what

3. Create special opportunities for creating synergy. Invite your clients to become spontaneous in their conversations. Ask them to spend time in a place that is sacred to them and invite others to join them. Ask your clients to form what Napoleon Hill calls 'a master-mind group' that is devoted to deep thinking, creative conversation, and soulful listening.

4. Realize that synergy is best developed when seemingly contradictory or outrageous ideas are blended and shaped into a final creation that mystifies all participants involved in the process. A synergistic outcome emerges from multiple causes—synthesizing the energy of all participants, their common dialogue, their various thoughts and visions, and then combining them in the crucible of creativity that allows it all to be synthesized...that is synergy!

### Tips for creating a synergistic coaching conversation

1. **Prepare yourself for the contact.** View the coaching conversation as an opportunity to co-create with your clients a synergistic outcome. Get ready for the contact by reviewing your notes from previous conversations, recalling what outcomes your clients want

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often separates us from one another. This myth idealizing 'doing everything alone' seems to have spread beyond the borders of America to most industrialized nations.

When coaching your clients (or using this lesson for your own personal evolution), we suggest you help your clients to:

1. Look for opportunities to involve others in their goals, creative ideas, and big visions. Great events in the world have always begun within conversations with others.

2. Become willing to let go of their favorite method for accomplishment to explore a new means for the blossoming of their ideas. As a coach, you might be the *seed planter*, but what eventually blooms within your clients may surprise even you.

from coaching, becoming aware of your own mental and emotional state, and remaining open to and focused upon listening, understanding, clarifying, and apprehending the entire conversation.

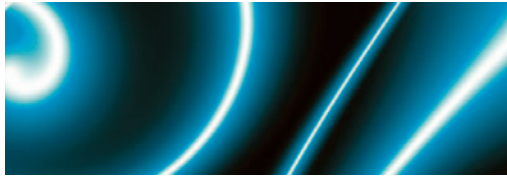
2. **Have your clients tell you:**

**“How They Are Today...This Moment.”**

- How are you feeling about yourself (good and bad)?
- How are you looking at your relationships, your life?
- How are you feeling about others?

**“What Has Happened Since Our Last Contact?”**

- What has occurred to you since the last call?
- What breakthroughs and insights have you had?
- Have you made any new choices or decisions?
- Is there any relevant personal news you can share?



“...communication is the bridge to co-creating a positive relationship with your clients...”

“What Are You Working On?”

- What progress have you made on your coaching goals, projects and new habits?
- What have you done that you are proud of?
- What you are coming up against?
- What ways are there to move over, under, around or through perceived obstacles?

“As Your Life Coach, How I Can Best Assist You?”

- Where are you stuck?
- Where are you wondering about something?
- What is your plan of action?
- Do you need information, a strategy, to brainstorm, or advice?
- How can I best coach you?

“What’s Next?”

- What is the next action, clarification, choice, or decision that will move you closer to your desired outcome?
- What do you want next for yourself?
- What new key habit do you want to strengthen?
- What do you want next for your relationships?

3. Always seek to fully comprehend your client before sharing your own thoughts, ideas, feelings, opinions or knowledge.

4. As you speak, listen at least twice as long as you speak.

5. Speak with clarity and appreciation for your client’s position and power.

6. Regarding your contributions to the coaching conversation, remember that *your* timing is critical.

Sample coaching conversation for LIFE LESSON 19

(This dialogue is really for the coach to see how to create coaching relationships that are synergistic. We believe that is the power of authentic life coaching.)

**Coach:** (after debriefing the client’s week) So, what would you like from our coaching today? (This is a great way to imply that the client is part of the equation...the coach did not ask, “What do you want from me today?”)

**Client:** I need help with my sense of overwhelm. I am not accomplishing what I want. So I need you to tell me ways to combat that.

**Coach:** I am sure you would like me to tell you, but I find it more powerful if we come up with possible solutions together. My answers may not work for you. So let’s work together on some ideas now, okay?

**Client:** Darn. You mean you are not just going to tell me the secrets? Somehow I knew that (client chuckles).

**Coach:** Tell me first what is overwhelming you and then we will do some possibility thinking together, okay?

**Client:** Well, I have all these projects, and obligations, such as...

*(This models the key to collaborative and synergistic coaching. Often times brilliant ideas come out of the coach’s mouth or the client’s mouth. But they surfaced because of the nature of the coaching conversation.)*

In the coaching relationship, communication is the bridge to co-creating a positive relationship with your clients in order to model the best communication and to avoid conflict. But when conflict or breakdowns do occur, you can use communication to move back to positive and purposeful conversations that propel the client to their desired outcome. •

*This excerpt is from Total Life Coaching: 50+ Life Lessons, Skills and Techniques to Enhance your Practice and your Life by Patrick Williams and Lloyd Thomas, WW Norton Books, 2005, New York, NY.*

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