Life Coaching after Addiction Counseling

The focus of addiction counseling has always been to keep the client clean and sober, and to nudge some sense of functionality.

It is about preventing relapse and providing a place of structure and safety to protect the person’s sobriety. In this context, the 12-step Program has literally saved thousands of lives. Its contribution to the therapy of addictive clients is immeasurable.

But what happens after the tenth step? Is there life beyond merely a static place of sober functioning? I posit that life coaching can take the addictive personality beyond the tenth step, into a future place of gratifying productivity — the reality of achieved goals and successes that would ordinarily remain unattained.

Unachieved goals and unrealized potential are an unaddressed threat to the addicted client’s sober future. They keep him or her locked into an endless cycle of running “no-destination laps” on the “need-to-stay-sober treadmill.” Life coaching can break this unproductive cycle and endless cycle of running “no-destination laps” on the “need-to-stay-sober treadmill.” Life coaching can break this unproductive cycle and

Life coaching treats the whole person.

Psychotherapy generally deals with emotional and behavioral problems and disruptive situations — such as addictions — and seeks to bring the client to normal function by focusing on his dysfunction. This context can keep the person in constant recovery, which unconsciously imposes a limit on discrepancy and creating a fulfilling, purposeful life. In contrast, life coaching generally deals with functional persons who want to move beyond addiction to achieve excellence while creating an extraordinary life. Coaching is a process similar to solution-focused techniques that many therapists use for less serious psycho-emotional problems and life stresses, yet goes beyond just problem solving by creating instead of fixing.

The basic philosophy behind life coaching is that humans have immeasurable resources of energy, wisdom, ability and genius waiting to be set free. Life coaching can help people who already have a “measure of success” in their lives — sobriety and a stabilized place of safety — but who want to bridge the gap between where they are and where they want to be in their professional and personal life. With coaching, this safe place becomes a place of expectation and amazing potential, instead of mere functioning.

Life coaching treats the whole person, not the dysfunction. It focuses on helping people who already have a “measure of success” in their lives — sobriety and a stabilized place of safety — but who want to bridge the gap between where they are and where they want to be in their professional and personal life. With coaching, this safe place becomes a place of expectation and amazing potential, instead of mere functioning.

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The therapist is the expert who holds the answers and can fix the problem. The coach partners with the client to support his growth and co-create a better life with him — a contrast between the professional and the collegial relationship.

Therapy deals with the patient’s past and how it applies to his present. The therapist works to bring the client to an adequate and reasonable level of functioning, given the addiction. In contrast, the coach works with an already adequately functioning individual — the addiction is under control, a state of sobriety prevails — to move him or her to a more satisfying level of functionality. Traditional psychotherapy focuses on the root of the problem, the history — the “everything” of origins; coaching focuses on barrier identification, goal setting, planning and creative action to achieve a healthy future.

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Beyond the 12th Step:

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The focus of addiction counseling has always been to keep the client clean and sober, and restore some sense of functionality. It is about preventing relapse and providing a place of structure and safety to protect the person's sobriety. In this context, the 12-Step Program has literally saved thousands of lives. Its contribution to the therapy of addictive clients is immeasurable.

But what happens after the 12th step? Is there life beyond merely a static state of sober functioning? I posit that life coaching can take the addictive personality beyond the 12th step, into a future place of gratifying productivity — the reality of achieved goals and successes that would ordinarily remain unmet.

Uncoupled goals and unrealized potential are an unaddressed threat to the addictive client's sober future. They keep him or her locked into an endless cycle of running “no-destination laps” on the “need-to-stay- sober treadmill.” Life coaching can break this unproductive cycle and steer the client towards a place of realized dreams, where the focus is on the wonderful possible future, instead of the destructive past.

Take the story of a woman currently addicted to 12-Step Programs. For 20 years she has joined and rejoined twelve-step, self-help groups, always thinking of and keeping herself in a “broken” mode. For this kind of person, there is no “post-addiction” victory. Life becomes a place of expectation and amazing potential, instead of mere functionality.

A life coach is much like a trainer who helps an athlete win the “gold medal” instead of just being in the race. Life coaches help their clients design the life they want, bring out their clients’ own brilliance and resources so that they can achieve excellence and create purposeful, extraordinary lives.

We believe the most powerful therapy on earth is to empower a person by showing him his strengths instead of his weaknesses. This logical and most healing move beyond the twelfth step of addiction therapy can improve dramatically the addictive client’s overall mental health and life coaching. Coaching answers the question “now what?” that every addictive client asks when reaching that twelfth step.

It is necessary for the addicted client to move along the 12-step path with the kind of care, guidance and accountability provided by a trained therapist. Each step is designed to realize another measure of success and, instead of replacing or modifying this kind of therapy, I suggest that it be complemented and completed through life coaching.

Life coaching treats the whole person.

Psychotherapy generally deals with emotional and behavioral problems and disruptive situations — such as addictions — and seeks to bring the client to normal function by focusing on his dysfunction. This context can keep the person in constant recovery, which unconsciously imposes a limit on discovering and creating a fulfilling, purposeful life. In contrast, life coaching generally deals with functional persons who want to move beyond addiction to achieve excellence while creating an extraordinary life. Coaching is a process similar to solution-focused techniques that many therapists use for less serious psycho-emotional problems and life stresses, yet goes beyond just problem solving by creating instead of fixing.

The basic philosophy behind life coaching is that humans have immeasurable resources of energy, wisdom, ability and genius waiting to be set in motion. Coaching can help us create the life we want more efficiently by tapping into our resources to facilitate change and realize our potential. Life coaching treats the whole person, not the dysfunction. It focuses on helping people who already have a “measure of success” in their lives — sobriety and a stabilized place of safety — but who want to bridge the gap between where they are and where they want to be in their personal and professional life. With coaching, this safe place becomes a place of expectation and amazing potential, instead of mere functioning.

Therapy focuses on the past, coaching looks to the future — perspectives on the process of healing.

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• The therapist is the expert who holds the answers and can fix the problem. The coach partners with the client to support his growth and co-create a better life with him — a contrast between the professional and the collateral relationship.

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Most therapists agree that to avoid a relapse, something must replace the addictive substance or situation. For those who have spent many years in and out of addictive situations, the addictions themselves create a lifestyle that is difficult to change. Often, a void is left in that person’s life that needs filling. Life coaching can help to bridge this gap with productive alternatives that may quite possibly allow her or him to reach previously unattained potentials.

A transition occurs in the client’s life when moving from therapy to coaching. Therapy is centered in a patho-psychoanalytic style; pathology, process, history, and the exploration of the inner world. It focuses on solutions for specific “problems.” As the client transitions to coaching, he begins to experience a broad focus on his whole person, not just the addiction. This orientation is on outcomes and action, moving from the inner world of therapy to the outer realities and possibilities of life.

In therapy, the vision is limited to a specific set of circumstances that have created something “bad” in the person’s life. In coaching, an unlimited vision is open, filled with promise—the opportunity and ability to achieve dreams, leaving behind the limitations of the past. The therapist asks “why?” The coach asks “how?” The post-addictive client moves from being patient to partner with the possibility of a bright and attainable future. The gap is breached.

Coaches recognize that their clients have the knowledge and the solutions; the coach simply helps unlock the clients’ own brilliance. Coaching sessions are typically open, often friendly, casual and even light. At appropriate times, the coach may feel comfortable sharing personal experiences that are pertinent to what the client is experiencing. Typically, coaches and clients come to feel they really know each other on a deeper level than is common in most other professional relationships.

Should the therapist also don the coaching hat? Often, the answer to this question is no! Generally, a therapist separates his or her therapy practice from their coaching practice. However, it is true that some therapists have been trained as coaches, and practice coaching techniques with many of their therapy clients. And many therapists have actually transitioned very successfully into full-time coaching.

For therapists who are also coaches and practice active therapy with their clients, it is possible to move into a coaching phase with the addictive client, as long as there is a ritual ending to the therapy relationship, and coaching is begun formally and clearly. It is still best, however, for therapists to refer clients to life coaches when they have reached their therapeutic issues and are ready to move forward with their life plans.

A family members in the Leadership Coaching Certificate Program at Georgetown University, Washington, DC, we are master coaches dedicated to “double-loop” learning. We also teach our students to “be” and to learn to be comfortable with just “being.” It’s very hard for most to do that!

The second stream, doing, has to do with the actual work of coaching. While, initially, we emphasize the being idea with our students, something has to happen in the coaching for organizations to pay us and for clients to begin to experiment with new ideas or behaviors and feel like they are getting somewhere.

The third stream actually supports the first two, we are calling it the doing stream. Whatever beliefs a coach has, whatever experiences a coach has, and whatever models or tools inform a coach, at some point in the coaching some or all of these will converge to afford one or several approaches or structures for a coach to work with. Students in our program work on all three streams, with particular emphasis, at least initially, on being— which is enough to drive most new coaches crazy.

**Being, Doing, Using**

A Way to Understanding Coaching

As a family members in the Leadership Coaching Certificate Program at Georgetown University, Washington, DC, we are master coaches dedicated to “double-loop” learning. We also learn from our work, our interactions with other faculty members and our students. In fact, one of the great benefits of teaching coaching is that it is a superb vehicle for deepening clarity regarding your own practice, and drawing a clearer connection between theory and practice. As a result, our thinking about coaching, and our practice, are constantly evolving.

We are on an ongoing quest to seek frameworks for making a wide variety of ideas accessible. In our most recent thinking, we are focusing on the distinctions between “being,” “doing,” and “using.” We have begun to think of coaching as these three parallel streams:

*The first — being — comes from the grounding many of us have in a safe and caring childhood and interior philosophy — the idea of “being,” “authenticity,” “being present to” and “being with” our clients. We encourage our students to “be” and to learn to be comfortable with just “being.” It’s very hard for most to do that!

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**In their teaching experiences, Neil Strode, Ph.D. and Chris Wahl, M.A., discover that, when all is going well, synchronicity and creativity permeate coaching.**

**Coaching involves both discipline and art.**

**“The therapist is the expert; the coach is your partner.”**

Patrick Williams, Ph.D., MCC, co-author, with Deborah C. Davis, of *Therapist at Life Coach: Transforming Your Practice* (W. Norton & Company).

**“Coaching is a craft, involving both discipline and art. The principle, “help clients become more effective at error-detecting and self-correcting,” represents an example of the discipline”**