

CHMN760 Advanced Leadership
Book Reflection by Steven Poenitz
*Co-Active Coaching: New Skills for Coaching People
toward Success in Work and Life*

By Laura Whitworth, Karen Kinsey-House, Henry Kimsey-House, and Phillip Sandahl

I have read this multi-authored book on co-active coaching and learned there is a difference in coaching, counseling, mentoring, and therapy, according to the authors. I have also listened to the CD provided from the back of the book that describes briefly co-active coaching, records two sets of coaching dialogue, and provides a toolkit of forms and formats for facilitating the process of coaching.

From the authors' own description, I recognize the importance of the "co" in "co-active coaching." Just by absorbing the intent of the dialogues and instruction from the book, I see the value of both coach and client participating in the coaching experience. It is not a one-way experience like consulting or therapy can be. I perceive some parallels with mentoring, but note that there is more intentionality in letting the client set the agenda rather than the coach. Mentoring seems to have more flexibility with the mentor or mentee setting the agenda; although, there is more value from my research in collaborative determination of agendas.

The co-active coaching experience seems quite new to me; although, the authors indicated some of their kind have been coaching for a number of years. I found the Level II and Level III listening skills eye-opening and valuable for me. I can cite numerous times in my life where I've interjected my story in an interview or session visit with a parishioner. I understand more than ever that what folks really want is to be heard, to be guided through their thinking, to be observed as they tell their story, and to have the

coach help walk them through the potholes of thinking and the mud puddles of emotions into the light of self-management and achievement of goals.

The powerful question is so well illustrated by the authors and challenges me to be thinking intently as I listen to people for the subtle nuances of their thoughts, emotions, and behavior as they tell their life story. Asking the right question/s can facilitate growth and self-understanding for the client.

In reflection this pastor has determined that he needs to be much more focused upon church members as they are sharing their story with me. I've depended more than I should upon my wife to do the hard work of discernment and determination of a church member's situation. However, under this co-active coaching process the client (church member) performs much of the self-management and self-discovery of answers to his/her questions. The coach has the privilege after permission under contract to ask the client the developing question in what the authors call "the dance of the moment." That is a very fluid situation of discussion. Almost like the organic growth of a plant in fast-forward fashion. I have experienced some of those special moments of coach-client exchange in pastoring when I've simply let the church member unfold their story as I've continued to ask leading questions. However, I remember all too often trying to sympathize with their story by interjecting mine, which obviously turns the direction of thought away from the client/church member.

I do remember taking a class at Glacier View Ranch with the Kansas/Nebraska Seventh-day Adventist pastors at a retreat where NLP was taught. It was basically a class to understand how to restore the inactive church member back to church. I do believe the class was helpful in learning more about human relations. I believe we were taught some

snippets of this co-active coaching that relate to co-active coaching, like paraphrasing, mirroring, and fogging. On the other hand, this system of co-active coaching seems to bring so much more help to the individual in all areas of life as well as being helpful for coaching teams and specialty areas of life.

Personally, I definitely understand the self-judgment situation that the authors call the “Saboteur” (see pages 4 and 139). That voice has limited me in my thinking and demobilized me with fear to pursue certain aspirations like I’m delightfully pursuing right now in lifelong learning. The Saboteur has minimized my ability and giftedness to accomplish life goals. I can see so clearly how I might acknowledge and champion church members with legitimate and authentic strokes of affirmation which can contribute to catapulting them into incredible challenges and opportunities. I perceive that the coach has to be so selfless in the articulation and asking of questions. It’s not about me as pastor, but rather about the one who has (informally usually) contracted to discuss a life issue or disturbing event with me.

I marveled at the grace with which Phillip questioned Debra regarding her career in the CD coaching session. I covet that same ability to assist church members in self-discovery. The contexts of fulfillment, balance, and process made so much sense as the major focus areas in co-active coaching. Especially do I see fulfillment working in my own life as a motivator. Those things that fulfill me need to continue to be pursued, rather than left un-attempted. It gives me so much hope and encouragement to be involved in this process of research and lifelong learning. There have been life commandments early in my school years that self-limited my own excellence or pursuit of projects. I gave up

too easily or chose to procrastinate on assignments that could have vaulted me into the “forward and deepen” experience.

Recently, we had some conflict between our Pathfinders and Spanish group. I believe I have cited that earlier in a reflection. What I remember from our head elder in that scenario was this: Rather than focusing upon the conflict and pressurizing the situation more when the groups got together to iron out their differences and lack of communication, why not challenge the Spanish group with a question of what their plan of growth for the future is. Interestingly enough, in the recent session where the two groups conferred together, the Spanish group offered on their own initiative the desire to grow and move to another facility. That totally alleviated the necessity to confront a situation head-on, but rather looked at the conflict more from a “forward” perspective. I salute the head elder for having that vision in working with people. I was the learner that experienced the “deepening” experience (see chapter beginning on page 87).

Another issue that co-active coaching brought to my table was authenticity. I have been taught (maybe a lot of my own self-teaching) to avoid conflict and skirt telling the brutal truth—which can be perceived as tactfulness. Both are needed: authenticity and tact. I think that people appreciate kindness when citing the truth about their situation. However, this book and system of thinking has encouraged me to be authentic and careful to tell the truth to clients (church members). One special aid in this area is the idea of asking permission. I have reflected and discovered that my personal operational style of counseling has included this asking permission to pursue an issue.

Another theme which comes through so often in my reading and reflection has been lifelong learning. Here it related to the “celebrating of failure” (see pages 93 and 94). As I

read this book, I was visiting with my mom in Texas. I mentioned this section of the discussion in the book and it piqued her interest. She cited how in her early days of high school (she's now almost 84) that she took a class in economics and got a D. She felt like a failure. I mentioned how the book stated: "There is a difference between failing at something and being a failure." She expressed to me an "ah!" moment when I read this. This discussion opened up some valuable time with my mom and me. We were able to discuss failure like we probably never had before. This perspective has also helped me feel more valuable as a person, learning to focus failure on issues rather than myself.

Another area in which I am challenged is dealing with conflict. This area did not plague me early in my ministry, but as time evolved in my ministerial career, I've grown more prone to struggle with my emotions and get "hooked" (107) with a church member's situation. There have been occasions like one on the West coast when the Lord especially provided me with the gift of graciousness during a "storm" of conflict. But now, I find controlling my anger, agitation, and irritation is difficult. The best suggestion that co-active coaching offered was the curiosity factor. Keeping a curious focus about a client can help to avoid becoming "hooked" with your emotions in the dance of the moment. I pray for discernment and perception to remember these tools as I deal with church members in conflict.

My past has a proclivity against therapy and counseling which could tend to bias me against co-active coaching. Growing up in the Seventh-day Adventist Church I was exposed to a pastor-counselor that used his office of ministry to ensnare women in inappropriate liaison. This has prejudiced me against the tools used in psychology to deal with clients' (church members') emotional and mental behavior. My best positive

reinforcement was Dr. Eldon Chalmers at Andrews University back in the mid-70's. For me, he gave a very balanced approach to psychology and therapy.

I would need to pursue this topic deeper, but it seems that this co-active coaching model comes from the Rogerian methods of psychology. Yes, I just checked methods of psychotherapy from Wikipedia on the web and discovered Carl Rogers introduced the person-centered therapy or PCT as it is known. I suppose there is no real danger in this person-centered and self-discovery form of psychotherapy. The only danger might be the challenge of keeping our focus from self-absorption. The Christian coach would be the one tasked with the responsibility for guiding and directing the client away from total self-absorption.

I would like to join the authors in recommending the “wheel of life” as a helpful tool for guiding the client in contracted sessions of co-active coaching. Giving the client an open-ended agenda for establishing their own priorities seems to me to be a helpful discovery tool.