Mike’s Musings: Hints and Help from Mike Jay
Coaching & Ancient Wisdom

Mike Jay

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Coaching & Ancient Wisdom

This has to be one of my favorite topics because the more I coach the more I realize that everything and everybody has already been here. I’m sure some of you have wondered across the new physics where time as we seem to relativize it, doesn’t actually exist.

Here’s a quote: “In a profile in The Sunday Times (London, October, 1998), Steve Farrar wrote: “[Julian] Barbour argues that we live in a universe which has neither past nor future. A strange new world in which we are alive and dead in the same instant. In this eternal present, our sense of the passage of time is nothing more than a giant cosmic illusion.”

So, what is Ancient Wisdom? Is it so ancient that it is past? I hardly think so. One of the big debates going around in coaching for the past few years is one where people discuss who has the answers, coach or client? I would say neither! The doors to ancient wisdom are all around us. Whether we decide to talk about the relative universe of cause and effect, or the absolute where none of those rules matter any more; ancient wisdom is everywhere.

Ancient wisdom is a source code that is wired into the universe. It continues to improve itself as it encounters more and more complexity, always reverting back to itself as the source. Ancient wisdom is the Occam’s Razor that allows us as coaches to gain access to the fundamental building blocks of problem-making and problem-solving.

Carl Jung discovered that ancient wisdom awaits us at each moment because of archetypes being wired into our collective unconsciousness. Ancient wisdom has wired all of us through the evolution of our life for billions of years. The interesting thing when a cell replicates or divides is that biologists believe that all of the information contained in that cell is passed on. No matter how small or large the ‘life’ ancient wisdom persists everywhere.

Ok, now here’s something you can use right now. Chris Argyris, who I’ve mentioned before, wrote a book in 2000 called: Flawed Advice and the Management Trap. In that book he noted that in general most of the information that comes to us day in and day out will not be actionable for us. He specified four criteria which must be present in order for us to create what I’ll call ‘actionability’. The point? Ancient wisdom is actionable. It’s already wired into our genes, our memes and a whole lot of our jeans! Yet, we’re unable to decipher the code. I find people wandering in the desert of their understanding who, if they just took a few moments, would realize that the answers lie all around them. In large part, it’s the questions that they have wrong.

In executive coaching, I find that many times what the client wants is our expertise, our experience, our wisdom. Yet, in my experience, and according to the research that Argyris has done, our experience, our wisdom and our expertise just doesn’t translate. I don’t think many people realize this because the desert is a pretty big place and few of us out there ever really bump into each other, except for reasons often we can’t explain. I believe that, practically, when we begin to approach clients with the “I don’t know, but let’s inquire and find out,” instead of a “this is the way it is or how I’ve done it” method, we will realize that the answers lie in the ancient wisdom that all of us have access to through the doors of inquiry.

What is ancient wisdom? How about reading the book, by Robert Fulghum, the author of All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten. I’ll point you to a quote I took from an interview I found with him that I think you’ll muse over here: http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/202/300/january/1999/01/fulghum.html.

No apology then. No regrets. My convictions have validity for me because I have experimented with the compounds of ideas of others in the laboratory of my mind. And I’ve tested the results in the living out of my life. At twenty-one, I had drawn an abstract map based on the evidence of others. At sixty, I have accumulated a practical guide to
grounded in my own experience. At twenty-one, I could discuss transportation theory with authority. At sixty, I know which bus to catch to go where, what the fare is, and how to get back home again. It is not my bus, but I know how to use it.” — Robert Fulghum in *Words I Wish I Wrote*

The key with ancient wisdom and coaching is in learning to use it. It’s everywhere, in everything and consistently at the beckoned call…if instead of telling, you learn to inquire from I don’t know. The chimes of that sound in the collective unconsciousness will bring ancient wisdom to the door.

Mike Jay

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**Do You Like the IJCO Format?**

If you are a regular reader of *The International Journal of Coaching* over the past three years, you know that the format for this journal continues to evolve. During the first year, we printed a much shorter journal (usually under 55 pages), with relatively wide spaces between each line (what the printers call “leading”). Our journal has grown appreciably over the past three years. Our issue editors and authors have much more to say about coaching than was the case when we started in 2003. The field of organizational coaching is evolving. The discussions and dialogues are fuller and more finely nuanced.

We have accommodated this growth in the amount of information and number of ideas to be presented in this journal by not only increasing its length (now averaging about 75 pages in length), but also by narrowing space between the lines. We think this latter change in formatting has not hurt comprehension—in fact several of our readers have commented that the journal is now “easier to read.” One of our readers even suggested that IJCO now “looks more like a ‘real’ journal.” In this issue, we have narrowed the inter-line space (reduced the leading) even further. Do you like it, or do you prefer the leading used in previous issues of IJCO?

We would like to pose several additional questions regarding the formatting of *IJCO*. As we enter the fourth year of publication next January, we will be using a new software program for “pasting up” the journal. This is an excellent time to review our current format for *IJCO* and entertain suggestions from you our readers about ways in which to improve the “readability” and “use-ability” of the journal. So please feel free to offer your suggestions by email ([whberquist@aol.com](mailto:whberquist@aol.com) or [jlazar@ijco.com](mailto:jlazar@ijco.com)).

Do you want more graphics (or less graphics)? Do you want wider (or narrower) margins? Do you want the journal published in a different size (for example, as a 5x8” document)? Other recommendations? We do have one restriction in making any format revisions. IJCO is intended to be a journal (as the name implies) rather than a magazine. Thus, we do not envision moving to a format that relies heavily on graphics or includes a large number of advertisements intermixed with the text. Keeping this one restriction in mind, we welcome your comments.

Thanks for your support up to this point. We look forward to hearing from you and to extending our partnership with you—as publisher and reader—for many years to come.

Bill Bergquist  
John Lazar
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