Adler’s Professional Coaching Certificate Program—Resolving the Paradox

By Melinda Sinclair, D. Phil., PCC and Linda J. Page, Ph.D., ACPC

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Adler’s Professional Coaching Certificate Program—Resolving the Paradox

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Founded in 1998 and accredited by International Coach Federation since 2002, the Professional Coach Certificate Program of Adler School of Professional Coaching assumes a dynamic tension between individual uniqueness and social embeddedness that drives creativity and, ultimately, contribution to a better world. The program draws on the life philosophy of namesake Alfred Adler and on many other approaches to positive, appreciative, systemic, holistic development and change, focusing particularly on leadership in the workplace. A description of the program indicates its connection with three transformations: education into learning; careers into callings; and theory into practice and vice-versa. Guiding principles about what it means to be a human being support the program’s strengths and indicate challenges for the future.

At the core of the Adler School’s approach to coaching, and by implication to coach training, is a philosophical assumption about the dynamics of being human. We are all caught in a paradoxical tension between being ourselves and being in relationship with others. On the one hand, we are all unique individuals, with a strong need and desire to express our unique selves fully in our life and work. On the other hand, we are embedded in a web of relationships with other individuals, a member of multiple systems, and irretrievably part of humanity.
Our creativity in resolving this paradox between individual self-expression and social embeddedness determines, to a significant extent, our level of success and fulfillment. The key to resolving this paradox lies in using our unique selves to make a contribution to others. We see coaching as a profession that distinguishes itself by helping people discover how to bring their choices and actions more in line with their unique “best self,” and to connect more creatively with the deep human desire to take a place among one's fellow beings and make a contribution to the betterment of humanity.

The existence of the Adler School of Professional Coaching (ASPC) and the involvement of our faculty and staff represent in part our response to the challenge of using our unique selves creatively to make a difference for the better in the world. Our hope and intention is to train coaches who also see their work as a creative response to this challenge.

The Adler School’s goal is to develop coaches whose work will be thoroughly grounded in the intention to help clients resolve and transcend the paradox between self-expression and embeddedness creatively in their own work and life. Even when the coaching assignment is narrowly focused on a specific issue or area, we believe that operating from such a higher-level intention will enhance power and possibilities for the client.

**HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL**

The Adler School of Professional Coaching was founded in 1998 as part of an Adler group of schools that has existed in Ontario, Canada, for nearly 30 years. Adler School of Graduate Studies is in the process of applying for accreditation to offer degrees in human services, including psychology and, eventually, coaching studies. Adler Professional Schools provides administrative services to the group of schools. And Adler Learning Federation for Research, Education, and Delivery of Services—ALFREDS—is an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to making Adlerian services and education more available to the public.

These associated organizations share administrative support and respect for and dedication to applying and expanding on the philosophy of life of Alfred Adler (1870-1937), a Viennese physician who contributed to the early development of psychotherapy. During the early part of his career, Adler focused on mental illness, its conceptualization, and its treatment, bringing to psychoanalysis an orientation that can be described in modern terms as social constructivist, systemic, and holistic.¹

The First World War, in which he served as a conscripted military doctor, had a profound effect on Adler. After that experience, he changed the focus and scope of his activities to improving childhood education, family, and social relations. He intended to positively affect world society, including in particular North America, where he taught, lectured and traveled extensively. He wrote popular books that would today fall in the “self-help” genre. He sought an answer to the question: what makes people truly healthy, both mentally and physically? He did not separate mind from body. He was indefatigable in encouraging people to develop their unique, creative selves in ways that would further the progress of humanity. He considered that any of us is “the painter and the painting” of our own existence.² Again speaking in modern terms, we see the last 20 years of Adler’s life as being his “coaching years” and consider him a grandfather of coaching.³
In keeping with Adler’s own example of a multi-disciplinary and multi-theoretical orientation, all the Adler organizations draw on many other fields and approaches, including social and developmental psychology; psychotherapy and counseling; neurobiology; sociology; anthropology; and leadership, organization, and management studies. All the Adler Schools are united by their dedication to transforming
• Education into learning,
• Careers into callings, and
• Theory into practice and vice-versa.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM
The Professional Coaching Certificate Program offered by ASPC has been accredited by the International Coach Federation (ICF) since 2002. The program is currently offered at our main campus in Toronto, Ontario, as well as at our satellite campus in Phoenix, Arizona. The Program consists of three main elements:
• Course work, including
  • Three 5-day in person intensives (Foundations of Coaching, The Coaching Conversation in the Context of Work, Moving Towards Artful Coaching)
  • Teleclasses and tele-labs
  • Assignments for independent learning
• Practicum
• Final evaluation

The course work is designed to educate participants in human change and the mindset of coaching; to train them in the core coaching competencies; to equip them with appropriate tools and techniques to use with clients; and to orient them towards a commitment to ongoing personal and professional development (education into learning).

A significant part of the course work is dedicated to the application of coaching in the domain of work, specifically within an organizational context. This focus for the program is motivated by two main considerations:
1. Work is a significant part of virtually all our clients’ lives. Indeed, Alfred Adler identified work as one of the main “life tasks” that we all face and need to manage successfully. After all, we are physical beings in a physical universe and must somehow manage physical resources in order to survive. As an expression of our whole personality and interconnected with all aspects of our lives, work and the organizations in which it is carried out must be conceived of more deeply than occupation or career choice. That is, work provides an opportunity to resolve the paradox of self expression vs. social embeddedness (careers into callings).
2. The work context, and more specifically the organizational context, is where most of our participants will do their coaching. Our belief is that effective coaching in this context requires specialized know-how, tools, and processes, in addition to high levels of coaching competence.

The course work combines face-to-face classroom training with teleclasses, practice labs and a series of assignments for structured, out-of-classroom independent learning. The teleclasses and assignments are linked to the content of the classroom training and form an integral part of participants' learning in the program.

The Practicum is designed to provide an opportunity for participants to apply their learning to the real world and to foster the continued development of their unique individual profile as a coach. Participants receive customized feedback and mentoring on their progress, further develop their capacity for being a reflec-
tive practitioner of coaching, participate in collaborative learning opportunities, and continue the personal growth and development that forms the foundation for being an effective coach (theory into practice and vice-versa).

The final evaluation is the culmination of an extensive and ongoing process of feedback and assessment built into the program. The emphasis on feedback and assessment during the program reflects the strong developmental orientation of the program, in keeping with the concept of “expertising.” The final evaluation serves to ensure that the participant has reached a level of competence that satisfies the criteria of ASPC in particular and the coaching profession in general. Thus, graduates who complete the requisite number of additional coaching hours are eligible to apply to the International Coach Federation for the Associate Certified Coach designation.

**CORE THEMES: SOME DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE PROGRAM**

The Adler program defines coaching as a process for facilitating change. Participants are introduced to different models and frames for change as they move through the program. We hold that change is fundamentally an “inside out” process. At the same time, we recognize that there are many different kinds and levels of change that coaching can support – ranging from practical changes in the external world to deep personal change. Our intention is to develop coaches who can effectively support clients across a wide continuum.

We recognize that any approach to facilitating change is necessarily based on a conception of what it means to be a human being. As a framework for developing a coherent model, we offer participants a set of nine guiding principles, arranged as a set of embedded triangles. These principles are fleshed out from various sources as participants move through the program. Participants are constantly challenged to examine themselves in view of these principles, and to reflect on their work with clients through the perspectives offered by them:

A first set of principles help anchor us in our unique, best selves.

1. Every human being is creative and self-creating.
2. Every human being is by nature meaning-seeking and meaning-making.
3. Every human being has unique strengths and gifts with which to create a meaningful life.

The next set of principles help guide us in developing our full potential.

4. Reflection and inquiry are essential for enhanced awareness, which in turn is a key in the quest for greater excellence and meaning in working and living.
5. A human being is an integrated whole consisting of many different aspects: mind, body and spirit; thinking, feeling and imagination, etc. Effective and meaningful working and living require congruence and synergy among these different elements.
6. As human beings, we always have both the freedom and the responsibility to choose.
Figure 1

A third set of principles guide us in relating to others and the world around us.

7. Our subjective view of reality - our beliefs, assumptions, mental models, “stories” about ourselves, others and the world in which we operate - influences our choices and actions.

8. As human beings we are embedded in a multi-faceted life, and we form part of many different systems of relationships.

9. The guiding principles outlined above provide grounding for intentional action, leading to the creation of meaningful results.

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

The Adler School, though only in operation for seven years, has developed a number of program strengths. A partial listing follows:

• Grounded in a clear philosophical orientation, rather than on the personality and strengths of a particular individual teacher or leader, and both depth and breadth of multiple theoretical underpinnings.

• Focuses on the personal development of the coach, their being as well as their knowing and doing, and encourages ongoing learning.

• Relies on powerful collaborative and co-creative learning environments based on strong relationships among students developed through program format and context.

• Offers a diversity of faculty skills and backgrounds, including extensive organizational coaching and consulting experience, and draws on the expertise of related schools—psychology, psychotherapy, counseling, family and parent education.

• Exhibits a spirit of continuous improvement that results in regular revisions and enhancements of the program.

• Provides extensive course material, with extensive reading lists to guide participants who want to do further reading in specific areas.

• Leads to advanced team, interpersonal, parent coaching, and coaching research training, as well as access to international opportunities for providing training to organizational leaders.
PROGRAM CHALLENGES

The Adler School's programs are in a state of continuous improvement. Hence, what are listed as “challenges” here are stimuli for further development:
• Business building and practice management form a secondary part of the training – and some students need more support. More and other resources need to be provided for this support.
• Many newly-trained coaches are willing to offer their services to social causes in order to gain experiences and make a contribution to the public good. Adler is working with the Coaches Alliance for Social Action to develop much-needed connections with such causes.
• More advanced coaches need further development, both in breadth and in depth, especially regarding understanding and working with systems and organizations. Additional advanced training needs to be designed and delivered.
• The future of coaching as a profession requires further research and the development of graduate-level degrees in coaching. Adler is engaged in curriculum design as a Founding Member of the Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching and has instituted an Adler Research Consultancy, but such efforts need further resources.
• ASPC’s insistence on the value of face-to-face learning limits the availability of the program to those who can travel to where it is offered. The School therefore needs to expand geographically and/or expand its distance education offerings.

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Melinda Sinclair has been involved with the Adler School of Professional coaching since 1998, and she played a major role as Program Advisor in developing the Adler Professional Coaching Certificate Program. Melinda also designs and delivers programs based on the Adler coaching approach to organizations. She serves on the Founding Board of the Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching and is part of the Adler Research Consultancy. In addition, she has an active executive coaching practice.

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Linda Page founded the Adler School of Professional Coaching in 1998 and has served as its President since that date. She completed the Adler Professional Coaching Certificate Program in 2002. She serves on the Boards of the Association of Coach Training Organizations, the International Consortium for Coaching in Organizations, and the Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching. She is a member of the Research and Development Committee of the International Coach Federation, served on the organizing committee of the 2004 and 2005 ICF Research Symposia, and is part of the Adler Research Consultancy.
ENDNOTES


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