



# The International Journal of Coaching in Organizations

# ijco

## *Mike's Musings: On Coaching and Consulting*

By Mike Jay

This article first appeared in the *International Journal of Coaching in Organizations*, 2007, 5(4),80-82. It can only be reprinted and distributed with prior written permission from Professional Coaching Publications, Inc. (PCPI). Email John Lazar at [john@ijco.info](mailto:john@ijco.info) for such permission.

*Journal information:*  
[www.ijco.info](http://www.ijco.info)

*Purchases:*  
[www.pcpionline.com](http://www.pcpionline.com)

**2007**

ISSN 1553-3735

© Copyright 2007 PCPI.  
All rights reserved worldwide.



Professional Coaching Publications, Inc.



# On Coaching and Consulting

BY MIKE R. JAY

**M**ost likely anything I write about appreciative inquiry and coaching is going to get me into trouble. In my first book, *COACH2 the Bottom Line: An Executive Guide to Coaching Performance, Change and Transformation in Organizations*, I took the time to seek out the work being done in Appreciative Inquiry and actually had an article in my Appendix on an overview of appreciative inquiry.

Over time, I realized there was something missing.

More specifically, I realized that if we are going to understand an organization, we had to surface the underlying structures. In order to do that, we needed something more in coaching. I don't know for sure whether it was reaching the 10,000<sup>th</sup> hour of coaching, or whether it was because I stopped counting, that I really triggered meaning about inquiry which was, until that time, closed off to my understanding. Brian Tracy, one of the self-made gurus of our time, had said that it took 10,000 hours to gain mastery at any discipline. I wasn't what you would call a traditionally credentialed coach—I had snubbed the ICF during their “grandfathering” of master coaches back in the early days. This, even though I was one of the original people to come along with Thomas Leonard back in 1995. He was, at that time, “outside” of the CoachU community.

OK, so what was it that I discovered that could be meaningful to you around inquiry?

Here's what I found, and I now call it Dynamic Inquiry. I call it that because you have to be able to move with the person being coached in an organization as their role shifts and changes during the course of their organizational work. And you have to be able to get through all the noise to get to the signal; otherwise you can't find the structure in their meaning-making system. Without structure, you're guessing around appreciation, actionability and capability—capability being the operative word in organizational work. Elliot Jaques and Requisite Organization taught me that: coaching is about surfacing and growing capability.

What is Dynamic Inquiry anyway?

M  
U  
S  
I  
N  
G

Essentially, it is made up of five simple constructs:

- Pinging – introducing something never mentioned by the client
- Probing—considering something that has already been tabled (the Canadians say this and I like that term here to describe what is happening)
- Prompting—directing the interaction with 5Ws and how
- Perturbing—challenging the person’s current meaning-making structure
- Permitting—asking for embellishment that provides deeper insights into meaning-making

Each of these “forms” or processes emerging from these forms is used for a different reason. Let me see if I can explain a couple of ideas. [For more info, you can download a free paper at [www.dynamicinquiry.com](http://www.dynamicinquiry.com).]

Pinging is taken from the metaphor of sonar to understand when you can’t see hidden formations or structures, what they might look like, or if they are even there. Using the ping, which starts with is, are, have, could, would, do, can, etc., is *almost* always a closed-ended question. I know, I know, coaches are supposed to use open-ended questions, but I’ve found that open-ended questions are really not that effective because for one thing they almost always start with a prompt: who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Now, of course these can be great questions, but what I found is that if you remember Hersey-Blanchard, and situational leadership, they found essentially if task followership is unsophisticated, you have to be more directive, to paraphrase the theory. If task followership is more sophisticated, then use more support. Coaching with Dynamic Inquiry is situational coaching, because until you find capacity and capability, potential (appreciative inquiry’s big thing) is no good to you, and especially not much good to an organization.

So, you might say, *that’s* the big demarcation, depending on “whose” appreciative inquiry you read.

Prompting in my experience the past six years, is a major mistake to make. If you don’t have to do it, don’t do it, Why? Because it “assumes” structure.

Here’s an example. When you ask, “What is important?” (a question we like to use), you assume something is “important.” There is an old adage that a category error is made when you confuse “ought” with “is”. In other words, don’t assume it is, simply because it ought to be; check whether it is or not.

This is how I got to Dynamic Inquiry in the first place. Let me explain.

If you’re searching for the structure of meaning-making in the person being coached, you can’t assume things. If you do, all you’ve done is confused how YOU make meaning with the person being coached. And quite frankly, the organization (once coach selection is complete) is not much interested in the way in which YOU make meaning. They are NOT interested in your capacity, capability or potential. It’s the person who is coached that is of concern.

If you project YOUR meaning-making as an intervener into a situation, we then can’t decide how much of your structure is making up the structure of the person who is being coached. I have been researching this effect for some time. In our COACH2 world, we call it “leading” the client. And it surely does, as does anything you do with a client, assuming they are breathing, so let me erase any doubt there. Kurt Fischer from Harvard found that it’s likely that people work

“one” level of complexity higher with support. That’s pretty dangerous right there to me, because are you going to be in the mind of your client all the time? Which means, when you’re not, they are working one level lower without support. This can be pretty devastating at times to people who had their “minds” implanted by “well-meaning” appreciatively trained coaches, eh?

I think you catch my drift here.

Be careful where you end and the client begins. This whole idea of partnership wanes when the going gets tough for people on the job and there’s nary a coach around to pump them up appreciatively.

So, I created Dynamic Inquiry to help us move with the client, give us some better tools to chase structure without “determining” it (and believe me we do). In the research I’ve been doing, I’m sort of proving Fischer’s axiom. I recently had a series of interviews scored and by mistake I had mixed up the interviews, so that we had the same scorer score two different interviews on the same person within days of each other; a Kegan Subject-Object Interview, and a Jaques Complexity of Information Processing Interview. In one of the interviews, I noticed that the interviewer, not trained with Dynamic Inquiry had “gotten” a lot farther into the interview than was necessary and in fact, in my view, was working too appreciatively. When the scores came back, I saw almost ONE FULL LEVEL of complexity (Commons Model of Hierarchical Complexity Scoring applied to both) separated the interviewer trained with Dynamic Inquiry vs. the one not trained. The score was highest on the “appreciative” interview.

What does it all mean?

There’s not enough data to affirm the theory, but over time I’m convinced that we’ll see these differences. Why does this matter to people and organizations? If you misjudge capability, any number of things can occur, most of which are negative.

So, if you really want to appreciate the meaning-making differences of your client, learn where you end as a coach and the other person should start, instead of mapping your capability onto clients in an appreciative guise. Be careful. I know I’m not against talking about what works, but we need to be clear that we understand clearly that capability is a judgment we consistently make when we promote, assign tasks, and allocate resources. I would suggest to you that the misinformation created by this failure to adequately assess capability is one of the great hidden costs in organizations today—appreciative or not.

*Mike Jay*

## Resource Center for Professional Coaching in Organizations

The International Journal of Coaching in Organizations (IJCO) is the signature publication of Professional Coaching Publications, Inc. (PCPI). In addition to this internationally acclaimed journal, PCPI publishes books on topics of interest to those in the coaching community, whether practitioner, decision maker, or end user. You can count on PCPI, Inc. to provide content that pushes the envelope — bringing theory, research and application together in ways that inform, engage and provoke. Visit the PCPI website, [www.pcpionline.com](http://www.pcpionline.com), to view and purchase our growing line of products.

If you have administrative questions, please refer them to our IJCO Office Manager, at [officemanager@ijco.info](mailto:officemanager@ijco.info). For advertising, marketing and operations inquiries, please refer them to John Lazar, IJCO Co-Executive Editor, at [john@ijco.info](mailto:john@ijco.info). Please submit unsolicited manuscripts for peer review consideration to the IJCO office manager at [officemanager@ijco.info](mailto:officemanager@ijco.info).

---

Visit Both Our Sites at Your Convenience

---

*Journal information:*  
**[www.ijco.info](http://www.ijco.info)**

*Purchases:*  
**[www.pcpionline.com](http://www.pcpionline.com)**

