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## *Coaching and the Freedom to Learn: A Conversation with Tim Gallwey and John Whitmore*

Interview Conducted by David B. Drake

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# Coaching and the Freedom to Learn: A Conversation with Tim Gallwey and John Whitmore

INTERVIEW BY DAVID B. DRAKE

**David:** As I was getting ready for this conversation, I realized that your beginnings in coaching, your roots, were almost 40 years ago now. They began at a very unique time and place in history in terms of the impetus from Esalen in the late '60s and early '70s in the U.S. What are your thoughts as you reflect back to that time and how it has shaped your thinking and coaching more broadly?

**Tim:** I'll be glad to start. The '60s and early '70s was a time in which, in a very broad sense, people were struggling with the top-down hierarchical paradigm in many forms of culture. My area was education. I'd obviously been in school a lot and I'd been a training officer in the navy and a college educator. The paradigm was the person who knows tells the person who doesn't, and the focus was on content, not on the person's learning the content. There was very little about learning. My breakthrough came on a tennis court during a sabbatical when a person started learning before I began teaching them. This, in my mind, was a horrible thing. First, I should teach; then you would learn. Then you thank me and pay me. Noticing this — that I was more committed to teaching than I was to learning — really made a shift in my direction and started me on a quest to figure out how a person could facilitate the learning of another person.

**John:** It's r interesting how we come to similar conclusions from different directions, in a way. My own background was that I'd been successful in sport and business and I felt there must be more to life than the sort of traditional material success. This was in about 1969 and I heard there were interesting things going on in California, both in terms of the political thing of the anti-Vietnam War protests and all that and the birth of the human potential movement. In particular, I read something about Esalen Institute.

I understood very little about it, except that I felt there were probably new ideas there that would help me to look inwards rather than outwards. I knew the solution wasn't in more possessions, so I knew I had to look inside. It seemed that that's what they were doing at Esalen and so I went there. Carl Rogers and other people like him were there and it was all new stuff to me. But it really woke me up

to another side of myself, particularly the emotional side, which as an Englishman — at least in those days — we don't have emotions, we have stiff upper lips instead. I got very involved in Esalen and I really felt that I expanded a lot through the exploration of the whole of myself — mind, body and emotions. In 1971 I met Bob Kriegel who subsequently wrote the *Inner Skiing* book with Tim. Bob and I had a lot of conversations because his background was in sport and mine had been in sport. We were looking very much at what awareness contributes to sport. We spent time together at a university track in Santa Barbara because it was where a lot of the American athletes did their training all the year round. We went jogging and had a lot of conversations with many of them. It really turned me on to the idea that there was something in this form of humanistic psychology that really applied to sport. Bob and I talked about it a lot, but we didn't do a lot about it. It wasn't until Tim's *Inner Game of Tennis* book appeared in 1972 that suddenly I got it, "OK, this is it; this is how it works." It was the epiphany for me at that time.

**David:** I'm going to pick up on that word, 'epiphany', John, because we know that learning and transformation are not just about one moment in time, but everything we were doing, consciously or unconsciously, that made the moment possible. For you, Tim, it's the epiphany on the tennis court where all of a sudden you realize someone is learning without you teaching her. John, I have heard that for you it came from reading an article in *Time* that talked about Esalen. What was it about this article that compelled you to fly half way across the world to a place you did not know to do something that was so different from your British heritage?

**John:** There were a couple of other pieces to it. I'd seen a film called, *Bob and Carol, Ted and Alice* and it was about what was going on at Esalen. I really was moved by the film; it struck me because these people were free to express their emotions. It was not long after that I saw this double-page spread in *Time Magazine* which, by the way, was very cautious about Esalen. Of course, this only fed my already established interest — having seen the movie — but there was also clearly a political element about it. The magazine didn't say so, but was this a communist plot? Immediately, I was attracted to it because I could see this was definitely an alternative to the traditional way of thinking. I really didn't know any more than that. After I read the article I got a brochure for Esalen; it had lots of words in there like 'consciousness,' but I didn't even know what they meant. I thought the only way to find out was to go there.

I went there not knowing what to expect at all. I actually imagined it would be a sort of intellectual think tank. But when I got there, I found the game was to leave your brains at the door and bring in your emotions. That was a really different approach to anything I was used to doing. I spent two weeks at Esalen and did a variety of different activities. It really was a mind-blowing experience for

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me because I think it was the first time I regarded emotions as valuable and useful instead of something you just suppress. It was the key moment for me.

**David:** How about for you, Tim? What do you think was going on for you that helped you to seize that moment where you had the epiphany about the difference between teaching and learning? What was that like for you as you remember it?

**Tim:** It was amazingly like John's experience, although I wasn't at Esalen much. I had helped found a liberal arts college in Northern Michigan, which was an attempt to do something new in education. After the college collapsed economically, I went to California to study with Carl Rogers in a place called the Center for the Study of the Person. It was basically three weeks of encounter groups, where they had exactly the same principle [as John mentioned]. We're not interested in what you think; we're interested in what you're feeling in the moment and in your ability to express it. I think that's where I understood the power of nonjudgmental awareness, in an environment where it was safe to be bored, be scared, be angry, or be in love with the person across the room from you. Anything went in terms of what you were feeling. So it opened up a side of me that I hadn't known before. I think the shift was to begin to trust that the basis of a human being was good and that there was a lot more there than I had given account for.

**John:** I agree with you, Tim. I felt the same thing. I was really moved in the encounter groups at the goodness that emerged from deep within people in these processes. I saw that when people expressed their emotions, even very negative emotions such as anger or sadness sometimes — very often directed at their parents, who may have been dead for years — there was always this great generosity and affection and other things lurking underneath this stuff that had to be shed off first.

**Tim:** I think the other thing that must have struck us both in these experiences was how little teaching there was. For the first two hours in my first encounter group, I didn't even know who the facilitators were. The learning happened from the interaction amongst the people. The facilitators said their role was to be a participant and at the same time watch what was going on with the group. They were just another set of eyes focused in a different way, but the learning happened from people's experience not from being taught.

**John:** Absolutely. I had a very specific experience of that which I've never forgotten. When I was at school I was never particularly good at writing. Creative writing was just not for me. I just used very simple, possibly grammatically correct, English. I always marveled at people who could write poetically.

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I'd read *The Greening of America* and *Future Shock* which had impressed me, but I could not write when I went to Esalen. I didn't write anything while I was there. On the airplane on the way back to England, I wrote to a friend of mine. It was extraordinary; this letter was poetic and I realized as a result that when you don't include your emotions in the process you can't write. I learned that it was all within me. Nobody had to teach me about writing; I just had to liberate the part of me that had been suppressed and then I could write. Some people think I'm quite a good writer now. It's really strange.

**David:** It is strange, isn't it? I want to pick up on this theme. A lot of coaches and, I suppose, clients feel that part of what instinctively draws them to coaching is a desire for liberation at some level — that there's more to my life than this and I have more to offer than this. It is a drive toward self-actualization, to borrow an old term. But in order for them to survive and prosper and advance, they also feel the need to figure out how to accommodate more effectively to the organizational and cultural systems in which they work. What is coaching's role in managing these tensions?

**Tim:** I think that from the stories that John and I have already told, you can see that this drive to self-actualization, discovering what is in the human being, is a very natural process. It happens in practical ways when you find yourself being able to do things that you couldn't do before and be things that you weren't able to be before. It can happen on a tennis court; it can happen in a business environment.

I'm not for teaching self-actualization in the business context, but teaching or coaching on learning so the coach is there to help when the person who is ready for a personal step in learning. In the business environment, you shouldn't forget the business objectives of the individual and the corporation — or else coaching will become something it really wasn't designed to be and will lose face. That's a personal bias.

I'll just say one more thing. Whereas my highest value, you could say, is self-actualization, meaning self-knowledge, I'm protective of the environment in which that occurs. Freedom of choice and lack of pressure of any kind is critical to learning in the realm of self-knowledge and cannot be a sub-goal to business. It just won't work that way. I learned to appreciate self-knowledge in such an environment and am careful not to mix apples and oranges in this regard.

**John:** That's really interesting. I guess we all develop our own story about how life and the world works and that sort of thing, and then we live by our story and we refine our story as we go along. None of us have access to the truth, so we all live by a story that works for us. In a sense, the story that I ended up with by this time — and I'm not sure it was very developed in the early stages

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then, although it may be happening subconsciously — was that workplace activities had no real significance in themselves. They were vehicles through which people could experience and enrich their own lives.

So by experiencing the challenges of the workplace or the sport field, people would grow and develop. I felt at the time that the actual contribution to the business was important in so far as people had to earn a living and cooperate with the system, but it was actually secondary to people's personal growth. Later on, I had a more spiritual awakening. I began to see that this kind of work had a spiritual purpose, but I don't think I realized it was at that time.

The difficulty I have with the relationship between the workplace and individual development is the extent to which the values of business very often run counter to the values of the individual. I believe profoundly that at deeper levels everyone has good, positive values. We both sort of see it that way. I think there is a lot of difficulty when there's a conflict between an executive's personal values, which are often compassionate, contributory ones, and a lot of the business values that tend to be selfish, acquisitive and, what I would call, counter-evolutionary. This does pose a problem for coaching. I manage to work with it, but I cannot pretend that this contradiction does not exist.

**David:** There are other professions, e.g., therapy and economics, which address some of these same issues. For both of you, then, what is the unique contribution that coaching can make to help individuals and groups with these dilemmas?

**John:** I think what we're doing in coaching is helping people or at least creating the environment in which people can look at these things clearly and make their own decisions. I wouldn't begin to say that, because you have these values and your corporation has these values, this is what you should do. I trust absolutely that each of us is the best person to answer that question for ourselves. What we provide is the environment and, in some cases the challenging questions, which make them think it through and get a clearer picture — both intellectually and emotionally — so they can make their decisions from a more informed place.

**Tim:** John and I agree on that for sure. It's not only in business that there's conflict between basic human values and what's going on in the culture. So the key role of the coach is to help each person to think and feel for themselves and to be an independent individual. I say independent, meaning they can stand on their own two feet and work together with others in a cooperative way. So the business environment is as good as any environment in the culture to work out that dilemma between individual and culture. I don't see it as an obstacle, but as necessary learning to even win

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your stripes as an individual. You have to recognize the culture that you're in and the culture you've been taught, and then make very fundamental choices about where you stand.

**John:** Can I just illustrate that with a very simple model that I think helps to illustrate it? The model starts with dependence, where we are dependent on our parents, then our teachers, and then the rules of the game. So to speak, we do what we are told. Then we go into this stage of independence where we become self-determining. Ultimately, what seems to emerge is a third stage, interdependence, because at a certain point in our developmental journey or evolutionary journey, the desire to collaborate with other people for the good of the whole seems to arise automatically at the right time. You don't have to force that or teach it. It just emerges once somebody has had the opportunity to experience and thrive in that liberated space of being independent.

**Tim:** I would agree with that model and the belief that how interdependent one wants to be is one's individual choice, and it's clearly what's going to make the world work. It's going to be what makes governments work, what makes education and healthcare work. It is based in a real interdependence where people can speak straight to each other and move towards a common good because they are confident enough in their individuality that they don't always have to win every argument or look the smartest.

**John:** The difficulty is that our social structure, our economic system, is sort of tribal and competitive in nature and encourages us to be competitive between one another, as people and as organizations. I think we've reached a stage in the world today where the competitiveness is getting more and more inappropriate and we've got to take better care of the human family.

**David:** One of the questions that comes to mind for me in response to these challenges is to get your take on and your hope for the current interest in mindfulness. What are the implications of the breakthroughs from research on the brain and the growing interest in Buddhism and mindfulness as an essential quality for coaches and coachees? Tim, I can imagine it would resonate quite well with you given your long-standing interest in observation and nonjudgmental approaches to learning. And for you as well, John.

**Tim:** Just so that it doesn't become a cliché. Paying attention is critical to learning and what you pay attention to is critical for what you learn — and that's all driven by basic felt desires. If those desires aren't really your desires but are the culture's desires, you're going to be paying attention to things that make you into something other than what you really are. So the art is to really know who you are and from that where you want to focus your attention. That will determine your priorities and what you learn.

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In my discovery on the sports field, the amazing thing was that as you pay attention, things improve, and that doesn't mean I'm trying to improve them. If you pay attention to where the ball hits on the racket, it begins to cluster towards the center of the racket — and that blew my mind. I didn't see why that would happen, but it felt better and it worked better. So I began feeling that the real teacher, if there has to be a learner and a teacher, is one's own experience. Coaches simply help clients pay attention to their own experience in ways that foster their growth and development and movement towards their own goals.

**John:** I would use another model to describe exactly what you're saying, Tim. I use the term 'awareness' to mean the same as paying attention. If we paid attention or we were highly aware at all moments in our lives, we would be overwhelmed by all of the input and we wouldn't be able to cope. I suggest, then, that we have an automatic system that closes down our awareness to the level we need [at the time] in order to do whatever we're doing.

For example, if you're just walking down the street, you don't pay much attention to your body as it's walking. You may be watching where other people are so that you don't bump into them, but your awareness is pretty low. The thing that enhances learning is increasing your awareness. It's a little bit like having a magnifying glass, which increases the quality and the quantity of the information you receive or the input. As you get that extra input, inevitably, it will create the improvement. If you see exactly where the ball is going, as Tim says, body will automatically begin to self-correct.

The magic of this mindfulness, this awareness, this quality of input is that it is, in itself, curative. You don't have to fix it. The problem with "teaching" is that it tries to fix something and, as a result, very often actually disrupts the learning process. I think you'll find that what is showing up now in the neurosciences is that the area of your mind that deals with the experience and reception of high quality input is different from the area of your mind which takes instructions or the information given from outside. What we want to do is make sure that we activate the right part of ourselves, but teaching actually runs counter to that aim.

**Tim:** We see it pretty much the same. I see awareness like a light that enables us to know. The tension is the focusing of the light; it enables you to learn more in a specific direction and it keeps you from having to pay attention to everything at the same time.

**David:** There have been several generations of coaching; many of the early founders and contributors to coaching like yourselves are now in their 60s and 70s. There's a middle wave of people like myself in our 40s and 50s who are carrying forward some of these traditions as well as bringing forward new disciplines like positive

*I see awareness like a light that enables us to know. The tension is the focusing of the light; it enables you to learn more in a specific direction and it keeps you from having to pay attention to everything at the same time.*

and narrative psychologies. As coaching moves globally and across different age groups, what do you think will happen with coaching and what sort of exciting possibilities do you see on the horizon? What do you think is still missing from coaching and where should we be paying more attention?

**Tim:** The direction of my interest — and I think where there is the need — is in the coaching of teams to work together and to overcome the self-interferences such as self-doubt and fear that prevent a person from accessing his or her potential. Coaching is always about overcoming the self-limitations that we impose on ourselves that keep us from going where we want to go. The amount of interference that happens when people are trying to work together is extremely high, as is the potential that people also have when they work together. It is like having one big brain made up of all the life experiences of the people on your team, whether it's a team of seven or a team of 7,000 or 7,000,000. When they're moving towards a common goal, they can overcome the individual mindset that was so important to them in their development, to accomplish something more. Before becoming an independent individual a person tends to rely on the group to for approval and self-esteem. Only when confident in oneself can a person be free to work effectively in a team without putting individual goals in front of team goals. When truly free people work together as a team you can get something done that begins to bring hope to the future beyond simple individual growth.

I'd also like to put a voice out there for really understanding why people have a hard time listening to each other and a hard time putting aside their own mindset to even be interested in the mindset of another. In the end, why do they have difficulty working together for common ends? If we don't solve that one, the world itself will be in a very sad condition. I think to get the job done we have to work together to make health work and education work and to make peace in the world to work. So, I would envision that coaching moves in that direction as the need does.

**John:** I really agree with that. When we first talk about coaching, certainly as applied to the workplace and pretty often in sport — certainly with a sport like tennis or skiing — it is a one-on-one process. I don't want to deny that there have always been teams in sport, but when coaching came into the workplace — or with life coaching — it was very much a one-to-one process. As time has gone on, we have focused very much in the British and European coaching scene on playing down the word 'coaching' and focusing more on the attitudes and behaviors that people needed to develop. I will simplify that by saying we needed people to be more aware and more responsible. So what we have spent a lot of our time doing in Europe — it may be a little different in the States — is working to have the principles of coaching adopted by organizations so that their managers and leaders were behaving in

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a manner that represented the principles of coaching. We wouldn't call them coaches, but we enabled them to learn how to manage differently and, as a result, create more of what we might describe as a coaching culture in organizations.

What I'm seeing is that we're moving from working with individuals into working more with groups through coaching teams and working more with whole organizations in becoming coaching cultures. But what I've noticed in the last four or five years, more than anything else, is whole institutions changing. The institution of education is wanting to move in this direction. The institution of healthcare . . . and I'm working with the European Commission on a massive task to move the whole of Europe from instruction to coaching in driver education. So what I'm seeing is larger and larger organizations that go beyond the corporate boundaries into a whole institutional way of being, whole cultures adopting this way; and I'm very encouraged by that because, as Tim has expressed, this is what we have to adopt right across our society if we're going to address these problems. This is not going to be fixed by a small organization or a few individuals. We've got to start working together for the good of the whole, and I'm very encouraged by the shifts I see occurring.

**Tim:** One hope I have for the future of coaching is that it doesn't lose its foundation in learning. Whether coaching is facilitating the learning in an individual or a high performance team, understanding the learning process and what gets in its way, is fundamental to its success. And the only way you can have that understanding is by continuing to be a learner yourself.

**John:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Tim:** We can start thinking of coaching as a value itself, so I would like to see learning cultures and institutions that are learning just like individuals learn. They evolve — and that's what corporate leaders feel responsible for — and it even can work in a competitive model. Those companies that learn how to learn, they're going to survive and thrive — whether they're bigger or smaller, they're going to thrive. That is kind of the law of evolution. Those that think they're getting the job done, period — and getting totally stressed out on the way — they're going to fail. It's coming to a point in organizations where they can see that, and I think that's why they'll be open more and more to embracing the principle of learning in their organizations.

**John:** You used the term 'evolution' again there. I do see coaching as a way of facilitating or fostering psychosocial or psychospiritual or psycho-socio-spiritual, if you like, evolution. It is a way of facilitating that process, and it is a learning process. I see that as going on.

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It does raise the other issue that Tim and I have talked about before, which is where does spirituality fit into this model? One of the things that comes up a lot for me... I work quite a lot in Asia and, of course, in Asia there's less of a division in the personal development journey between the psychological and the spiritual; it's just a continuous process in which people move gradually from what we in the West would say was the psychological into the spiritual as they do more work on themselves. We tend to have a division between psychology and spirituality, and I see that as very foreign to most of Asian thinking. I find that they love the coaching principles and they use it and are interested in it for their further development in that area.

**David:** So it begs the question, then, of just what is 'coaching?' John, I read somewhere that you have mused whether, in hindsight, it would have been better to invent a whole new word instead of bringing forward 'coaching' from the sports world. I wonder if coaching was a necessary word to be able to express something that was familiar to people, but if now there's perhaps an openness to think beyond 'coaching' in search of a new word for what we are doing.

**John:** The word was confusing because the traditional coaching in sport was really based on behavioral psychology, which is very much about just getting the behavior right not about paying attention to the internal obstacles and things that Tim was talking about. It was just getting behavior right. Hold the racket like this, not like that. That was all behavioral, but then coaching as we know it came along with a fundamentally different way of learning, so to speak. Yet we still use the same term 'coaching.' I think that has caused confusion for people that had had coaching in sport but were now getting something more psychologically advanced. It was a very different approach and the word is confusing because it's used for both of them.

**Tim:** The word will get redefined as coaching continues. It's a borrowed word, it is getting redefined, and the future depends on how we define it and use it. It has a very short history so far.

**John:** I absolutely agree, yeah.

**David:** In my client projects I point out that most leaders and managers will spend only 5% of their time during the week formally coaching. The bulk of what they're trying to accomplish in their organizations needs to happen as a result of the other 95% of their time. I talk about coaching as a lens or window through which they can look at their daily practices so it becomes the way that every aspect of their business gets done. In any given moment, what is the highest thing I can offer to this conversation or to this person? What is being asked of me right now? These types of questions transcend what we would traditionally think of

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as coaching, but if coaching truly embraced the spiritual element you've mentioned it would become more transparent and be able to focus more on what it is trying to accomplish.

**Tim:** I would agree. You have to look to be a clean mirror and not to put your own bias ahead of the evolutionary instinct of the person being coached.

**John:** I sometimes say that the ultimate question — and there's only one question in coaching ultimately — is, “who are you?” I think that is what we are trying to help people to do. There's lots of different ways you can define coaching, but you could say that it is helping the person to find who they are underneath the conditioning, the social obligations, the imposed religious imperatives, and their own anxieties and defense mechanisms — to move beyond that stuff to find out who you really are. To me, one could describe that as a spiritual quest or as a personal development quest. I think the process is the same whatever the word we put on it, in a way.

**David:** One of the things I admire about both of you is that neither of you have rested on your considerable laurels; you remain engaged in learning and in contributing to the profession. I know, Tim, you've got a new book in the works. What other kinds of things interest the two of you right now that keep you alive and vibrant in your engagement with this quest called ‘coaching’?

**Tim:** I'm going to repeat that coaching doesn't keep me so vibrantly alive as learning does. I'm happy being on either side of the coaching fence. I love coaching and I love being coached, and I love learning when it's just from my daily life. Learning is a word that I don't think will quickly go away. Self-development is even a better word. Knowing yourself is even a higher quest. I don't believe those have to be in order. You can learn to know yourself at a point where you're still not that psychologically and emotionally developed. Self-knowledge is a never-ending quest for me. I've already learned that it doesn't have a limit, so I'm not looking for something else to interest me.

**John:** I guess for me it is things which I really didn't intend . . . that my book, *Coaching for Performance*, became rather widespread and translated into many different languages, mostly European languages, and then it's in Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Malaysian and so on. In many of these countries it was certainly the first, if not the only, textbook that they had when coaching began because it was the only one in their language. The result of that is that I have somehow ended up with feeling that I have a responsibility to help foster the coaching profession. I get asked a lot to all these different countries because they're using my book as one of their principal textbooks.

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I feel that I've had a great life. I've had enormous personal fulfillment from the journey that I have been on. I feel a responsibility and a duty that I welcome, actually, to serve the profession that has made such a difference in my own life. While I do have the reputation, I feel it's my duty to use that — so that's really what I'm doing about coaching as such, as a profession. But I'm really with Tim in that it's about learning and I feel that I'm continuously learning in my old age now.

The other thing I'm so concerned about in the world today is with the economic decline and all that. I'm horrified at the level of consciousness, for lack of any better expression, or the level of evolution that some of the leaders in the world have reached and the amount of harm they're doing because they're not more mature or more evolved. So I have been quite involved in a number of global issues for many years and I love it. Every day I learn more and learn more. I can't stop that if I wanted to. It's a great life.

**David:** It is a great life. . .

**Tim:** Over here in America we have a little bit of fresh air in leadership. We don't know how it's going to work out, but there's somebody that's pretty aware and you feel is a human being at least. He's got really huge problems, but he's really calling for a lot of people now to get involved, not only in rebuilding the country but in thinking globally. I don't think it will hurt if he's allowed to be around for a while.

**John:** I think we're living in very exciting times. There's so much change going on that is such needed change. There were periods in history that we've described in certain ways, like the Reformation or the Renaissance. I think we are going through one of those fascinating periods in human history now and it is very much a waking up of the collective because we have to. We cannot continue with the greater and greater disparity between the rich and the poor in the world, with one third of the world really suffering and others at the top who don't know what to do with their millions. So there's that social injustice area and then there's the serious environmental problems that, within 20 or 30 years, if we haven't done something enormous about them we will be in tremendous trouble.

I think that the function of coaching and people awakening and becoming more aware and more responsible — whatever the activity they are in — is just part of that change. It is almost as if coaching is a profession that's grown up to meet the need in this particular period, and that one of the products of coaching could be described as awakening people's self-responsibility. We can't just keep looking over our shoulder and saying, "Who is going to do it for me?" A very important part of personal development is

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the point at which you begin to take more responsibility for your own life. What a time to be alive!

**David:** In looking at the notes I made in preparing for this conversation I'm struck by the trajectories of your lives—starting with race cars and tennis courts through to spiritual paths, success as a writer and teacher, and now on to, perhaps, a wisdom keeper kind of role. As you look back — even as far as your family of origin and what inspired your first loves — what stands out for you, what are the threads that run through it all?

**Tim:** I'll start with a couple. One is that there's much more to a human being than we realize. That goes for every human being. The quest is not a limited quest. That's not only as an individual, but as a social human being. Secondly, we get in the way of our own selves a lot more than we'd like to admit. You put those two things together and you have the drama of living life today — that we've got a tremendous, incredible opportunity for a while to be a human being. In my understanding there's nothing like it, and yet we're faced with a lot of interference that gets born outside of us and some from inside of us that keeps us from even wanting to know. We think we already do know and that thinking that we already know shuts down the learning process. That trust in what a human being really is and can be is a fundamental theme served by the commitment, the choice or, in John's term, the responsibility, to find out amid your other social responsibilities is a current theme for me.

**John:** It's funny because when I look back, I grew up during World War II and we were in an area that was very heavily bombed in the war. Both my parents were very involved in the war effort. My mother was head of the Red Cross in the area, and my father was head of the home defense on guard. Their life was absolutely about service. Money was not the issue. The issue here was, "how can I contribute to society?" and I thought that was the purpose of life when I was young. Earning a living or making money did not get discussed at all.

**Tim:** I had a similar background.

**John:** Somehow, I think that's one of those bits of conditioning that I never shed and I don't want to shed. A lot of other conditioning, I think, stops people being who they are, but I do feel that that is a fundamental part of human being that I've been fortunate enough to carry. That's been a driving force and, to some extent, my desire to succeed in sport in the early days and achieving things since then, comes from a deep down relationship with parents who served humanity. I wanted to do the same and perhaps live up to their expectations although they are long gone. I remember my parents with enormous affection and I value what I got from them, which was about service to humanity. Some people say service

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since you're doing it for other people, but to me it's such a joy to be doing that. It's almost like a selfish activity.

**Tim:** We agree.

**John:** Just the other things I remember . . . there are certain key points when you could have taken the wrong direction. I could have taken the wrong direction if I had decided that more big cars or big boats or houses in the Caribbean or another airplane would have given me satisfaction. I think there are a tremendous number of very wealthy people today who have accumulated all sorts of material things in the hope that it would give them a sense of fulfillment. Then, tragically, towards the end of their life, they realize it's not a big boat or a big house — they didn't do it — but they've missed the opportunity to travel on the sort of journey that Tim and I and many others have been on.

**David:** Thank you for sharing that. It seems like part of what I hear both of you saying is that the value of coaching and the value of learning is in helping us to notice those moments of realization and be awakened by them. One of the joys of coaching is being able to completely focus on the human being that is across from you and ask yourself, "What does this person need most right now?"

**John:** There's something I think is very important to add here that we haven't touched on yet that I feel I must mention. When we talk about how we relate to other people, I think the most challenging relationships are our family relationships. I've had two marriages and I have learned so much from those experiences. In one sense, both marriages failed in the end. My second marriage lasted for 27 years, but there was so much learning and it was also part of the learning process. It's unfortunate that the way we organize our society is that these relationships come and go and there's so much social pressure on them. The true benefits of those relationships are often covered over by the 'shoulds' and how we should live in society. To me, they are an enormous challenge and I've learned an enormous amount. I think now in my old age I probably have finally understood how a relationship should be, but it's getting a little bit late.

**David:** You never know . . . Is that true for you, Tim, as well? Have you found relationships to be a similar learning ground?

**Tim:** Great learning opportunities. I just want to mention a word [in this context] we haven't mentioned — it is a special kind of learning called 'unlearning' and it may be as important as learning. Learning new things may be only half the job, if that, as unlearning the old things we've taken in unconsciously — or sometimes even consciously but realize they're not really our own — is perhaps even more important. Perhaps I could give an example of unlearning in my relationship with my step-children. Quite some time ago I was

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doing work in Copenhagen just before Christmas. When it came time to go home, I found myself feeling uncomfortable and even somewhat reluctant. Upon reflection I realized my discomfort had to do with not wanting to face the problem of gifts for the children at Christmas – would they be what they hoped for, would they be as good as what their friends would get, etc.? In short, I realized that my reluctance was based in the mental definition I held of my children. On further reflection I realized that my current “operating definition” of my children was of “problems to be solved.” I mean by this that when a knock came on the bedroom door, what I expected to come in was a problem waiting to be solved. This shocked me, and I asked myself where I had learned that definition.

The answer was obvious. I was a “problem to be solved” for my father, and I had learned to be, like him, the problem solver. These were pretty sobering reflections. When I asked myself, “Was this definition in keeping with my current commitments in life?”, it was clear that it wasn’t. I wanted to enjoy my life, not just be a problem solver. So I thought about the next question in the re-definition process – “What definition would align with my current commitment.” The answer was clear, “My children are my only chance to experience the kind of love that exists between parents and their kids.” I went home with this new definition in the foreground of my mind and, much to my surprise, the knocks on the door came and problems didn’t walk in. I was unlearning the old definition that allowed me to really enjoy that Christmas and my children on an everyday basis.

**John:** I want to reinforce what Tim says there because what I’ve found — particularly in the corporate world when I’m working with an organization to shift its management style from ‘command and control’ towards a coaching approach — is that the hardest thing is to stop giving instructions and being the one who solves problems. Many people find it more difficult than the coaching work itself because to give that up is harder than learning the new. They have to give it up to create the space for the new, but I think that is what human beings find so, so difficult.

**David:** I dare say, if one can make a generalization, that it can be particularly challenging for us men sometimes because for many of us this old style was so central to our identity.

**John:** Absolutely. That whole identity issue of who are you. We start off by giving ourselves labels. Who are you? I’m a coach or I’m a tennis player or I’m an ex-racing driver or I’m a businessman. That’s not who we are. That’s just the labels we put on ourselves. Moving beyond all those labels through the process of unlearning is such an important part of that journey.

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Tim Gallwey attended Harvard University where he majored in English Literature and captained the tennis team. In the 1970’s he embarked on an exploration balancing outer and inner dimensions of life. He has written a series of best-selling books, starting with *The Inner Game of Tennis*. This book established a new method for the development of excellence in any kind of performance by reducing mental interference; it became a primer for the new fields of sports psychology and executive coaching. *The Inner Game of Work* set forth his findings of thirty years of coaching in major international corporations, enabling them to better facilitate change. His latest book is *The Inner Game of Stress*. Tim lives in Malibu, California.

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John Whitmore started in professional sports (as a European champion racing driver), then worked six years in various businesses before studying leading-edge psychology in the 1970s. He started the *Inner Game* organization in the UK under license from Tim Gallwey, first with a tennis and ski school and later in business. John wrote the best selling coaching book, *Coaching for Performance*, in 1992 and won a series of national and international awards and a Ph.D. for his contribution to the coaching profession.

**David:** It is . . . Is there anything else you would like to add or share that I have not asked about yet that would help you feel like you've rounded out this conversation.

**John:** I want to thank you for coaching us because you've asked some questions that force me to look at myself and what I do in a new way, and it has been interesting to see how far Tim and I have traveled. Although we see each other from time to time, it's not very often; we're other sides of the world. Yet the similarities and conclusions we've come to are pretty similar. That's enriching. I've enjoyed the conversation.

**David:** Thank you. How about for you Tim?

**Tim:** I echo that. I've learned a lot. I'm just feeling right now that if what comes out of this conversation eventually in writing, whether it's about coaching or learning, is that it's really good news that there's so much more to the human being. We're not at the end of evolution; we're at the beginning of it. It's very exciting and it's within everyone's reach. It doesn't have to come from outside. The answers we're looking for are inside us, and that's a tremendously hopeful and exciting possibility.

**John:** I've become fascinated by this whole process of evolution in looking at how this huge process of humanity is evolving — both the collective journey and the individual journeys. I find that whole process fascinating.

**Tim:** The more you learn about yourself and what you are as a human being, the more you automatically respect the other human beings that you're sharing the planet with. It works that way. It's disregard for the value of a human life that makes us so ready to dispense with it for mere causes. It's all moving in the same direction — individual evolution and social evolution.

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