Coaching Is Dead. Long Live Coaching!

David B. Drake

This article first appeared in the International Journal of Coaching in Organizations, 2009 7(1), 138-150. It can only be reprinted and distributed with prior written permission from Professional Coaching Publications, Inc. (PCPI). Email John Lazar at john@ijco.info for such permission.

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DAVID B. DRAKE

The articles in this issue trace some of the central threads and players that have shaped coaching. This closing article offers a number of provocative reflections on the contributions and challenges from coaching’s past and the opportunities and requirements for coaching’s future. It identifies some of the key internal and external issues facing coaching and it proposes three important distinctions (coaches, coaching services and coaching approaches) as a way of advancing the conversations and deliberations on how best to address these issues. Finally, four domains of knowledge crucial to coaching mastery are explored further as a means to articulate what is needed in order to develop coaches and coaching. The article concludes with some recommendations for next steps.

The [American] Dust Bowl had occurred because people had been telling themselves the wrong story and had tried to inscribe that story — the frontier — on a landscape incapable of supporting it. The environmental rhythms of the Plains ecosystem were cyclical, with good years and bad years following each other like waves on a beach. The problem of human settlement in the region was that people insisted in imposing their linear notions of progress on this cyclical pattern. - William Cronon

There is a growing sense of urgency and anticipation about the future for coaching (what is it and what does it need?) as well as about the future of the world (where is it going and what does it need?). As such, it is important to assess the degree to which the historical stories we tell about coaching and about the world match the requirements for either’s future. Otherwise, we are at risk of literal or metaphorical dust bowls as a result of seeing the future as merely an extension of the past and imposing our outdated narratives as a result.

I believe coaching is at a bifurcation point in its evolution, a critical juncture whose outcome is currently unknown. Will it become a niche specialty for certain professionals, an assumed skill for every professional, a viable and independent discipline or something else not yet imagined? While time will certainly tell and we each have a voice to add, there is certainly a need for more revolutionary and proactive thinking about its future regardless of the outcome. As I shared in keynoting a recent coaching conference, “Coaching (as we knew it) is dead! Long live coaching!” In the pages that follow, I offer some of my reflections on the articles in this issue and the possibilities for the next generation of coaching.

The articles in this issue trace some of the central threads and players that have shaped coaching in an effort to better understand and honor its past as well as to better understand and shape its future.
This grounding is important for the viability of the professionals who coach, the growth of our collective wisdom about coaching processes, and the maturation of coaching as an institutional force. It echoes some of the findings from a recent *Harvard Business Review* research report (Coutu & Kauffman, 2009a) in which many of the survey respondents saw coaching as a highly effective process but felt that the field itself is in “adolescence.”

While concerns were raised (*ibid.*, p. 5) regarding barriers to entry, standards for practice, research on effectiveness and more, I would contend that the larger issue is the lack of a suitable and shared frame of reference by which to determine any viable answers. In part this stems from the fact that coaching has grown so quickly that we are, in a way, trying to get all the horses back into the proverbial barn. The result is an ongoing, but perhaps fruitless, attempt to view and orchestrate the development of coaching using traditional frames of reference borrowed from other disciplines. Instead, I continue to advocate for the view that coaching should be seen as the first post professional practice — a new integration of art and science and a new type of profession that draws on historical precedents but seeks out new metaphors for its identity.

While we cannot know how coaching will unfold in either the marketplace or the academy, for coaches or the broader enterprise, we will all be well served by placing coaching within a broader temporal, intellectual and professional context. If coaching is to remain a primary activity rather than a derivative one it needs to be more overt about its genealogy and its identity. The articles in this issue make an important contribution to remedying the often a historical stance in coaching and to help meet the need for greater clarity on both its past and its future. They add to the dialogue in addressing Coutu and Kauffman’s (2009a) concern that “there is as yet no overarching definition, let alone organization, of the profession as a whole” (p. 5).

**REFLECTIONS ON COACHING’S PAST**

*Stories are particularly important now because we are struggling to retain the ancient and familiar narrative structure to our existence in time when the past is swept away ever more quickly, the present is ever more compressed, and the future is ever more folding back into our experience.* - David Drake

In building on David Orlinsky’s work as cited by Page (2009), it is important for coaches to acknowledge their place in a broad range and a long line of psychosocial practitioners. In doing so, coaches would gain a greater humility and clarity through understanding the giants on whose shoulders they stand, the unique contexts in which coaching has emerged and the specific needs it is designed to meet. For example, Jackson and Cox (2009) highlight the (significant but often unheralded) contributions of humanistic psychology to coaching, most notably the work of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. It is from this work, among others, that
coaches get their dedication to client-centered approaches and the search for transformative experiences. Everyone who engages in coaching needs to understand its heritage, regardless of their eventual applications, and everyone is at risk if the central ethos and elements upon which it is based are overly diluted through a lack of attention to this task.

The importance of these early figures and their influence on coaching can also be seen in Werner Erhard’s est movement which informed many of the early programs which would become coaching. I attribute much of the culture than grew up around coaching, for better and worse, to the fact that his work and others like it, with its more commercial and “new age” orientation, was at the forefront of the coaching movement rather than the classical psychologists’ work on which much of it was based. Vikki Brock (2009a, 2009b) traces these connections in her two articles, e.g., the introduction of Fernando Flores’ doctoral work into the est community in the late 70’s that gave rise to ontological coaching and the work Thomas Leonard and Laura Whitworth drew from the est community which gave rise to the major coaching associations and many of the core principles and practices of coaching. Part of coaching’s evolution and maturation will entail acknowledging the many wonderful contributions from these early days as well as addressing its shadow sides, e.g., a propensity for hubris and a bias for “fake it until you make it.”

You can see also see these early connections in the comments by John Whitmore and Tim Gallwey as they describe their initial encounters with Esalen and other transformative learning environments that emerged in the late 60’s in California. To quote them, respectively, “It really was a mind-blowing experience for 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.” (Drake, 2009a) “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. . . . that’s where I understood the power of nonjudgmental awareness” (ibid.). Much of what emerged as coaching, and continues in large part today, is a reflection of these early experiences and values around self-awareness, self-expression, transformation, wholeness, etc.

The question remains as to how coaching will change as it comes into contact with non-Western cultures, a new generation, and issues related to social justice (rather than organizational optimization). In addition to the many contributions coaching has already made, its developmental path has also yielded some challenges which must be addressed in responding to the changing environments in which it is practiced, such as:
• a lack of clear and common definitions, standards and measures;
• ongoing rivalries between associations and among schools and approaches;
• competition among types of coaches, between psychologists and others;
• fascination with external success and a propensity for fads;
• favoring of the individual/personal versus the collective/relational;
• lingering biases for behaviorism and extroverted goal orientation.

Some of our sources even went so far as to wonder if the choice at the time to call this work “coaching” was the right one. For example, Whitmore 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 share Gallwey’s hope (ibid.) that since “coaching” is a borrowed word, it will continually be redefined and, in doing so, it will continue to morph to reflect the times. In the years ahead, we may even discover that coaching is not even the right word for much of what we do. For now, we are perhaps best served by defining a frame of reference for assessing its history and its progress and by refining its definitions, its measures and its uses. As the HBR report concludes, coaching has evolved in terms of its applications in organizations and continues to add value; the goal now is to determine just where it needs to head next in addressing its challenges and in fulfilling even more of its potential.

Bill Bergquist (2009a) raises some important dichotomies as a frame for the two characters in his first article. In reflecting on them, I offer the following as four dynamic tensions (rather than as zero-sum polarities) which coaching brings forward from its past as a resource for shaping its future:

1. the value of neutrality in working with people’s agendas amid the urgency for normative engagement around critical issues;
2. the need to foster healthy human relationships and individual development as well as address the systemic and cultural forces which shape them (and are shaped by them);
3. the drive to grow others and ourselves as full human beings while addressing the realities and demands of contemporary life;
4. the need to relinquish some of the allure and attachments to coaching as a fad in order to build a stronger foundation for coaching as an integral part of our personal, organizational, institutional and cultural lives.
REFLECTIONS ON COACHING’S FUTURE
In times of great change, the learners will inherit the Earth while those attached to old certainties will find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists. - Eric Hoffer

Given the speed and manner in which the field of coaching has grown, it would be risky to assume that its future growth will be either linear or uniform. The field of coaching is, in many ways, an unprecedented phenomenon that requires new levels of thinking about its practices, its nature as a collective, and its priorities as a philosophical and professional force. I would contend that many of the historic struggles around positioning within coaching must give way to broader and more inclusive approaches in order to deal with the complex challenges facing our clients, our organizations and our society. If coaching proves unable to adequately meet the rapidly changing needs of our time, it will give way — for better or worse — to other means.

However, if coaching evolves such that it can increasingly respond to these needs, it will continue to serve an invaluable function for people and the planet. In order to so, coaches must increasingly do for themselves what they do so well for others; they can only authentically and persuasively lead in these times if they have been down these roads themselves. Coaches can no longer hide behind the belief that “the client has all the answers.” If they did, they wouldn’t need coaches. As such, I see an increasing need to make room in coaching for the provision of expertise and leadership in helping clients navigate the complexities of their life and work. This echoes Ram Charan’s comments that,

future leaders will need constant coaching. As the business environment becomes more complex, they will increasingly turn to coaches for help in understanding how to act. The kind of coaches I am talking about will do more than influence behaviors; they will be an essential part of the leader’s learning process, providing knowledge, opinions, and judgment in critical areas. (Coutu & Kauffman, 2009b, p. 28)

As professionals who coach, we need to be clear about what role would be most empowering, liberating and effective for this client in this moment. It is plain to see that there is plenty to be done to harness the tremendous energy that has been unleashed through the rise of coaching. As with all crossings of a threshold, the task is not for the ill-prepared. This issue was conceived to help identify some of the critical issues and offer some guidance in support of our success in this next phase.

Bergquist’s (2009b) second article identifies some of these key issues, echoing recent work I did with Diane Brennan, Past-President of
the International Coach Federation (Drake & Brennan, 2008), in identifying trends in coaching. For example:

- How will coaching adapt to a world with less discretionary income, increasing disparities between rich and poor, and emerging markets with millions of young leaders?
- How will coaching adapt to serving clients in an increasingly virtual, socially networked, hyper-connected, and search-driven world?
- How will coaching adapt to our increased understanding from the neurosciences and respond to our increased abilities in bio-engineering?
- How will coaching adapt in the midst of the increasing tensions between relativism, modernism and fundamentalism at cognitive, political and cultural levels?
- How will coaching help people, organizations and communities move to a more sustainable life in a post-carbon world?
- How will coaching adapt its message of hope and possibility in a world that is increasingly volatile, uncertain, and asymmetric?

The good news is that I have begun to see an increased interest among coaches in taking their skills and practices into broader systems to address critical social issues. I’ve seen this in working with educational programs where we’ve come to realize that in order to fully develop coaching cultures in schools: (1) coaching needs to become part of the curriculum and degree programs for new teachers and administrators; (2) policy makers and unions need to incorporate coaching into their expectations for what it means to be a teacher; (3) communities and parents need to take a coaching stance in their roles in developing their children; and (4) the current staff need to incorporate coaching into their classrooms as part of a shift in how we think about and create learning environments for children and youth. It is no longer enough to just provide coaching to individuals and groups; we need to develop ways to bring it into whole systems in order to engage more of the stakeholders and sustain the desired changes. I look forward to the day when coaches are invited to join teams to design social interventions and innovations.

**THE EMERGENCE OF THREE KEY DISTINCTIONS**

‘[W]e are in the presence of a serious trend . . . that sees the emergence of a ‘meta profession’ at the heart of all the help-related professions and which therefore represents a profound and unstoppable trend which can contribute to the lasting development of people and institutions.’ - Vincent Lenhardt

As one indicator of coaching’s future, I am finding that more and more of my clients want help with embedding coaching approaches
and skills in the conversations within their organization and with their clients/customers. While formal coaching will continue to serve a specialized role within organizations, I increasingly believe that the power of coaching as a “technology” will be integrated into the way people do their business as a means to create sufficient and lasting effect. The only way to make this work is if we have clearer and more substantial distinctions about “coaching” that move beyond the narrow caricatures, such as between coaching and consulting or therapy, that are commonly perpetuated by coaches seeking to distinguish themselves (see Coutu & Kauffman, 2009a, p. 22). There is value in these distinctions even as there is a need to simultaneously move on from these debates to get to the work that needs to be done. Debates on the utility of different fabrics for the deck chairs are of little use if your client is the captain of the Titanic.

I have come to make three distinctions that I believe will define the next stage of development for coaching. I see them as part of creating a more nuanced lexicon for how we talk about this work and how we think about and plan for its future. The three distinctions are “coach,” “coaching services” and “coaching approaches.” Coaches are people who contractually provide explicit coaching services and who are recognized as members of a coaching profession. This discrete set of people are the ones for whom the further development of a coaching discipline and profession would be most helpful and appropriate. However, in doing so, few claims can be made on people (e.g., other professionals, parents teachers) who are taking a more implicit coaching approach through the course of their work in organizations and as professionals. These people draw on the same coaching skills but are not labeled, by themselves or others, as coaches. They are informed by but are not tied to coaching as a practice, a profession, an association, or a primary identity. In this way, coaching can be seen as a movement that is profoundly shaping the arenas in which it is practiced and is yielding a spectrum of users in which only some people are professional coaches.

I see these distinctions as important in providing language for the major shift that is under way as the number of coaches plateaus and the number of people who use coaching as an integral part of their work and life continues to grow. I see it already in my clients as they grow more sophisticated in how they use external coaches, increase their commitments to develop internal coaching capabilities, and expand the reach of coaching principles into their key conversations and processes. Part of my work with them is to continually clarify the grammar in our projects so that we can accelerate the effectiveness of coaches and the adoption of a coaching approach in the way their business gets done. This is particularly useful in working with organizations who say, “We’ve done coaching, now what?” For them, I introduce what I’ve come to call a coaching “value chain” in bringing coaching approaches to bear on every key point in their key human capital and operational processes in order to achieve the desired changes and results.
You can also see these distinctions in a number of the articles in this issue as when John Whitmore (Drake, 2009a) reflected on the fact that as time has gone on, they have focused in the European coaching scene on playing down the word ‘coaching’ and focusing more on the attitudes and behaviors that people needed to develop. I also appreciated Brock’s (2009a) vision that coaching becomes an open, fluid social movement that is spread virally through human relationships and interactions, is woven into the fabric of life, and becomes the preferred communication process and style for human interaction. So, how can the coaching community and all those who have taken onboard coaching approaches contribute to the next phase of development of this work?

**WHAT IS OURS TO DO?**

In my research on the philosophy and practice of coaching I identified four eras in the development of psychotherapy (see Drake, 2008) and mapped them to coaches/coaching as well as proposed a fifth era that was emerging as seen in coaching (Drake, 2007, 2009b). In this work, I also described four domains of knowledge I see as essential in developing coaching mastery, whether in providing coaching services or taking a coaching approach, and in developing a coaching profession. My work was informed as well by Wenger’s work (see Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) on communities of practice in thinking about what it means to have collective wisdom and individual excellence. This analysis is relevant here in providing a broader context for the development of coaches and the articulation of coaching’s history and the implications for its future. For this article, I have brought together these two pieces of work together to look at how coaching might learn from a sister industry in defining its own future.

The four types of knowledge necessary for a solid future for coaches and for coaching are as follows:

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**Figure 1. Four domains of knowledge for coaching mastery**
A relevant example for coaches would be the foundational knowledge a therapist gets in graduate school (yielding a diploma), the contextual knowledge they gain through hours of practice and qualifying exams (yielding a license), the self-knowledge they get through supervision and on-going development (yielding a craft), and the professional knowledge they get through involvement in and validation by their relevant associations (yielding a role/status). If coaches wish to develop a recognized profession, they need to make similar decisions that are fitting for their place as a postprofessional practice. In doing so, they must recognize that while they will be responsible for all four domains, there will be many others who want to have a voice in and will benefit from the evolution of the foundational and contextual knowledge sets. At the same time, it is important to recognize that this process will be much easier if it is acknowledged that only a small subset of people will want to pursue the development of a coaching profession. Attempts to put everyone in the same “tent” or define THE tent for everyone else will continue to be frustrating for all involved. Instead, it seems more productive to think of it as a series of tents, each loosely affiliated through a commitment to coaching principles and practices, but free to define their parameters for and paths to mastery using the four domains.

As such, looking at these four domains also sheds light on the need for developing a better taxonomy for types of coaches and for levels of mastery. As part of this process, coaches and other professionals using coaching need to make more visible and validate the causal connections between (1) their models, theories, and assumptions; (2) their decisions and actions; (3) their identities and roles; and (4) their results in order to enhance their coaching capacities, improve their coaching outcomes and grow the collective body of knowledge about coaching. In doing so, coaches in particular can learn from the earlier eras in identifying some of the key issues for each of the four knowledge domains.

- The Preprofessional Era (1880-1945) reminds us of the ongoing importance of foundational knowledge in coaching — theories, models, and guidelines from the basic and applied sciences. Work in this arena is essential for the development of a solid foundation for this work, particularly theories of development and change. For non-coaches, this domain will include additional theoretical knowledge pertaining to the expertise necessary for their specific context. For example, a family business consultant needs expertise in family law, family dynamics, etc. in order to successfully use a coaching approach with her clients.

- The Scientist-Practitioner Era (1945-1970) reminds us of the ongoing importance of professional knowledge in coaching — competencies and methods by and as
practitioners in reflecting on important elements and outcomes. Work in this arena is essential for making decisions as a practitioner, particularly in terms of ethics and standards as part of being accountable to others. For example, a coach needs to develop new competencies in shifting from individual to group work, one of which would be the ability to make higher order decisions around confidentiality.

- The Professional Era (1970-1990) reminds us of the ongoing importance of self knowledge in coaching — awareness, maturity and wisdom based on the process of coaching and the personal development of practitioners as they participate in it. Work in this arena is essential if we are to be at our best, particularly in terms of developing greater wisdom and maturity in dealing with higher stakes and higher levels of complexity. For example, a coach needs to develop and engage in a regular reflective practice in order to candidly assess his progress and identify his learning edges.

- The Postprofessional Era (1990-2007) reminds us of the ongoing importance of contextual knowledge in coaching — situational savvy and strategies based on a systemic understanding of our role and the client’s issues and objectives. Work in this arena is essential for the achievement of significant and relevant results, particularly in terms of how to track what is happening in conversations, in organizations and in the world. For example, a manager and a direct report need to sort out the agendas on the table in a given conversation and the expectations and needs around their resolution — all the while balancing a variety of often competing agendas in which they operate.

- The Artisan Era (2007-) reminds us of the ongoing importance of integral knowledge in coaching — spiritual depth, ethical capacity, and institutional/cultural agility in weaving together the strands of science and practice at higher levels. Work in this arena is essential for the continued evolution and increased influence of coaching as a service and an approach. In essence, it is about the alignment of all four domains of knowledge in order to advance both coaching and the way in which people communicate in every aspect of their life.

As coaching continues to grow and evolve, it may be useful to think of ourselves as midwives for our future as professionals and as global citizens.
CONCLUSION

‘Maieutics’ refers to the science and art of midwifery, of attending to the process of giving birth. Psychological maieutics, then, is the science and art of facilitating the psyche’s transformation and the emergence of new psychological structures. - Jan O. Stein & Murray Stein

As coaching continues to grow and evolve, it may be useful to think of ourselves as midwives for our future as professionals and as global citizens. Some of us will serve as coaches and as leaders in developing coaching as a profession. This path will be served by Page’s (2009) vision that coaching develop and identify a knowledge base that is sufficiently substantial, distinct and coherent to be considered its own discipline. Some of us will use coaching approaches as a set of philosophies and practices for improving the conversations that are near and dear to our work and their lives. This path will be served by Jackson and Cox’s (2009) vision to use the ideas, methods and concerns of philosophy to more fully understand and evolve our practices.

In any case, coaching now belongs to the collective and is beyond the reach of even the largest entities. To think only along proprietary lines at any level is neither sustainable nor useful if we are to move ahead in shaping and responding to the needs of our time, our selves and our clients. Each of us has a part to play in whatever tent(s) we choose to work. Whatever our choices, we would do well to develop a greater mastery of the four types of knowledge, better communities in which to engage in mutual learning and accountability, and a deeper courage and imagination from which to create the innovations we need as coaching moves into the future.

Along the way, we will need to give away much of what we hold so closely, much as the Open Source movement has reshaped the world of software. This would make sense for coaching as a truly postprofessional practice in that the knowledge we need to address the complex needs of human development, human relationships and human communities is really “in the web”—developed, sustained and accessed across multiple disciplines and players. Intellectual and commercial differentiation and sparring is part of the game, but in the end it will only serve coaching if the creative frictions that emerge yield progress for the whole. In this sense, coaching is a spiritual path, not a religion, a way of being and talking with people more than a codified testament. As such, the path ahead involves a transcendence of our individual egos for the sake of a greater calling. In doing so, coaching will move beyond its adolescent phase in order to mature in its ability to meet the challenges and fulfill the opportunities that are before us. As such, this issue of the journal is dedicated to all those who have made coaching possible, to all those who continue to do this work in the world, and to all those who will take it beyond its roots and into the future.
REFERENCES


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David is the Executive Director of the Center for Narrative Coaching, with offices in Sydney and San Francisco. The Center has helped organizations such as Pricewaterhouse Coopers, Nike and the U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services to develop vibrant coaching cultures through narrative- and conversation-based methods. The Center offers advanced courses on narrative coaching for professionals around the world, and it partners with other leaders in the field such as NeuroPower and LMAP to integrate narrative coaching into their organizational transformation and leadership development programs. David co-edited *The Philosophy and Practice of Coaching: Insights and Issues* (Jossey-Bass, 2008, www.practiceofcoaching.com), serves on the editorial board for three coaching journals, and has written over thirty publications on narratives, evidence, and coaching.
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