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## Coaching for Transformation<sup>2</sup>

I would like to introduce you to Coaching for Transformation through referring to a recent example from my own life.

I have been dreaming about creating a living community in the countryside, based on shared values, farm life and the organization of workshops since I was in my twenties. My ex-husband did not share my dream, so I thought it would never come true until I found myself done with caring for children, in a new marriage with a partner who shared my vision, and a coach's mindset able to support change.

After two or three years of discussions, explorations and getting clear on what we wanted, a few months ago I experienced a panic attack. In December 2015, we were about to be handed the keys to our astounding farmhouse with a cherry plantation, our own pond and a creek, which we were to share with another couple. My dreams were about to come true – actually, the contract had been sealed and I could not run away any more. After nearly three decades of dreaming, I found myself in fear and despair – what if...?

I connected with a coach friend of mine; her support led to a surprising action step.

“What’s alive in you, Pernille?”

Met with this question, I rambled to her:

“I don’t know anybody in that area! Creating new connections takes time and what if I never root? What if I regret? What if it is too late – if I’m too old?”

At that point, my coach had to decide how to support me. In Coaching for Transformation, we operate with five different pathways to alignment – the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.peacebyheart.dk/?lang=en>

<sup>2</sup> From September 2016, Poles and other Europeans will have the opportunity to attend Coaching for Transformation (CFT) training in Warsaw. I will be the lead trainer during the 9-month certification programme; I shall work alongside Joanna Berendt and other experienced coaches. In June, we expect 15 students from our first European in-person training to graduate. Thus far, the course has been run in Germany, where it has attracted students from Morocco, Thailand, India as well as Germany, Denmark, the UK and Poland. Since 1997, this ACTO-accredited programme has been taught in the US (on both the East and the West coast) and since 2012, in India.

inner state that we always aim for before planning an action. These are the typical options:

### #1: Positive experience

“Think of a time where you faced change. What happened? How can you use that experience in your current situation?”

At the age of 19, I went to Sweden for 3 months, to a yoga retreat. Two years later, I accepted a job offer in Norway, where I would be in charge of herding goats. I went to Findhorn in Scotland, knowing nobody. Actually, I have uprooted and re-rooted quite a few times, and I have had no experience of being lost and regretting.

Back then, possibilities opened up naturally. When I reconnect with those times, I remember my courage, my ease in connecting with people, and the pleasant thrill of not knowing what happens next.

My coach could also choose a different approach:

### #2: Experience the now

“What do you feel in this moment?”

“What happens if you allow it?”

“And now?”

As she keeps me in the fire of my experience, I notice a high frequency shiver all over; I am so alert. Focusing on it, it slowly shifts, and now I feel vulnerable. I am a little scared. Is this too big for me? As I sit with the anxiety and my coach stays quiet, the experience changes.

I notice my longing for reassurance. I dream about being able to trust. I would like to give myself permission to accept any outcome. Soft sadness. I want to allow myself the forbidden, shameful option of disappointment, of failure. As I open up to any outcome, the fear evaporates. I am ready to open up to possibilities.

Another option my coach has:

### #3: Connect with the dream

“Where would you like to find yourself when the dust of the transition has settled?”

I see myself thriving with my new housemates, neighbors and local people in a spirit of endless possibilities and acceptance. I want our new place to be a magnet for those who seek inspiration and community around Nonviolent Communication, permaculture and social change initiatives.

“What is it like to be you in this vision?”

It feels as if sunbeams reach my face, warmth and light sweeping the anxiety away. This is what I want – living radically and practicing what I teach and coach: love and faith in action. This connects me to my life’s purpose and to what I hope for rather than what I fear.

#### #4: Explore new viewpoints

My coach has more options in her pockets. “It sounds like you think the changes ahead are putting demands on you. Would you like to experiment with other viewpoints? So let’s play – what would Marco Polo say about it? How about Professor McGonagall (my favorite Harry Potter character)? What about Mother Earth?”

“I’m an adventurer discovering a new land without and within. Feeling scared sharpens my senses” – this is my first thought. “Every step brings me closer to who I am, and I am learning”. “My new land welcomes me even though I am shy.”

When I invite my thoughts to travel these paths, the discomfort and unease become part of the new life that has already begun, it becomes an adventure and as I invite it, it transforms from discomfort to excitement.

#### #5: Welcome the barrier

My coach actually chose the fifth path: Embracing the Shadow. She knows that fear and hesitancy are expressions of good intentions wanting to be taken into consideration. She asked: “What does that scared or hesitant voice within want for you?”

I noticed I’d only wanted it to go away. Turning towards these inner voices, my entire system relaxed.

Relieved to be invited to speak, the discomfort said it wanted to protect me from disappointment and pain. It wanted me to pay attention to what is important – to root in this new area – and that I spend some energy settling rather than

building sand castles. It wanted me to plan actions that would help me grow a new supportive network.

## The plan

Once I have finally come home, subsequent steps come naturally. It is easier to root in a new village if you have a baby stroller or a dog. Both are invitations to walk and meet new neighbors. I have chosen the dog. As I write these lines, the puppy is yet to be born, although it will happen any day now. In May, it will be old enough to be taken away from its mum and I will start walking her.

The coaching conversation dissolved the panic attack and took me to a place where I feel present and in line with the big changes in my life. Unease has been replaced with a profound sense of gratitude.

## From fear to resource

Any of these five approaches might have worked. The common denominator is to invite and accept the felt sense of whatever the experience is: hope, fear, tension. The paradox is that by inviting the unpleasant aspects with gentleness and warmth, they transform and reveal their precious offerings.

Through her presence and curiosity, the coach offers her tremendous support throughout the process of change. Coaching for Transformation focuses on the beingness of the coach and the inner transformation of the client before taking action.

Each of the five opening questions above opens up a conversation. The main idea is that it is not about coaching in one specific manner; it is about the coach's gentle presence while the client does the work.

### Welcome<sup>3</sup>

Whether you choose to establish a coaching practice, to integrate coaching into your current profession, to use coaching skills to enhance your interpersonal relationships or a case you believe in, welcome to this transformational journey. As you step into coaching, you create sacred relationships with others – relationships that take them to the core of their being.

These relationships form the basis for their discovery of who they are, what they want and how they contribute to their family, workplace, community and

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<sup>3</sup> The following text is an introduction to CFT, adapted from the book *Coaching for Transformation*.

the world. Coaching invites people to take action that reflects their power, creativity and authenticity.

The coaching journey takes you deep into your heart and far out into the world. As you support transformation in others, you awaken your own inner transformational process.

### What is coaching?

Coaching emerged as a way to provide support and guidance for individuals moving through a process of change towards greater effectiveness and fulfillment. Coaching is part of the cultural shift from a pathology worldview to a resourceful worldview. In the pathology worldview, problems are identified and evaluated, and solutions are implemented – usually by external experts. In contrast, coaches adopt in their approach the resourceful worldview, collaborating to explore opportunities and identify resources, to create an exciting future based on awareness, choice and action. Coaching is a world-changing – as well as a life-changing – process.

Coaching is a partnership that maximizes human potential. We define coaching as a skillset and a mindset that taps into the resourcefulness of people to initiate creative solutions. We can create coaching partnerships with individuals, groups, organizations or communities.

As coaches, we are trained to listen, observe and ask empowering questions. We reflect on what we see and hear to help people clarify their feelings and values, leading to insight and action. We customize our approach based on the challenges, experiences, cultural norms, values and knowledge of individuals, organizations or communities. We trust that our partners are resourceful and that they have the inner wisdom to overcome obstacles and generate compelling strategies and action plans. Our job is to provide support to enhance the skills, resources and creativity they already have. In addition, Coaching for Transformation is a holistic coaching process that combines the awareness of body, mind, soul and spirit. We delve into the impact of cultural identity, power and privilege, and institutionalized inequities to support deep, lasting and real transformation.

### What is transformation?

Humans have the potential and desire to learn, grow and evolve. Transformation is a process of profound and radical change that arises from deep awareness and leads to a fresh orientation and a new direction. Transformation honors what is, while reaching deep within us to find what is emerging – the birth of something new. Instead of denying the past or the present, the transformational process cradles or embraces our life forces. Coaches act as midwives to the birthing process – the creation of something new and exciting.

Transformation happens when people are seen, heard, understood and recognized for their gifts. Ironically, when we try to change them, they resist. In contrast, coaching helps people become more of who they already are. Simply witnessing the process and being fully present has a transformational impact.

In holistic coaching we create an essence-to-essence relationship of reciprocity. We look for and bring out the client's essence and, at the same time, bring our own essence to the relationship. In this essence-to-essence relationship, both the coach and the client experience transformation. The coach is transformed just by witnessing the powerful shifts within the client. Naming what is happening in the moment on the physical, emotional and energetic level amplifies the transformation. Naming the impact the client has on the coach can serve as a source of inspiration.

### Deep awareness of emotions and needs

Lasting and sustainable change is rooted in deep awareness. Traditionally, most coaching models focus on helping people achieve their goals by taking action. Often the change is temporary. The Coaching for Transformation process helps people break through limiting beliefs, become aware of the wisdom of their bodies, identify their emotions and understand their needs and values. From that grounded, centered place of deep awareness, people can develop strategies and take actions that honor their values. The coach's deep empathic presence does more to facilitate transformation than pushing people toward end-goals. By developing a fierce heart connection, we prioritize the depth of awareness before moving into action.

### Holistic – body, mind, soul and spirit

Our holistic approach combines the awareness of the body, mind, soul and spirit with solid coaching skills. As we exercise the right and the left side of our brain, we integrate the heart, mind and body with logic and the mystery of transformation.

### Cultural awareness and commitment

We are committed to changing the demographics of the coaching profession by making coaching available to diverse communities. We actively seek faculty with deep roots in multicultural competencies and participants that represent different communities and backgrounds.

We look for creative ways in which to bring coaching to people who traditionally do not have access to it – the social sector, ethnic minority communities, LGBT and more.

## The coach's stand

We take a stand for deep, transformative coaching. As we replace conventional, predictable coaching with coaching that comes from listening for what is beneath the surface, we respond with clarity, energy and boldness.

By developing our own personalized coach's stand, we can step into a powerful way of being that mobilizes transformation. The coach's stand is a set of physical, visual and spiritual practices and commitments that a coach embodies in order to make each coaching moment, session and relationship more powerful. Together, these practices create an orientation that allows us to effectively call out our clients' power. By taking risks and following our intuition about what we sense is possible, we hold a vision for clients that is larger than what they have been able to see on their own. This calls clients into being whole, humane, loving and powerful.

## Focus on transformation for the client as well as the coach

Although we hold the focus on the transformation of people we coach, the coach's life is also transformed by the process and there is no going back to mediocrity.

## Values

At Leadership that Works, we build relationships and make decisions based on our core values. We draw inspiration from these guiding principles that are reflected through daily interactions within the organization and with students, clients, partners and communities.

**Heart Connection** – We believe our human capacity for empathy and compassion builds trust, cultivates authentic and meaningful relationships, and empowers collaboration. We are committed to creating space for every part of every one of us. We believe in the power of love and generosity to support, challenge, respect and inspire each other.

**Social Change** – We take a stand for social, economic and environmental justice. We believe that each of us represents a complex mix of experiences, social identities, spiritual traditions and cultural backgrounds. We are committed to practicing cultural humility, and to authentically exploring issues of power, privilege and rank within ourselves and our communities, institutions and societal systems.

**Integrity** – We strive for excellence in everything we do, from innovative leadership programs to inclusive organizational practices grounded in accountability. We are committed to earning and sustaining trust with all our stakeholders and



communities. We create and deliver rigorous learning experiences that impact human evolution.

**Collaboration** – We believe that working together unlocks greater potential than we can achieve on our own. Creating conscious relationships and teams encourages each of us to make a uniquely powerful contribution. We enthusiastically partner with other entities in order to expand our collective knowledge and ignite synergy.

**Innovation** – We embrace our existing wisdom, curiosity and entrepreneurial spirit to explore realms of possibility and to identify natural openings and real-time opportunities. We are committed to cultivating wildly creative and supportive spaces that invite us to play at and go beyond our edges. We celebrate our successes as well as our failures in service of our collective learning.

## Core Principles

The foundation of holistic coaching is built on our beliefs about human beings and the coaching process. These beliefs form the core of effective communication, impacting the relationships we build, the level of trust that develops and the client's willingness to share vulnerably. Our beliefs permeate our body language, energy and the signals we send while coaching. When we internally integrate these beliefs, or core principles, we can create even more powerful relationships based on all that is possible.

1. People are whole, and simultaneously moving towards a fuller experience of their wholeness.
2. People are inherently resourceful and wise.
3. Honoring the full diversity of experience expands awareness.
4. People have the freedom to choose how they respond.
5. Much more is possible than any of us can imagine.

The core principles help us create a container for powerful and transformational coaching relationships. We can share the core principles with clients because these powerful foundational beliefs about life can build an authentic connection.

**WHOLENESS:** People are whole, and simultaneously moving towards a fuller experience of their wholeness.

Consider the power of being in a relationship from a place of wholeness, honoring all that is present, while holding the space for all that is yet to be born. The pathology worldview focuses on what is wrong or needs improvement, creating comparisons and images of brokenness. Seeing people as whole shifts the paradigm



to one of reverence and respect, setting the foundation for a powerful, resourceful partnership.

**DIVERSITY:** Honoring the full diversity of experience deepens awareness.

When we support people to embrace the fullness of their life, including their cultural experience, we help them honor and integrate all parts of themselves. This leads to deeper awareness as they notice what is important across the spectrum of their inner and outer world. The more aspects of ourselves we acknowledge and accept, the more accepting we are of diversity in the external world.

**RESOURCEFULNESS:** People are inherently resourceful and wise.

Trusting that our clients are wise and resourceful allows us to remain curious and hold space for what is emerging. We support them in tapping into a deep well of resourcefulness that connects them with new insights, creativity and action.

**FREEDOM:** People have the freedom to choose how they respond.

When we remember that clients have the freedom to choose their response to circumstances in their lives, we free ourselves from judgment and from taking responsibility for them. We acknowledge their life experiences, honor their choices and create a space where powerful, respectful connection and cultural humility exist between us.

**POSSIBILITY:** Much more is possible than any of us can imagine.

The beauty and mystery of the transformative process is that neither the coach nor the client can imagine all that is possible. The journey has no fixed destination, but holds great promise and rich rewards. As coaches, when we remain open and curious, we have greater access to the right side of our brain, our intuition and extraordinary solutions. Far more is possible than any of us realize.

### Coaching for Transformation Process

We create sacred coaching relationships that take people to the core of their being. These relationships form the foundation for their discovery of who they are, what they want and how they wish to contribute to the world.

Coaching for Transformation is a dynamic process, where we bring our full curiosity, compassion and courage to the coaching relationship. Yet our primary focus is on the person being coached. Whatever clients bring, whether it is a question, a dream or a desire, we support them as they move into awareness, alignment and action.

## Coach

The coach cultivates uncompromising presence by bringing these three qualities to every coaching session: curiosity, compassion, and courage.

To engage in a mutually empowering relationship, coaches need a solid inner foundation. We enter our inner relationship to own, heal and transform our inner world. To create intimacy with people we coach, we first need to create space for self-intimacy. When we focus on our inner landscape, we can access an empowering inner freedom, which we carry into the coaching relationship. As we cultivate mindfulness, we connect deeply to the life force in ourselves and in our clients.

## Client

The word “client” refers to the person receiving coaching; it can be someone who hires us as a coach, or someone from our organization or community. We can coach our boss, our peers and our direct reports. The coaching relationship is infused with equality and possibility. We support the client to develop presence by focusing on awareness, alignment and action.

The client determines the desired outcomes for each coaching session. Possibilities are endless. As we hold their agenda, we also hold the intention for the client to deepen their awareness, move towards alignment and step into action. Creating space for reflection gives clients access to their inner knowing. As they move towards new insights and deeper learning, we support integration, which allows them to consciously receive, savor and build upon their wisdom. When actions arise from that place of self-connection, their goals manifest more easily.<sup>1</sup>

## The coaching relationship

Connection comes first. Nothing happens without connection. Fierce love and unconditional support build trust and a flourishing relationship. The coach and the client share power equally. This relationship provides space for experimentation, alchemy and human evolution. In every moment, transformation is possible for both the client and the coach. In the space of deep connection, intuition blossoms for both the client and the coach.

## What is the client's agenda?

Through asking what clients want, the coach plays the ball over to them and allows them to reflect on and speak about their wishes. Their answer is often only the tip of the iceberg.

For example, a client wants to know how to proceed with an important meeting. She wants more clarity about what she wants to say, how she wants to prepare and what she wants to happen in the meeting. This is her “presenting agenda” and the goal for the coaching session.

If we look deeper, it becomes clear that she wants to be more authentic and relaxed, rather than put on a show during the meeting. This is her “deeper agenda.”

Both the *presenting agenda* and the *deeper agenda* are valid. As coaches, we pay attention to both what the client wants to do and who she wants to be. This allows for flexibility if the meeting moves in an unexpected direction. She will have thought about her viewpoint, what she wants to do about the situation and how she wants to be perceived.

Clients often come with something to work on and discover another, more important thing underneath. In this case, she wants to be herself and let go of the expectation that she must be an expert in all matters. Addressing this, she sees that her expectations of herself stand in her way and when she becomes more comfortable with being in her own skin, the meeting no longer looks ominous. This new light changes how she feels about the meeting and what she needs to do to prepare for it. By changing her viewpoint, she is more in touch with herself and can respond fluidly to whatever happens during the meeting.

By clarifying the *deeper agenda*, coaching includes both the doing and the being aspects of the preparation. The client is more self-aware and can draw from her intuition, imagination and excitement.

Another dimension of the client's agenda is listening for who the client is becoming and what else is possible. Transformational listening leads to the *transformational agenda* – the core need or the soul need of the client.

The *transformational agenda* may appear as something that not only connects with the matter, but is imperative for growth, a calling or a life lesson that cuts across many issues in the moment. Sometimes we point it out or we may choose to track it silently. We continuously look for the transformational agenda, holding the space for opportunities to emerge.

The moment the client from the example realized that she had let her professional success become a condition for accepting and loving herself, she sank into deep sadness. After having let her tears out, she became calmer and reached

a more solid state – a state from which she was self-connected, felt free to take risks and express herself without the fear of judgment. Her *transformational agenda* was revealed to be self-trust: no matter what happens in her professional life, she wants to meet herself with love and understanding. Through reconnecting with the presenting and the deeper agenda, she trusted that she would know how to face challenges from a grounded place.

Any coaching session encompasses all three agendas. Tuning into the client's transformational agenda is like tapping into a bountiful underground spring that feeds life, even if we are not always aware of its existence<sup>4</sup>.

### Putting it all together and taking it further

I am so proud of offering this programme in Europe. This is another of my dreams coming true. I love the programme, love teaching it and I am in alignment with the values and visions of the organization behind, Leadership That Works.

The CFT faculty members are serious about the goal of creating a just and sustainable world. We do this by empowering individuals and groups to create interdependent and visionary communities. Parallel to this, we walk our talk and develop ourselves as human beings, coaches and as a community.

The CFT family is growing. Leadership That Works invites all graduates to stay connected and join the free graduates' teleclasses, masterclasses, advanced mentoring programmes, conferences and more. We support each other formally and informally; friendships and professional connections tie us together in many ways.

As organization, Leadership That Works is continuously growing towards a stronger expression of our values. Transition into collaborative ownership is expected in the near future, and decentralized offices will follow, empowering regional offices to root and operate interdependently.

### Why Poland?

For the last two years, I have run a number of shorter coaching programmes in Gdansk, Krakow and Warsaw. I have been very fortunate to meet local people from the NVC community who found CFT interesting, and even though I have derived much satisfaction from shorter programmes, I have humbly given in to the demand for a certification course – and Leadership That Works have been willing to support it.

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<sup>4</sup> These pages have been adapted from the textbook *Coaching for Transformation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2015 by Martha Lasley, Sharon Brown, Richard Michaels and Virginia Kellogg, faculty and co-creators of the CFT curriculum.