The Secret History of Coaching

What you know and what you don’t know about how coaching got here and where coaching is going in the future

History was, today is, and tomorrow will be. The secret (or unknown) history of coaching is about the living history of coaching.

Many coaches don’t understand the rich and eclectic history of coaching, seeing it, wrongly, as having sprung up in the 1980s or 90s. In fact its roots go much farther back, some say to before Socrates. From the success merchants of the 1920s, to humanistic and transpersonal psychology of the 1960s, through the Human Potential Movement of the 1970s and into halls of business in the 1980s – coaching defies all attempts at definition and containment.

Coaching emerged during the postmodern period of the late twentieth century, born of a rapidly changing socioeconomic environment and nourished by the root disciplines of psychology, business, sports, and adult education. Now, approximately twenty years later, as we look forward to the professional challenges the field is facing today, we can benefit from the perspective we have gained on its short but explosive history. That history, characterized by the interaction between and the cross-disciplinary development of its root disciplines, is further complicated by the generational differences and varying professional backgrounds of its originators, as well as the changing socioeconomic conditions of the period.

In an attempt to understand coaching’s complex, dynamic history, and the ways in which that history informs the professional challenges the field faces today, my research focused on the influences of each of the relevant root disciplines, the impact the backgrounds of its originators had on the emerging discipline and its practices, and the socioeconomic factors that led to the emergence of coaching as a distinct discipline in the late 20th century. In so doing, my research also attempts to distinguish the differences between the practical tools and the theoretical models drawn from coaching’s root disciplines, the ways in which those tools and models are used by today's coaches, and the ways in which they might be used by the coaches of tomorrow, given the constant socioeconomic evolution of the world around us.

I began my research into the history of coaching as part of a Ph.D. dissertation in June 2006. I was awarded my Ph.D. in June 2008, and have been authoring a Sourcebook of Coaching History for the last 2.5 years. The difficulty in this task is that history is living and constantly changing – and the field is still expanding exponentially.

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<th>Common Threads Worldwide</th>
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The common threads throughout the world are evidenced by books, groups, and activities. In the 1930s, Dale Carnegie published How to Win Friends and Influence People and Napoleon Hill published Think and Grow Rich. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) founded by Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob
Smith while Elton Mayo conducted the “Hawthorne Studies”. Fritz Perls and several others coined the term “Gestalt Therapy” in the 1940s. The National Training Labs (NTL) was founded in the United States in 1947 by the group who founded Tavistock in the United Kingdom.

Following World War II, the 1950s witnessed the beginnings of Humanistic Psychology with Carl Rogers’ client-centered therapy and Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Transcendental meditation became popular and several key books were written, including Earl Nightingale The Strangest Secret, Norman Vincent Peale Power of Positive Thinking, Joseph Campbell A Hero With a Thousand Faces and L. Ron Hubbard Scientology. On the business front Chris Argyris created Action Research and psychology consulting organizations such as RHR International counseled executives.

The 1960s brought more self-help and personal growth activities. Books published included Maxwell Maltz Cybernetics, Jose Silva Silva Mind Control, Thomas Harris I’m OK, You’re OK, and John Gardner Self Renewal. In 1962 Esalen was founded in California to explore ‘human potential’ while Findhorn was founded in the United Kingdom to explore ‘spirituality’. During this period of the counterculture and the Beatles, the New Age movement melded spiritual traditions and alternative medicine, Linda Goodman published her astrology books, Weight Watchers was founded, and sensitivity training using T-groups was introduced at NTL and Tavistock. The first large group awareness training, called Mind Dynamics, was founded by Alexander Everett. On the business front Douglas McGregor created “Theory X, Theory Y”, Edgar Schein published Process Consultation, Peter Drucker The Effective Executive, Richard Beckhard Organizational Development, Warren Bennis Revisionist Theory of Leadership, Blake & Mouton The Managerial Grid, and Hersey & Blanchard Situational Leadership.

Moving to the 1970s, more influential books were published, including Richard Bolles What Color is Your Parachute?, Barbara Sher Wishcraft, Julia Cameron The Artist’s Way, Gail Sheehy Passages, Tony Buzan The Mind Map, Richard Leider Inventurers and Helen Schucman A Course in Miracles. John Whitmore hosted the May Lectures in 1974 where he brought together the aristocracy of Findhorn with the hippies of Esalen, including Werner Erhard. In business, the Center for Creative Leadership was founded, the Gestalt approach was applied to organizational consulting, and 360° feedback and assessment took hold for leadership development.

On the coaching front, what was happening from the 1930s through the turn of the century included:
1930s-50s
- Counselors, therapists, and organizational psychologists were “counseling” executives
- Developmental counseling practices by psychologist based consulting firms are similar to coaching
- Sales coaching focused on how to be a better salesperson.
- Sporadic articles on coaching & performance improvement & management development

1960s-70s
- Emergence of coaching in the business world when leaders role in change was viewed from the intersection of OD and psychology
- Executive and business coaching emerged from leadership programs and assessment centers
- 17 articles on coaching published in the 1970s along with 4 books on coaching by managers
- Counselors, therapists, and organizational psychologists continued “counseling” executives
- Peer Resources launched to work with peer mentoring in education
- Richard Fournies *Performance Coaching for Managers* - David Megginson *A Managers Guide to Coaching*

1980s
- Inner Game approach to sports adapted to business and called coaching
- First companies providing individual and business coaching services founded in United Kingdom and United States
- Psychological consulting firms begin providing services called coaching
- Sports coaches and business people identified common coaching principles across disciplines
- First training schools founded to deliver coach training to individuals and business in United States and Europe
- Coaching introduced into business in German-speaking countries
- Coaching literature expanded with doctoral research and 29 articles
- Five books were published addressing coaching by supervisors to improve performance

1990s
- Coach-specific training schools/programs grew from 2 to 8 in 1995, to 164 in 2004
- Professional coach assns grew from 0 to 12 in 2004; Annual coach conferences grew from 0 to 16 in 2003
- United States consulting psychologists published three journal issues on executive coaching
- Virtual teleclass coach training supported global spread of coaching; First internal coaching assignments in companies created; 79 coaching books published during 1990s with 62% in 1998-9

2000s
- Six peer-reviewed coaching publications began 2001 or later in support of evidence-based coaching
- Coaching psychology (identified as distinct in 2000) special interest groups created in United Kingdom and Australia psychology organizations
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- 153 coaching books published from 2000 through 2004; 132 coaching articles published in business & psychological journals; Coaching Culture become common term in business
- Coach industry publications grew from 0 in 2000 to 4 in 2004

From my research I gleaned five historical observations.

First, coaching sprang simultaneously from several independent sources and birthplaces, and then spread through a complex and somewhat unpredictable series of relationships. This initial stage occurred during the 1960s, an era of unprecedented personal and professional exploration and growth. The Human Potential Movement, a product of those times, gave us Esalen, the National Training Laboratories (NTL), Tavistock, and Findhorn, among many others. The rapid diffusion of coaching was fueled by a series of serendipitous, interdisciplinary gatherings in the above venues. The key figures in those meetings, long before technological advances made such interaction much easier, connected through face-to-face conferences, workshops, and forums. Once the information age dawned, around 1995, the spread of coaching has been put into hyper-drive by conferences, workshops, and forums, in both face-to-face and virtual environments.

What is key in the mind map above is the interconnections between influencer people in various disciplines (depicted by colors):
- Psychology (green)
- Business (yellow)
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- Sports (orange)
- Motivation (blue)
- Philosophy (lavender)
- Large Group Awareness Training (pink)

These connections are part of the secret history....especially as they relate to Werner Erhard who popularized personal growth and development through his large group awareness training, originally called est, and its numerous offspring.

In the 1970s Werner Erhard, founder of est, popularized human growth and development. Many of the key pioneers in coaching participated in Erhard’s programs and/or were his friends. For example, Tim Gallwey (*The Inner Game of Tennis*) coached Werner Erhard in tennis, Ken Blanchard (*The One Minute Manager*) was a personal friend, and Warren Bennis took est in 1979 in London and advised Werner in the 1980s. Sir John Whitmore (*Coaching for Performance*, 1992) brought Werner to the United Kingdom in May 1974, James Flaherty (1985 training Coaching: Evoking Excellence in Others) apprenticed to Fernando Flores as did Julio Olalla (1990 training Mastering the Art of Professional Coaching). When Thomas Leonard (founder of Coach U, ICF, CoachVille, IAC) worked as an accountant for Werner Erhard & Associates he hired Laura Whitworth (The Coaches Training Institute and Professional Personal Coaches Association) to work there also.
Psychologists worked as independents - and thus were harder to track down until after 2000 when coaching psychology appeared. Since the 1980s David Peterson and Richard Kilburg have been active in American Psychological Association Consulting Psychology. Bob Witherspoon and Randy White of Center for Creative Leadership were involved in the early days of 360 degree feedback and behavioral change. In the early 1990s Frederic Hudson and Pamela McLean of the Hudson Institute shifted to coaching from mentoring based on adult development, psychology, adult learning systems and developmental psychology David Megginson and David Clutterbuck started the European Mentoring Council in 1992 and expanded it in 2001 to include coaching. Many other psychologists shifted to coaching in the late 1990s and early 2000s as coaching psychology took hold.

Second, coaching has a broad intellectual framework that contains the synergetic, cross-fertilized practices and theories of many disciplines. Individuals drawn to coaching came from a broad spectrum of disciplines and a rich heritage of life experience. The collaborative nature of
the emerging field supported the cross-fertilization of such ideas and practices, customized to each coach, and each person being coached, according to their environments and their specific needs and talents. This cross-fertilization was to some extent limited to coaching’s earliest days, as the backgrounds of those who come to coaching today seem less varied, and the forums where such people once met are fewer in number. For example, in the United Kingdom, the tribe in the late 1970s and 1980s included Jinny Ditzler, John Whitmore, Tony Buzan, and others... In the United States it was the Esalen group of Rogers, Gallwey, Perls, Bateson, and even Erhard a bit.

As demonstrated in the chart above, coaching rooted in and influenced by multiple fields, for example:

- Organization Development – systems perspective, Action Research, Appreciative Inquiry, organization context, and process consultation
- Clinical Psychology – models and theories to change thinking and behavior applied to non-clinical populations; client-centered therapy, solution focused therapy, Gestalt therapy
- Business – leadership development models, career counseling and entrepreneur life planning
- Performing Arts – techniques including listening, presence, setting ego aside, being present
- Philosophy – mind/body connection, spirituality, elders around campfire, language, meaning and purpose, 12-step programs
Third, modern patterns and practices of coaching are neither uniform nor rigidly applied, but are dynamic and contextual. Coaching is customized to the coach, the person being coached, the context, and the specific conditions that led its initiation. Today’s coaches focus on what the client wants to do or become, and how he or she can best accomplish those desires. The fluid nature of the modern coaching environment requires every coach to rely on intuition, creativity, and flexibility, as well as a solid base of foundational knowledge.

Fourth, coaching came into existence to fill an unmet need in a world of rapid change and complexity. That need, unsatisfied by traditional, pathology-centered therapy—or illness model—was met by the shift to a wellness model founded on the principles of humanistic psychology, and the postmodern perspective of integral philosophy. While the advent of humanistic psychology was evidence of that shift, the “illness model” was still practiced by most clinical psychologists. Coaching emerged, by adding complementary practices from other fields, and without the constraint of traditional clinical practices, to become more interactive, client-driven, and fluid.
Curing the 1800s, natural curiosity about nature led to specialization and the natural sciences separated from philosophy. In the mid-1800s curiosity about people led to specialization in the social sciences and business arenas, with a burst of specialization around 1900 in the psychology discipline. From the mid-1990s through the present day began the shift to well-being, life balance and fulfillment through success motivators, the human potential movement, and fascination with personal growth.

Looking at this through socioeconomic perspectives we have the modern and postmodern eras: From 1890s-1950s was Modern period:
- Obsessed with evidence, logic, rationality, analytic thinking and what it could produce
- Industrial revolution looked a people as economic units, separated work and family, and changed nature of occupations
- Shift from isolated local communities to more integrated large scale society
- Control, order, certainty

From 1950s the postmodern shift began:
- From industrial to service society which allows for reintegration of family and work by changing nature of work
- Resistance to sacrifice in name of progress – environmental, anti-war, civil rights, equal opportunity, feminism, multi-cultural
- Social, economic and political changes occur more frequently
- Mass media and rapid technological change along with migration and globalization

Fifth, and finally, coaching came into being as a result of a newly open, integral social network characterized by diversity and inclusion. This first phase of coaching was one of exploration and inclusion, and was about building relationships through mutual adaptation. Approaches were diverse, sharing and collaboration were celebrated, curiosity was abundant, and the social
network was open and loose. For the United States of the 1960s the goal was to put a man on the moon. For the earliest coaches the goal was to contribute to the happiness and success of others.

In summary, the factors that influenced the emergence of coaching are both generational and timeless. The five historical observations presented establish a framework for understanding both the emergence and the state of coaching today.

Malcolm Gladwell describes the tipping point as “that one dramatic moment in an epidemic when everything can change all at once.” [1] For example, most of the major ideas of Gestalt theory were already developed in the 1930s and 1940s, and became common in the 1960s. Somewhere between the 1930s and the 1960s Gestalt theory reached its tipping point, just as coaching reached its tipping point around the year 2000. Gladwell talks first about contagiousness as an unexpected property of all kinds of phenomena. Some ideas, like coaching, can be virally contagious. Brodie, in much the same way, wrote about memes as viruses “of the mind . . . [that gain] a life independent of its creator and evolves quickly to infect as many people as possible.”[2] Looked at in this way, as a virus or a meme, coaching is a function of the people who transmit it (coaches), the infectious agent itself (knowledge, skills, and abilities of coaching), and the environment in which the infectious agent is operating (society and organizations). Gladwell described epidemics as small changes that somehow have big effects, with both positive and negative effects. In so doing he attempted to show people how to start positive epidemics of their own. Coaching can be viewed as one such positive epidemic, because its purposes are to develop and value people, increase productivity, and strengthen connection.

Gladwell linked the concept of tipping point with the Roger Everett’s diffusion of innovation model, which I apply directly to the emergence, present state, and future of coaching. The diffusion of innovation model illustrates adaptation to a new phenomenon through the use of a bell curve (see above) using the following categories: Innovators or adventurous ones; Early Adopters or opinion leaders in the community; Early Majority and Late Majority, or the
deliberately skeptical masses[CW1]; and Laggards, who were the most traditional of all. According to Gladwell this is a “perfect epidemic curve – starting slowly, tipping just as the Early Adopters start . . . then rising sharply as the Majority catches on, and falling away at the end when the Laggards come straggling in.”[3] (p. 197).

“One of the main goals for all theorizing, regardless of specifics of problem and perspective, is the creation of a mental model of the phenomenon to be understood and/or explained.”[4] Below I will introduce the concepts of the “tipping point” and the “diffusion of innovation,” popularized by Gladwell in 2002, and expanded upon by Orr in 2003, followed by an explanation of how they fit my model of the roots and emergence of coaching.

[3] ibid., p.197  

It is important to know that this model does not exist in isolation from other adaptations to new phenomena. I use three categories to describe the influencers on and pioneers of coaching, some of whom were coaches and some of whom were not.

• The Originators are those individuals who created the theories and models on which the field of coaching rests.
• The Transmitters are those individuals who took the originators’ theories and models and adapted them to the emerging field of coaching.
• The second and later generations generally came to coaching through contact with an individual from the originator or transmitter generations.

In my analysis, the Innovators are the transmitters and the Early Adopters are the second-generation coaches who learned directly from the transmitters. The Early Majority are the companies and/or individuals provided the new services, or adapted their services to include coaching by making incremental improvements. During the time of the Early and Late Majorities, the coaching service becomes commodified and institutionalized. When the Laggards arrive, coaching must have either reinvented itself or have been eclipsed by a new innovation.
Coaching emerged within the framework of the postmodern period, and the data I have collected suggest that external socioeconomic factors will continue to support coaching’s evolution. It is the internal factors that are the keys to the growth or decline of coaching. The diffusion of innovation model is used for looking at the internal factors, with a series of innovation curves for coaching to track the internal changes in coaching over time. These innovation curves begin, peak, and drop off over thirty-year time span. This time span is getting ever shorter. The Emergence Curve begins in 1985, the Prominence Curve in 1995. Around the year 2000 there was a tipping point in the Emergence Curve, where coaching became well-known and “commodified.” At the same time a new innovative spurt took place, characterized by an evidence-based and globalized focus and academic research which started the Prominence Curve. We are now in the year 2010 - which is the tipping point of the Prominence Curve, where coaching is facing another tipping point - and I suggest possibly another curve.

Now I will place two questions before you.

**Postmodern Challenges for Coaching**

- How to maintain its unique lens on the client as it integrates with other practices and disciplines?
- As an integral part of practice in other disciplines, how to respond to the demands for marketplace distinctiveness?

.... How are these challenges manifested?

With the integral perspective of the postmodern era, the first challenge is for coaching to maintain its focus on the client as it integrates with these other practices and disciplines. The second challenge requires coaching, as an integral part of these other disciplines in practice, to respond to the demands for distinctiveness in the marketplace.
I have presented historical observations, and have identified the professional challenges faced by coaching. The tipping point and the diffusion of innovation models underscore the complexity of both the coaching discipline and the environment in which it operates.

In 1997 at the second Professional and Personal Coaches Association (PPCA) annual conference, the theme was “weaving into the tapestry of life”. They predicted that in 20 years, which would be 2017, that was where coaching would be. They did not say whether coaches as we know them would disappear. They said coaching would be woven in much as philosophy and psychology are woven into our lives today.

Coaching is an open, fluid social movement that spreads virally through human relationships and interactions and will become woven into the fabric of life as the primary means by which people interact with one another. In other words, coaching becomes the dominant worldview and global culture.
I am predicting another curve, called the Worldview Curve, where coaching will begin to move into the social network and the global worldview, extending itself beyond the confines of a discipline.

During this period coaching will have the opportunity to cultivate diversity within the discipline, through larger looser networks, or to narrow the field through the cultivation of smaller and tighter networks. Inclusion can be represented by a continuum, presented as part of the coaching definition used for this study, while narrowing the field can be represented by the proliferation of specialized coaching definitions applicable to all coaching styles. This choice will impact the coaching curves that result.

Memes and tipping points support the innovation at the top of each curve, at which point coaching needs to innovate or risk becoming institutionalized, at which point another group may come along with a new curve, just as coaching followed psychology in response to socioeconomic factors. The next coaching curve needs to be starting up well before the prior curve reaches the tipping point.

The Worldview Curve begins in 2005 and represents the social network framework, where coaching moves from being one of the ways people interact with one another to being the dominant worldview. As stated above, I predict that coaching will be woven into the fabric of our modern lives. This vision is consistent with the PPCA vision which predicted that by 2017 years coaching would cease to exist as we know it in 1997 and would be accepted as one of the primary ways we interact with one another. My analysis suggests that coaching is taking the first small steps to becoming the dominant worldview, arriving as its tipping point on the Worldview Curve in 2025. This analysis presumes that coaching will become a global phenomenon with international Web-based networks, that the “coaching approach” will become an integral part of human development in a variety of organizational and non-organizational contexts, and that the coaching vocabulary will begin to appear in popular media, and business and professional journals. My analysis also suggest that coaching as we know it today may continue to exist alongside other, more evolved forms of coaching.

While several socioeconomic factors may influence whether coaching becomes the worldview and global culture, there are two internal factors that will enhance or degrade this possibility. The first internal factor depends on whether coaching maintains an open network. This means a network with many loose connections (weak ties) to individuals and disciplines outside the main network. The more open the network, the more it is likely to introduce new ideas and opportunities to its members. Also, the more open and loose coaching’s network remains, the more likely it is to be agile and nimble in responding to the socioeconomic factors of our changing environment. The second internal factor is the willingness and commitment of coaches to promote diversity and inclusion, which means to be coach-like in all their dealings—may affect the public perception of coaching either positively or negatively. For example, if it happens that only credentialed coaches are coach-like in all their dealings, then the demand for credentialed coaches may increase dramatically. If it happens that only coaches from specific training programs or service companies are coach-like in all their dealings, then
this may increase the demand for graduates of the specific training programs or coaches from specific service companies, respectively. By modeling and living coaching moment by moment, a positive epidemic may be sustained beyond the tipping point. Once the tipping point is reached, people not connected with individuals who model coaching in all interactions will spontaneously begin exhibiting coach-like behavior.

In summary, modern patterns and practices of coaching are dynamic and contextual, awareness- and choice-focused, and delivered across a continuum of attributes customized to the person being coached, the coach, the context, and the specific situation.

Coaching is a social phenomenon and multidisciplinary field that, to be sustainable, must continue rapid innovation while encouraging diversity and inclusion, and while maintaining an integral balance within a loose open social network.
Six principles that will contribute to coaching’s evolution as the dominant worldview and global culture are:

1. **Understand and value the influences of coaching’s root disciplines and originators.** Though coaching focuses on the present and future, it is important to know where we came from and to value the contributions of those that came before. Coaching did not emerge, and does not exist, in a vacuum. Clients are not coached in isolation from their context or environment. (This I know from personal experience, as I was one of many who began by practicing coaching in isolation from its context.) Understanding and valuing the influences on and contributions to coaching is central to the professional and personal development of every coach.

2. **Embrace a definition of coaching that values inclusiveness and diversity.** The coaching definition I propose is broad and encompassing: coaching is a dynamic and contextual mutual-learning process that fosters self-awareness, attention to behaviors, personal growth, and conscious choice for the highest good. There is room within this definition for many of the existing definitions of coaching as well as future definitions that such cross-fertilization will produce.

3. **Promote diversity and inclusion through an integral open social network framework.** It is imperative that coaching transcend the competitive framework. The premise of postmodernism is that dichotomies are arbitrary, and everything is fluid and connected. Coaching needs a framework to include the both objective theories (the meaning of things are fixed, and are what they are) and constructive theories (the meaning of things are constantly changing, and arrived upon through the interaction between individuals and external phenomena). The social network I propose is integral and open—integral in the sense that it encompasses both reductionist (scientific) and holistic (humanistic) perspectives simultaneously, and open in that it has a multitude of connections to individuals within and outside its network to ensure that coaching remains agile, nimble, and proactive over time.

4. **Support every human being in the use of the knowledge, skills, and abilities of coaching.** For coaching to thrive and become the dominant worldview, the knowledge, skills, and abilities used in coaching must become the preferred method of interaction for all peoples. This means that coaches must support the use of the knowledge, skills, and abilities of coaching by all individuals, not only those identified, or certified, as coaching practitioners.

5. **Live coaching moment by moment in each interaction.** This requires willingness and commitment by each coach, and cannot be legislated by a code of ethics or a standard of conduct. It is critical to be coach-like in interactions with others both within and without the coaching field.

6. **Champion coaching as a social phenomenon for the 21st century and beyond.** This requires a shift in perspective, from viewing coaching as a set of practices to seeing it as a social phenomenon. Holding a coaching worldview and contributing to the spread of this positive epidemic means creating new possibilities for both coaching and the world in which it is practiced. This approach is not dependent on coaching achieving the status of a profession, nor whether it is clearly distinguished from related disciplines. We now have the rare opportunity to contribute to the wellness of the planet, including its flora, its fauna, and our own race.
It's coaching not so secret history and exciting future that are fueling global change in how we communicate with each other and how we think about ourselves.

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