

Coaching cultures - what has coaching brought to me?

I am artistic director of my own company and I have been meeting with a coach for 18 months now. In that time I have also undergone training to become a coach and now coach others. I am committed to using coaching to support young emerging artists and to support people from diverse backgrounds into leadership positions in the arts. I have begun to develop the use of coaching in the rehearsal room and production meeting to enhance and develop the artistic process.

But what is coaching and how does it work ?

Well it is a confidential relationship (when it is one to one) that is supportive and challenging. This perfectly describes the mixed feelings I have on leaving a coaching session. I often feel exhilarated as my self esteem and confidence have been boosted. This is because I have often realised that I have more agency in a particular situation than I thought. My responses of " I can't " are reflected back and I can see them for what they are - fear about doing something outside of my comfort zone. They might be called " self limiting beliefs " in coaching. I often feel liberated to think a bit bigger, inspired to go a bit further , to do a ' stretch'. But it is challenging. I am more self aware and clearer about why I don't make some choices.

I have understood better some patterns I have in work. When I am under stress I often obsess about an issue/ person that is not the main story . Perhaps as a way of deflecting attention away from the big elephant in the room. So last year when I was managing a large olympics project I was actually obsessing about having selected the wrong driving instructor. Focusing on this issue rather than the huge Olympics project I was managing was a way of feeling I had some control.

So what have I done since being in coaching ? I have cleared up a list I have had for a long time of 'things to do' . I have lost weight, I passed my driving test , I have got back into running and run several races , I paid off any debts I had.

On the work front I raised £ 200,000 very quickly for a large project. I have decided to earn more for the work I do. I have given up work that pays the bills but is not central to what I want . I am taking more risks in order to do the creative work that I really want to be doing.

In short I am more comfortable with change and transition.

I have goals. I did of course have these in the past but probably not very clearly. I somehow felt it was selfish or over grand to have goals. But to paraphrase many a self help book unless you have clear goals and a vision of what it is you want then you simply aren't going to get there. I have always responded well to opportunity but I have rarely sat down and planned my goals. It turns out there are things I really want to do. Take my little girl to live in Australia for a short while to spend time with her cousins. Run the San francisco marathon. Take my mum to Rio for the next Olympics.

Working in the arts these things need to both aimed for and really saved for.

I am more self aware. This is painful. I am much clearer about what I am not good at. I see myself taking too much responsibility, over promising to lighten the perceived blow and failing to manage expectations. I can see myself from a distance more clearly. I find it very hard to ask for help. Indeed to ask for anything - particularly money for myself. And I want to please people. Turning people down is very hard.

But the very best thing about coaching is the way it has improved my relationships. Coaching is about really listening to someone and reflecting back what you hear. It is about being really present for someone else and bearing witness. There are so few places left in our society where there is the time or space for us to be really listened to. Being listened to makes your heart sing. When I do active listening in my home and work life it is transformative. I am not waiting to make my point I am trying to understand the other perspective without judging it or offering answers. Coaching is not advice. We all jump to offer advice. But if you really listen people aren't asking for advice . They are asking for the time, space and support to find their own way.

I wrote about coaching last year in my Guardian blog - which is here :
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2012/mar/07/clore-leadership-blogs-women-arts?INTCMP=SRCH>