

Can You See Milton Erickson as a Coach?

by L. Michael Hall Ph.D.

- Can you imagine Milton Erickson as a life coach, executive coach, or personal coach?
- Would Erickson have liked coaching as a field?
- How Ericksonian is coaching or could coaching become?
- Is there anything that's hypnotic and magical in coaching?
- Would Milton have liked what's happening in the field of coaching today?
- How could Erickson's thinking, spirit, and ways of working with people enrich the field of coaching?

As a psychologist who has been modeling both Milton H. Erickson and the field of coaching, the longer I explore the field and models of coaching, the more similarities I see in it with the work of Milton H. Erickson. In so many ways, coaching is by its very nature very Ericksonian in nature.

And no wonder - both began with many of the same assumptions and so are founded on similar premises about people, growth, development, and assistance. What are these presuppositions that each share? The following summarize the key ones.

- People have the resources within for solving their problems and finding their way.
- People only need assistance in facilitating the accessing and unleashing of these inner powers of learning and empowerment.
- Every person's reality makes sense from within the client's model of the world.
- Any helper has to begin by making contact, creating rapport, and entering into the world of the client. It is pace, pace, pace, and then lead.
- The helper works as an awakener of the possibilities, potentials, and powers within.

- Facilitating another's awakening and empowerment comes from a relentless probing into the frames of mind that governs a client's reality.
- Sometimes the facilitating involves provoking the client to take action.
- Sometimes it involves tasking a client in a way so that the client can discover for him or herself.

There are more but these are the beginning ones. No wonder the Ericksonian approach has led to solution-focus therapies and fit so neatly with the assumptions of Maslow called the third-force in psychology, the Human Potential Movement. Today coaching is all about unleashing the potential in clients so that they can maximize their possibilities. What does a coach do in working with clients? He or she works to unleash those potentials to the client's outcome. In this, the coach co-creates with the client the kind of inner mapping, framing, and experiencing that brings this about. And doesn't that describe so much of what Erickson did and was about?

From Erickson, Bandler and Grinder modeled and invented their NLP take which highlighted Erickson's verbal and non-verbal expressions, his patterns of using hypnotic language for accessing resources and restructuring a client's mapping of the world. They contained Erickson's genius in the field of therapy. Fast forward thirty-years and we now find that NLP has shifted to NLP Coaching with various leaders like Ian McDermott (*The NLP Coach*) having the trainings certified through the ICF (International Coach Federation) and Robert (*From Coach to Awakener*) Dilts being a regular keynote speaker at the ICF conferences.

Why? Because the heart of Neuro-Linguistic Programming which comes from Erickson along with two other leaders in the Human Potential Movement, Perls (Gestalt Therapy) and Satir (Family Systems) highlights that people already have the inner resources, at least in potentiality.

This reframes therapy or helping as a respectful facilitative process that works with a client in co-creating a new way of living and relating.

Coaching today grew out of the work of a sports psychologist, Timothy Gallwey as he found his way from a teaching and "doing things to people" approach to a more facilitative way of working. His *inner game* books and style focused on the special healing awareness of non-judgmental awareness and the ability to be present to the actual senses of the experience whether it be tennis, golf, music, or work. Later Thomas Leonard used his genius of organization and collaboration to found Coach U., the ICF, and Coachville to turn Coaching into a movement and then a field.

In the field of Neuro-Semantics, my associate Michelle Duval, a master coach and executive director of one of the fastest growing coaching organizations in Australia (*Equilibrio*) has co-created with me Meta-Coaching that utilizes many of the processes of Erickson. While we focus on performance coaching, we go beyond mere improvement and enhancement of performance to developmental coaching and transformational coaching. We do that by focusing on the importance of entering the client's model of the world, his or her matrix of belief and value frames and move up the levels of those belief frames within belief frames to understand the client and invite the client's own self-understanding of how that matrix works and the reality that it creates.

In doing so, we focus on facilitating and co-creating with the client the outcomes and dreams that most awakens the client. Because it invites a person to move up the levels of the mind, we call this meta-coaching. In coaching we also induce states, altered states and hypnotic states. It's inevitable. The coaching conversation invites a client to "go inside" and imagine (hallucinate) desired futures of unleashed possibilities. Yet for that coaching

differs from hypnosis. It is much more indirect in its inductions and does so more as a by-product of communicating. Hypnosis proper is much more direct and usually involves inviting clients into a more passive role. Coaching utilizes hypnosis more conversationally and invites clients into a more active and direct role.

Summary

So can we imagine Milton Erickson as a coach? And would he like what's happening in the field of Coaching? To the extent that coaching is facilitating and unleashing the potentials of clients, I think that the answer is yes to both of these.

About the Author

L. Michael Hall, a cognitive-behavioral psychologist, studied NLP and Ericksonian hypnosis, then later created the Meta-States and Matrix models in the field of Neuro-Semantics. He also co-founded the Meta-Coach training system with Michelle Duval of Equilibrio. See www.neurosemantics.com and www.equilibrio.com.au.

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