Chapter 11: Coaching Presence
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Coaching Presence

“There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

— Albert Einstein

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After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Define coaching presence.
- Distinguish between the doing and the being skills of coaching.
- Describe your own way of being in the world with reference to your top-five character strengths.
- Discuss the choices, frameworks, and practices that support masterful coaching.
DEFINITIONS

Coaching Presence: A way of being with clients (mindful, empathetic, warm, calm, zestful, fun, and courageous) that facilitates growth and change through connection.

Being Skills: A way of being in the world that includes qualities that can be chosen, valued, and strengthened in the course of a coach’s professional development.

UNDERSTANDING COACHING PRESENCE

We have made reference from the beginning of this manual to Tim Gallwey’s definition of coaching as “the art of creating an environment, through conversation and a way of being, that facilitates the process by which a person can move toward desired goals in a fulfilling manner.” Gallwey goes on to note that this “requires one essential ingredient that cannot be taught: caring not only for external results but for the person being coached” (2000, p. 177).

This definition highlights that coaching supports client growth and change not only by what coaches do (have conversations with clients), but also by who coaches are (a way of being with people). It is concerned not only with results but also with the person seeking to achieve those results. The two always go hand in hand. Failure to have a full coaching presence with people undermines the efficacy of coaching conversations. If we are not having success as a coach, then it may have less to with our technique than with the nature of our presence.
Our work on coaching presence was inspired by our exploration of relational cultural theory as we developed the relational flow model to capture the intuitive dance of coaching, discussed in Chapter 9 on generative moments. Relational cultural theory includes a description of the elements which generate growth-promoting relationships. Those elements form the main basis for this chapter on coaching presence (Jordan, et. al., 2004).

We include in this chapter an interesting discussion of character strengths and their role in generating our presence. This is not to say that strengths are the only factors that generate our presence. However, at an early stage of one’s evolution as a coach, feeling overwhelmed by how much there is to learn and practice is common. It’s vital for new coaches to discover or reconnect with personal strengths and use them to foster one’s presence as a coach.

The ICF core coaching competency on coaching presence (Chapter 2) describes this competency as the “ability to be fully conscious and create spontaneous relationship with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible and confident.” To this end, the ICF indicates that a professional coach:

a. Is present and flexible during the coaching process, dancing in the moment
b. Accesses own intuition and trusts one’s inner knowing – “goes with the gut”
c. Is open to not knowing and takes risks
d. Sees many ways to work with the client, and chooses in the moment what is most effective
e. Uses humor effectively to create lightness and energy
f. Confidently shifts perspectives and experiments with new possibilities for own action

g. Demonstrates confidence in working with strong emotions, and can self-manage and not be overpowered by or enmeshed in clients’ emotions

IMPORTANT: We have studied these skills in past chapters, primarily as things coaches do in conversation with clients. We can categorize them as relational “doing” skills that coaches can learn and master as practices. This chapter recognizes that there are additional qualities we call the relational “being” skills that coaches use to build growth-promoting relationships.

As being skills, these qualities are about our way of being in the world as human beings, not just about our work with clients as professional coaches. They also represent a full-trust relationship to life itself. “Don’t just do something, stand there!” is a Buddhist saying that expresses this understanding. It’s not up to us to solve problems and put out fires, but to trust that life has a way of working things out. We need only make ourselves available in its service.

This is the calm confident energy that coaches radiate outward to reach our clients. By modeling the being skills and the trust not only in the client’s ability to work things out, but also in life’s ability to work things out with the client and with all the client cares about, we shift from coaching competence to mastery. The energy of mastery infuses clients with the self-efficacy clients need to move forward successfully with their vision and goals.

That’s why it’s so important for coaches to choose empowering and delightful frameworks or philosophical principles in life and work. Thomas Leonard, a
founder of the modern life coaching movement, is famous for suggesting 15 frameworks (2002) that include the following notions:

1. It’s all solvable or it’s not.
2. Risk is always reducible.
3. There’s usually a better way.
4. Success is a byproduct.
5. Emotions are our teachers.
6. Inklings are higher intelligence.
7. The answer is somewhere.
8. Self-confidence can be arranged.
9. Problems are immediate opportunities.
10. People are doing their very best, even when they seem not to be.

Frameworks such as these empower clients in movement, growth, and connection. They undergird what Jordan (2004) describes as the “quality of presence” that leads to “growth-fostering” or “growth-enhancing” relationships.

Key Takeaway: Clients grow not only because of what coaches do for them, but also (and perhaps even more so) because of who coaches are in relationship to them. The disposition of the coach matters greatly when it comes to client outcomes.

COACHING PRESENCE AS A SYMPHONY OF STRENGTHS

All coaches bring their own, unique presence to coaching relationships and conversations. Since no two coaches are exactly the same, no two coaches
come from exactly the same frameworks or use the core coaching skills in exactly the same way. Who we are being influences and, in many respects, determines how we connect, move with our clients, and intuitively dance, generating new possibilities and forward momentum.

One way to think of presence is as a symphony of character strengths. These are the aptitudes or capacities that people most value and use most ably. In multiple studies, research has shown a direct relationship between the engagement of a person's character strengths and his/her effectiveness, as well as happiness, in both life and work. That's as true for coaches as it is for anyone else. The more we play to and come from our strengths, the more powerful and effective our coaching will be.

In order to fully engage our character strengths, it helps to know what they are. One of the more significant contributions of Positive Psychology over the past ten years has been the development of classification schemas for human strengths that are similar in both form and function to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV (the DSM IV). What the DSM IV is to mental illness, the emerging models for strengths, talents, and virtues are to mental wellness. One of those models is a popular work-place model developed by the Gallup organization (Rath, 2007).

Peterson and Seligman (2004) have developed a different model, identifying 24 character strengths, grouped into six large categories called virtues that consistently emerge across history and culture. They virtues are wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. A free, on-line survey, known as the Values-In-Action (VIA) Signature Strengths Questionnaire, is available through the University of Pennsylvania
It generates a report that identifies a person’s character strengths in rank order (from 1 to 24). The top five strengths are called “signature strengths,” which interact with each other and most influence a person’s presence in the world. Coaches learn from completing this questionnaire by discovering their signature character strengths.

The following is a summary organizing the 24 character strengths [Peterson and Seligman (2004)] with the addition of Coaching Style Points (that encompass who we are and how we show up for coaching):

I. Wisdom and Knowledge

Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge.

1. Creativity [Originality, Ingenuity]

Thinking of novel and productive ways to do things; includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it.

Coaching Style Point: “I love to think outside the box with my clients, brainstorming novel and productive ways of doing things.”

2. Curiosity [Interest, Novelty-Seeking, Openness to Experience]

Taking an interest in all of ongoing experience for its own sake; finding subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering.

Coaching Style Point: “I love to explore all facets of a situation, especially the best situations have to offer, in order to broaden and build on client strengths.”
3. **Open-Mindedness [Judgment, Critical Thinking]**

Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; *not* jumping to conclusions; being able to change one’s mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly.

Coaching Style Point: “Instead of jumping to conclusions, I love to think things through with my clients, examining them from all sides with no sense of judgment or urgency.”

4. **Love of Learning**

Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one’s own or formally; (obviously related to strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add *systematically* to what one knows.)

Coaching Style Point: “I love to learn new things and assist my clients in learning new things, building on what we know now to master unknown skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge in the future.”

5. **Perspective [Wisdom]**

Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people.

Coaching Style Point: “I love to make sense of experience, both for myself and with my clients, in meaningful and purposeful ways.”
II. Courage

Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal.

6 Bravery [Valor]
Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right, even if there is opposition; acting on convictions, even if unpopular; (includes physical bravery but is not limited to it.)

Coaching Style Point: “I am willing to speak the truth in love, holding my clients feet to the fire, even when it may be uncomfortable.”

7. Persistence [Perseverance, Industriousness]
Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles; “getting it out the door”; taking pleasure in completing tasks.

Coaching Style Point: “I hang in there with my clients until we get the job done. Nothing is impossible; some things just take a little longer.”

8. Integrity [Authenticity, Honesty]
Speaking the truth and, more broadly, presenting oneself in a genuine way; being without pretense; taking responsibility for one’s feelings and actions.

Coaching Style Point: “I seek to be genuine in all my communications with clients, especially when I sense there may be feelings, needs, and desires below the surface that want to be spoken.”

Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or halfheartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated.

Coaching Style Point: “I love life and I do everything, including coaching, with excitement and energy. Life is an adventure that I seek to live and share with full engagement. People find that to be infectious.”

III. Humanity

Interpersonal strengths that involve “feeling” and “befriending” others.

10. Love

Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people.

Coaching Style Point: “I love to feel close to people and to be in mutually supportive relationships. There’s no lack of warmth when it comes to my coaching style.”


Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them.

Coaching Style Point: “I love to help people and to do nice things for them. I often reach out to my clients in special and caring ways that touch the heart.”
12. Social Intelligence [Emotional Intelligence, Personal Intelligence]
Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick.

Coaching Style Point: “I can easily understand people’s feelings, needs, and desires (including those beneath the surface). People say I “connect with respect,” the hallmark of my coaching.

IV. Justice
Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life.

13. Citizenship [Social Responsibility, Loyalty, Teamwork]
Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one’s share.

Coaching Style Point: “My clients always come first and think of me as being on their team. I love to be their partners in facilitating growth.”

14. Fairness
Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance.

Coaching Style Point: “It’s not my agenda, but my client’s agenda, that counts. I leave my personal opinions out of the equation as I seek to model fairness in all my dealings.”
15. Leadership

Encouraging a group, of which one is a member, to get things done, and at the same time, maintain good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen.

Coaching Style Point: “I model being a leader in my work and personal lives and I demonstrate my leadership with my clients by encouraging and supporting them to be leaders in their lives.

V. Temperance

Strengths that protect against excess.

16. Forgiveness and Mercy

Forgiving those who have done wrong; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful.

Coaching Style Point: “I accept my clients right where they are and just the way they are. I am never judgmental and never suggest that my client is wrong. I rather explore and appreciate the perfection in every situation.”

17. Humility/Modesty

Letting one’s accomplishments speak for themselves; not seeking the spotlight.

Coaching Style Point: “Although I “walk the talk” when it comes to my own path of development, I never call attention to myself or put myself up on a pedestal. We’re all learners in my book.”
18. **Prudence**

Being careful about one’s choices; *not* taking undue risks; *not* saying or doing things that might later be regretted.

Coaching Style Point: “I love to design doable strategies with clients. I want my clients to be successful, and that requires setting goals that are Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, and Time-lined.”

19. **Self-Regulation [Self-Control]**

Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one’s appetites and emotions.

Coaching Style Point: “Silence is my friend. I love to take my time, to think through my thoughts and feelings, and then say just the right thing at just the right time to move my clients forward. I also am a role model for self-regulation in my personal wellness.”

**VI. Transcendence**

Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning.

20. **Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence [Awe, Wonder, Elevation]**

Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life, from nature to art, to mathematics & science, and to everyday experience.
Coaching Style Point: “My clients never cease to amaze me. I love to acknowledge their beauty, excellence, and skill. No matter where they are on the journey, there is always something to celebrate and relish.”

21. Gratitude
Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks.

Coaching Style Point: “I bring an “attitude of gratitude” to life that my clients usually pick up on and come to share. What a gift to be alive, to work together, and to learn new ways to experience well being!”

Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about.

Coaching Style Point: “I always believe in my client’s ability to become his/her best self. I know that self is in him/her, no matter what, and I love to bring it out in all its fullness.”

23. Humor [Playfulness]
Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes.

Coaching Style Point: “There’s no shortage of laughter when it comes to my coaching sessions! I love to make learning fun, enjoyable, and meaningful. We even learn to laugh at our mistakes along the way.”
24. Spirituality [Faith, Purpose, Religiousness]

Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort.

Coaching Style Point: “I see my clients as participating in a much larger narrative that includes the purpose and meaning of the universe. I love to make that connection with my clients and to watch the mysteries unfold.”

THE PRESENCE THAT GENERATES MOVEMENT & GROWTH

As evidenced by the Coaching Style Points, all strengths are valuable and there is no “right” combination of “signature strengths” when it comes to masterful coaching. The Style Points impact everything about our coaching presence and practice, including who we are, how we show up for coaching, who we attract as clients, and how we facilitate their movement and growth.

The key to successfully using our unique combination of “signature strengths” has less to do with specific techniques than with the intentional use of our being skills in coaching. These skills include such critical qualities as: mindfulness, empathy, warmth, affirmation, calm, zest, playfulness, courage, and authenticity. We describe these qualities of being as “skills” because they are qualities that can be chosen, valued, and strengthened in the course of a coach’s professional development.
1. **Mindfulness** [Related Character Strengths: Self-Regulation, Bravery, Integrity, Perspective, Citizenship, and Social Intelligence]

Masterful coaching requires mindfulness, defined as the “non-judgmental awareness of what is happening in the present moment” (see Chapter 2). Mindfulness is a prerequisite for everything a coach does. If the coach is not mindful, s/he will not be skillful enough to assist clients in engaging in a deep coach-client relationship that will enable them to reach their positive Vision (or desired future). As coaches, it is our job not only to pay full attention to our clients, but also to suspend judgment, utilizing empathy, inquiry, and reflections instead.

Although there is no single strength identified as “mindfulness” by the VIA Signature Strengths Questionnaire, the following strengths, in descending order of correlation, were found by one study to have a significant positive relationship to mindfulness: self-regulation (19), bravery (6), integrity (8), perspective (5), citizenship (13), and social intelligence (12) (Silberman, 2007). These correlations suggest intriguing lines of research and development. For example, Silberman (2007) discusses ways in which mindfulness may “cultivate a number of strengths simultaneously,” perhaps by its ability to quiet “mental chatter.”

The ability to practice mindfulness during coaching sessions is a core coaching skill. To offer the mindfulness gift to clients, coaches would do well to experience mindfulness on other occasions. Practices which support mindfulness include relaxation, breath-work, meditation, and yoga. The key is to actually do them, rather than just study or read about them. Try the following three-minute mindfulness exercise right now:
• Shift your body position and sit up straight.
• Notice your feelings (both physical and emotional) for 60 seconds.
• Notice your breath for 60 seconds (breathe slowly through the nose).
• Notice your feelings (both physical and emotional) for 60 seconds.

Try the same mindfulness exercise five minutes before a coaching session. Notice the impact it has on you and your coaching.


Empathy is defined as the respectful understanding of another person’s experience, including his or her feelings, needs, and desires. It is the core relational dynamic that leads to movement and growth in coaching.

Empathy was discussed extensively in Chapter 5, with the introduction of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) as one method for expressing and receiving empathy (Rosenberg, 2005, see also Patterson, et. al., 2002). The distinction was made between empathy (understanding and connecting with someone’s experience in positive, life-enriching ways) and sympathy (sharing another person’s experience by feeling their feelings and owning their needs).

The skill sets and protocols NVC gives coaches for expressing and receiving empathy will not work unless the intention of the coach is to truly respect, honor, and understand the experience of the client. As with AI and MI, NVC is an orientation as much as it is a practice.
So what is the intention or presence of empathy as a way of being with people? Like mindfulness, empathy allows us to suspend all judgment, analysis, suggestions, stories, or motivation to fix things in favor of connecting with and understanding what’s alive in and coming up for another human being in the present moment.

Someone who is empathetic is:

- curious without being demanding,
- interested with being intrusive,
- compassionate without being condescending, and
- persistent without being impatient.

Empathy seeks solely to understand and value, with respect and compassion, another person’s experience. It is the intention to “get with” where another is coming from, and nothing else (Jordan, et. al., 2004). When clients realize that their feelings and needs matter, and they are being heard and taken seriously by their coach, a zone of new possibilities is created.

It takes work to nurture and maintain this intention. In the interest of being helpful, coaches are especially prone to advise, educate, console, reassure, explain, correct, and problem-solve. Although such behaviors may, at times, be appropriate and useful in coaching conversations, they interfere with and do not represent the posture of empathy.

An awareness of one’s own feelings and needs is crucial if coaches want to be an empathic presence with clients. When coaches notice and share what’s happening with them in the present moment (“My stomach is churning right
now”), their clients may respond with greater awareness and openness of their own.

IMPORTANT: When coaches find it difficult to give empathy, it probably means they are not receiving enough empathy. Since coaches cannot demand empathy from clients, we must be sure to get it from somewhere for ourselves. Both regular self-empathy, as well as mutual empathy with significant others, are essential practices for authentic coaching presence. Both empathetic processes are essentially the same. By connecting deeply with our own feelings and needs, or those of others, (to the point of grieving when needs are not being met and celebrating when they are), coaches grow their empathy muscles and open the way for relational authenticity (Jordan, et. al., 2004).

3. **Warmth** [Related Character Strengths: Vitality, Love, Social Intelligence, Kindness, Gratitude, Forgiveness & Mercy, and Humility/Modesty]

There is a reciprocal relationship between warmth and empathy. Without warmth, all attempts at empathy will fail. That’s because empathy requires a sincere, heartfelt desire to connect with another human being. Obligatory expressions of empathy just don’t work. Likewise, without empathy, all attempts at warmth will fail. That’s because warmth requires an awareness of what others are feeling and needing in the present moment.

Warmth comes from what psychologists call “positive regard.” It has the power to open up clients, just as sunshine has the power to open flowers. Too little or too much warmth, however, can distress clients, just as too little or too much sunshine can damage flowers. Warmth has to be tailored appropriately for every
situation. The key is to radiate just the right amount of warmth, in just the right way, so our clients warm up and the coaching process becomes energized.

Warmth generates full engagement. It is a contagious quality of being that enlivens conversations, relationships, and circumstances. When people warm up to each other, their energy elevates, ideas come, light bulbs go off, and new possibilities get created.

IMPORTANT: To increase our warmth as coaches, it helps to remember our best experiences with people. Similar to the work we do with clients in the Discovery phase of Appreciative Inquiry (Chapter 5), remembering past warm moments makes us more ready, willing, and able to extend warmth in the future.

4. Affirmation [Related Character Strengths: Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence, Gratitude, Kindness, Hope, Creativity, and Perspective.]

Just as empathy is different from sympathy, affirmation is different from affiliation. Affirmation implies acceptance and appreciation, whereas affiliation implies alignment and agreement with someone’s interest and purpose. Masterful coaches extend unfailing affirmation to both themselves and others because they come from a framework that recognizes perfection in every situation.

How can each and every situation be perfect, even when it obviously isn’t? By virtue of the fact that every moment is the only moment that can be happening at any moment. There’s no way to arrive at any future moment other than through the present moment. Nor is there any way for the present moment to be any different than it is, given all the past moments. Affirmation and acceptance have to do with mindfulness and empathy. If we see every situation as perfectly
designed for our own movement and growth, then we can embrace every situation for where it comes from and where it leads us. Living fully in the present moment makes perfection easy to affirm.

That is the posture masterful coaches generally take in life, particularly with their clients. They neither disparage themselves nor others. Instead, they continuously come from the transactional framework of: “I’m OK, You’re OK” (Harris, 2004).

The notion that things are not OK is dissipated by recognizing (with NVC, see Chapter 5) that all life-alienating thoughts, words, and actions are expressions of unmet needs. By hearing the needs that underlie thoughts, words, and actions, masterful coaches can remain unfailingly affirmative in relationship to both themselves and others.

Such perspectives enable coaches to reframe negative energy and challenging circumstances as positive opportunities for movement and growth. Carol Kauffman, PhD, Assistant Clinical Professor at Harvard Medical School and co-creator of the “being skills” concept with Margaret Moore, tells the story of a young Asian woman with an eating disorder who came to a session feeling very down. She shared that she had spent $40 on food for lunch, which she had vomited up in an alleyway. (This was not the first time she had done this.) When she lifted up her head, she noticed a homeless person not far away, sitting on the ground. Mortified and totally ashamed, she thought, “My goodness, this person doesn’t have $40 to spend on food, and look what I’ve just done.”

Upon hearing this, Dr. Kauffman responded, “We all have a dark alleyway. That happens to be yours, but we all have one. We all have things in our lives we’re ashamed of. You’re not alone and you’re not terrible. You’re human.” Instead of
allowing her client to wallow in her guilt and shame (her place of “not OK,”), Dr. Kauffman positively reframed the incident and affirmed her client.

Extending unfailing affirmation, regardless of the situation, is about helping clients respond to life’s experiences without catastrophizing. Until we can accept every situation as perfectly designed for our own movement and growth, there is no way to be happy and productive in life.

Taken together, empathy, warmth, and affirmation foster an important quality of being necessary for masterful coaching. It doesn’t happen through our dispensing expert advice, teaching, consoling, explaining, or correcting. It only happens through connection and presence.

5. **Calm** Related character strengths: Spirituality, Bravery, Integrity, Open-Mindedness, Perspective, Self-Regulation, and Prudence

The word “calm” comes from Greek and Latin roots that refer to “burning heat” or the “heat of the day.” To find a resting place in those contexts is the energy of calm, demonstrated and exercised by masterful coaches. It’s an energy that comes from connecting with and trusting the unfolding of life, whether on the most personal or universal of levels. In the spring of 2003, with worrisome drumbeats of war in the air, Bob Tschannen-Moran noticed the energy of the forest at sunrise. He wrote a poem, titled “Awake” that speaks to the connection between calm, mindfulness, and wonder:
Awake © 2003
Bob Tschannen-Moran

The world comes back to life
Tiny buds burst into flower
Drab and barren branches
Dance to a symphony of becoming
Like a painter's palette
We see the colors laid out
And smell their intoxicating aromas

This too shall pass

But for now
There is hope
In a world that knows too much fear

But for now
There is faith
In a world that knows too much despair

But for now
There is love
In a world that knows too much hate

But for now
We dance to this symphony of becoming
We twirl and laugh
We trust and believe
As though nothing could ever silence the music

But for now
We are pleased to dwell
On planet earth
And do call ourselves
Awake

This poem reminds us of our way in the world when we connect with our values and come from our purpose. Undaunted by circumstance, even by dying, we celebrate both the beauty and certainty of each and every moment. “My certainty
is greater than your doubt," to quote Dave Buck of CoachVille, represents not only an approach masterful coaches take with clients, but also their way of being in the world. Calm energy, in the fire, is the strength that comes from knowing that it’s never too late to make a difference. That’s what makes it possible for first-responders to handle emergencies effectively. Instead of dissolving in the midst of chaos and distress, they maintain perspective and poise in the moment.

Masterful coaches do the same in their life and work. They set aside those inner voices – those gremlins and jackals that interfere with feeling at peace with our selves, the world, and our work. At the start of every day, before every coaching session, and in many other moments in life, they claim the calm energy to make a difference, and perhaps even to generate a breakthrough. They believe in and are confident of who they are and what they do. Through being present and open to the unfolding of things to come, they add meaning, purpose, and value. It isn’t necessarily easy but it can be done.

6. **Zest** [Related Character Strengths: Vitality, Humor, Gratitude, Curiosity, Love of Learning, Bravery, Persistence, and Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence.]

This energy is very different from the energy of calm. It is optimistic and hopeful. It anticipates the best and, as a result, often generates the best. You may remember this energy from childhood, when you were looking forward to doing something special (like going to the zoo or getting on an airplane). As the time approached, you could hardly wait to get out of bed in the morning. You were excited and filled with the energy of zest.
In their book, *The Art of Possibility* (2000), Rosamund Stone and Ben Zander write about the importance of “shining eyes” in determining people’s level of engagement. Zest looks and feels like eyes shining and smiles sparkling. In spite of life’s obvious challenges, masterful coaches radiate zest in ways that generate conversations for change. It’s almost impossible for coaches who are filled with zest not to infuse that energy into coaching conversations.

It may not be possible to radiate this energy every minute of every day, but masterful coaches come from it more often than not. That is what makes their coaching practices successful! Zest is an incredibly attractive energy that people want to get close to and build on. It is self-reinforcing and upward spiraling. It supports resilience and self-efficacy in the service of coaching outcomes.

IMPORTANT: Just as there is a reciprocal relationship between giving and receiving empathy, there is also one between giving and receiving zest. The more things we do that fill up our tank with zest, the more zest we will have to share with others. This is one area where self-care clearly and directly translates into coaching effectiveness. It is not possible to coach masterfully in a state of feeling overwhelmed, fatigued, stressed, burned out, or in despair. Without doing the things that make life worth living, including adequate time for rest and recovery, it is hard, if not impossible, to share zestful energy with others.

One simple strategy for elevating zest, without a total life makeover, is to cultivate gratitude. Noticing, remembering, and celebrating good things that happen are powerful antidotes to the patina of bad things that tends to build up over time. Understanding this, masterful coaches stoke their own attitude of gratitude through daily positive practices that build happiness, balance, and self-esteem (see Chapter 12).
When we live and experience life as an adventure, it’s easy to approach our work with clients in much the same way. There’s no telling what our clients will come up with!

7. **Playfulness** [Related Character Strengths: Humor, Curiosity, Creativity, Vitality, Hope, Spirituality, and Perspective]

Just as empathy, warmth, and affirmation go together, so do playfulness and zest. They may be distinct energies, but they support one another. Indeed, it’s impossible to sustain zest without playfulness. Playfulness ignites our energy for and engagement with life.

Just as playfulness underlies zest, humor and curiosity underlie playfulness. Without the ability to laugh, especially in the face of life’s ironies, incongruities, and adversities, one would seldom find the energy to play. Young children laugh hundreds of time per day; older adults average about 17 times per day. Masterful coaches, and other healthy adults, know how to laugh and have fun (Wooten, 1996, Balick & Lee, 2003).

Perhaps that’s why laughter clubs, which started in India, have turned into a global movement. These groups, which typically meet in the morning, run through a series of laughter patterns that eventually give way (after an initial warm up) to an epidemic of spontaneous giggles, chuckles, and guffaws. Participants report feeling refreshed, relaxed, revitalized, and rejuvenated by the experience.

**IMPORTANT:** To cultivate the energy of playfulness, laugh even when you’re not in the mood, laugh out loud, and laugh often. It’s not enough to chuckle inwardly
at a joke or cartoon. We have to get our bodies involved in order to experience the full benefits of laughter.

What makes you laugh out loud? Whatever it is, do it! If you enjoy comedians, funny movies, or jumping on trampolines, be sure to get your fill. If you have friends who make you laugh, be sure to spend time with them. And don’t be afraid to laugh with clients. It’s never too late to lighten up, change perspective, and remember “Rule Number 6”. As Rosamund Stone and Ben Zander tell the story:

Two prime ministers were sitting in a room discussing affairs of state. Suddenly a man bursts in, apoplectic with fury, shouting and stamping and banging his fist on the desk. The resident prime minister admonishes him: "Peter," he says, "kindly remember Rule Number 6," whereupon Peter is instantly restored to complete calm, apologizes, and withdraws.

The politicians returned to their conversation, only to be interrupted yet again twenty minutes later by an hysterical woman gesticulating wildly, her hair flying. Again the intruder is greeted with the words: "Marie, please remember Rule Number 6." Complete calm descends once more, and she too withdraws with a bow and an apology.

When the scene is repeated for a third time, the visiting prime minister addresses his colleague: "My dear friend, I've seen many things in my life, but never anything as remarkable as this. Would you be willing to share with me the secret of Rule Number 6?" "Very simple," replies the resident prime minister. "Rule Number 6 is: Don't take yourself so g— damn seriously."
"Ah," says his visitor, "that is a fine rule." After a moment of pondering, he inquires, "And what, may I ask, are the other rules?"

"There aren't any." (2000, p. 79)

This is, indeed, a fine rule that applies both to our way in the world and our way with clients. Coaching is serious business, but that doesn’t make it the business of seriousness. Unless we carry ourselves and show up with a certain lightness of being, clients will dread coaching and fail to move forward as they otherwise might.

8. **Courage & Authenticity** [Related Character Strengths: Integrity, Bravery, Social Intelligence, Fairness, and Persistence]

Perhaps the most challenging way of being for many coaches involves courage and authenticity. The word “courage” may conjure up images of judgment, conflict, and pushiness. But being courageous is not about being mean, cruel, or threatening. It’s about naming what is there in order to increase client awareness, create connection, and generate movement.

Masterful coaches, who understand the difference between being nice and being authentic, are able to boldly express their observations, feelings, needs, and requests in the service of client outcomes. They have a genuine way of stepping up to the plate and making conversations real.

In concert with all the other coaching strengths, masterful coaches have a fearless, conversational prowess that shakes things loose and stirs things up without offending, violating, blaming, shaming, or demeaning people.
Approaching clients with courage and authenticity may be difficult and intimidating at first, like when you asked someone in high school to dance. Back then, your heart may have been pounding and your palms may have been sweating, but somehow you got through it and eventually it got easier. You may have even convinced them to dance! That’s the way it is with courageous and authentic conversations. By shining a light on what “wants to be said,” coaches can move clients forward in dynamic and powerful ways.

That’s because truth is contagious and resonant. As long as we stay with accurate observations, free from evaluations, and honestly reflect back what we are experiencing and seeing, we enable our clients to honestly gain new awareness and understanding of who they are and what they are facing. As a result, clients can muster the courage to more fully meet their needs.

Guy Corneau expresses this dynamic in the introduction to Being Genuine: Stop Being Nice, Start Being Real by Thomas d’Ansembourg (2007), a communication guide for courageous and authentic conversations through NVC. Expressing one’s truth while respecting others and respecting oneself … that is the journey (this book invites us to take) by suggesting that we plunge straight into the heart of how we enter into dialogue with ourselves and others. In it we learn how to reprogram the way we express ourselves. Once that has been done, there comes the joy of being closer to others and closer to ourselves. There is the joy of being open to others. And at the heart of this process lies the possibility of giving up the familiar, even comfortable, confusions with which we so often content ourselves, instead of gaining access to a universe of choice and freedom (from d’Ansembourg, 2007, p. 1).
Such is the key to courageous and authentic conversations in coaching—and in life, in general. It’s not about telling people what we think or believe. Rather, it’s about courageously sharing with people what we notice, feel, need, and want. It often takes time to make this deeper level of connection, but it’s worth it. Respectful and genuine interactions with our clients can provoke the change they seek.

Key Takeaway: The following “Being Skills” are central to coaching presence: mindfulness, empathy, warmth, affirmation, calm, zest, playfulness, courage and authenticity. The more coaches develop and play from these skills, the more clients will experience movement and growth through connection.

THE BEING SKILLS OF COACHING PRESENCE

Figure 11.1 illustrates how the being skills of coaching presence relate to each other around a 360-degree wheel. Surrounding the core of coaching presence is mindfulness, which determines how we show up for coaching and how we engage all the other skills. Around the perimeter, the being skills are arranged in ways that show the connections as well as the distinctions between them. Reviewing Figure 11.1 prior to a coaching is an excellent way to prepare oneself for masterful coaching.
CONVEYING COACHING PRESENCE

Coaching presence is conveyed in many ways, including word choice, phrasing, pace, body language, facial expressions, and intonation. A variety of factors combine in different ways for each person to make coaching effective.

Masterful coaches use their voice well, both in face-to-face and telephone coaching. Sometimes they use their voice to build excitement with stimulating energy. At other times, they use their voice to calm things down with soothing...
energy. Either way, coaching presence is conveyed when their voice is used in just the right way, at just the right time.

Silence, too, is an important part of coaching presence. It conveys comfort, respect, and spaciousness for client experience. Feelings, needs, and desires can take a while to surface and become clear. When coaches are comfortable with silence, their presence becomes more evocative.

One universal trait of coaching presence is the dance between intention and attention in the present moment. Although coaching presence may appear graceful, and even effortless, in the hands of a masterful coach, it never happens by accident. It takes clear intention and lots of practice. The more coaching we have under our belt, the stronger our conveyance will be.

A key factor to consider is the flow of energy in the field between coaches and clients. When presence is conveyed artfully, coaches and clients lean into each other with full engagement. This leaning in can be seen in the eyes and heard in the voice as one thing leads spontaneously to another. If one or the other is leaning out or pulling away, then something isn’t working. It’s time for the coach to try a different approach.

IMPORTANT: None of this works unless coaches are ready, willing, and able to engage. When coaches are exhausted, their strengths desert them. When coaches are rested, all strengths come into play. Paying attention to the rhythm of work and rest, of energy out and in, is an essential part of self-management for conveying coaching presence.
Key Takeaway: Coaching presence is communicated in many ways. Body language and voice are two critical elements. Clients resonate in response to the way coaches come across. Ideally, coaches come across in ways that promote mutuality and involvement.

Review and Discussion Questions

1. Define coaching presence.

2. Define being skills.

3. Distinguish between the doing and the being skills of coaching.

4. What are character strengths? How are they related to coaching?

5. What are signature strengths? (Peterson and Seligman 2004)?


7. List three character strengths and illustrate with Coaching Style Points how each strength relates to coaching.

8. List eight being skills of coaching presence and the related character strengths for each skill.

9. What factors communicate coaching presence? Select two factors and describe how they can be used to promote mutuality and involvement.
References


