



## Being Your Own Coach (March/April 2009)

**Hello You.** This next message comes from my super colleague Gwen Currie. Gwen's background is in healthcare and she has been a freelance coach for seven years, working mainly with carers and people with long term health conditions, through the voluntary sector. She finds that coaching in this context often seems to help people introduce more balance, helpful communication and fun into their lives. Thank you for writing this message for us Gwen!

Alison and I were talking recently about how fortunate we thought we were to be coaches. The work is something we both enjoy, but more than that, the use of our coaching skills in our everyday lives has been very helpful to us both.

We agreed that having access to coaching knowledge, skills and experience has given us both many opportunities, as well as challenges, to develop and to become better people.

If this sounds smug then it's not meant to be. I'm not saying that I am now a 'perfect person' nor that I live a completely goal-oriented life. Probably, however, I am more accepting of myself in many ways – in being non-judgemental and respectful of others at work, I have become kinder to myself. I strongly believe that it's important to practise what I promote. I like to explore my plans using a coaching process whenever I can or if I have key decisions to make. I love experimenting with coaching tools whenever I find myself stuck or uncomfortable in any situation or relationship. This might just be sitting down with pen and paper and going through systematically what I want to change or to plan. It might mean checking out my beliefs and challenging rigorously those which are negative for evidence or relevance. None are safe from my gaze any more!

It often means simply asking the right questions of myself, as I aim to do when coaching others, or noticing conflict developing between different goals I have set. It always means being more self aware and that state has its pros and cons, as yes, I do often catch myself out with lazy thoughts and habitual or outdated perspectives on myself and others.

It certainly means that just moaning, picking fault, blaming or being self-pitying are now out when spotted – curses! How is a girl to have any fun? Well, the upside is great when I find myself doing things I didn't think myself capable of or even enjoying things which I used to find stressful.

I've just begun an exciting MSc at Oxford University Business School and the HEC in Paris – Consulting and Coaching for Change. Initially, I read about it and thought it looked great - but 'not for me' as I was not 'international' nor an 'executive'. However, my inner coach said 'why not you?' and persuaded me to check the eligibility criteria. I am now writing this instead of my first essay – caught out again!

I can also justify 'working on myself' physically and mentally in ways which are often seen as 'treats' to other people and certainly would have been to me in the past. For example, in the last three years I've had individual sessions weekly with my charming and dedicated French yoga teacher, Florence, and taken time out to learn Italian in Rome, Genoa and Turin.

For me, one of the most useful parts of my coach training programme was experiencing as well as providing coaching - I had chosen my 'trio' companions carefully for skill and sense of humour! And when that ended I thought: Why stop there? I have a coach supervisor where I look at developing as a coach, but I decided to keep coaching myself on my life goals very early on.

So, if you are a coach then you will no doubt be working on yourself too, knowing that your clients will benefit as you live and work more skilfully or with more awareness and integrity. My coach supports and challenges me to ground or stretch my thinking just as Florence encourages me to do the same with the asanas. However, why waste all that skill and experience which I have on tap?

And if you're not a coach, then you can always start by accessing some coaching via a professional body like the Association for Coaching. There are always coaches in training for those on a tight budget. You can usually take away a learning experience and tools to use again whenever you want or need to focus on achieving positive change or planning for success in whatever you do.

My final question to myself as I write this is 'Am I doing this to be a better coach or a better person?' I set out to be a better coach and found that there were knock-on effects into the rest of my life. But there was also another factor which made the difference for me. I have been amazed and energised by my clients' creativity and achievements, determination and resilience week in and week out, as I watch them taking steps they did not think possible or reaching goals they dared not hope for before coaching. So I have been inspired and infected by their success to follow them onwards and upwards – how fortunate is that?

Alison and I would love to hear your views on what difference coaching has made to your life, perhaps in unexpected ways, and how you use coaching skills for yourself.

Good luck with your self-coaching! Gwen



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All the best until next time

Alison

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