An Introduction to Ontological Coaching
Presentation to the Prairie Professional Coaching Association
– Botting Leadership Inc. – June 14, 2012

Introduction to My Business

Botting Leadership Inc.

Asking Questions that Matter.
Guiding Leadership to More Effective Strategies.
Connecting Enterprise for Growth and Responsibility.
What is Ontology & Ontological Coaching?

Key Models and Distinction
- The B.E.L. Model
- The O.A.R. Model
- The Basic Speech Acts
- The Basic Body Posture Distinctions
- Mood Management and the Basic Moods of Life

Some Fun Exercises and Practices

Summary Remarks, Q & A, and Comments

Ontology is "The Science of Being" in general. It embracing such issues as the nature of existence and the way we structure reality. It is based on 20th Century work in the biology of cognition, anthropology, existential philosophy, the study of language, modern sociology and even quantum physics.

An Ontological Coach is able to:
1. Develop a sound understanding of what aspects of the coachee’s Way of Being are generating an unhealthy reality.
2. Support the coachee to develop a more constructive reality that will lead to a positive change in his/her world.

Transactional Coaching further deals with how a coachee manages transactions based on the same fundamental way of being.
Evolution of Ontological Coaching

- Work done by Humberto Maturana, Fernando Flores, Julio Jollala, Alan Siefert, and Bob Dunham.

- Offered through the Global Newfield Network and the Institute for Generative Leadership (The CEO – Coaching for Excellence in Organizations Program).

- Network of many hundred alumni around the world. Canadian base is in Calgary, Alberta.

Essential **Role of an Ontological Coach:**

- To provide a safe context for the coachee to learn new distinctions that expand how they are observing.
- To enable them to become a different and more powerful observer, with “power” being interpreted as “the capacity to take effective action.”
- The client/coachee is only limited by how they are observing the work, and that problems, possibilities and solutions exist in the “eye of the beholder”.
Einstein Was Right!

“The way we see the problem, is the problem.”

“We see the world not as it is, but as we are.”

“Insanity is doing the same things over and over again, but expecting different results.”

In Ontological Coaching we call this the O.A.R. Model:
Observer--Actions--Results

Ontological Coaching is based on a Trilogy – The B.E.L Model

› The Body
› Emotion
› Language

› Shifts – Can occur in all these domains to generate new perspectives that open up new possibilities for action by each coachee.
The Power of Language

- Speech is powerfully generative and creative:
  - It creates Action.
  - It creates Moods and Emotions.
  - It can even affect the Physical shape and Health of our bodies.

“It is through the word that you manifest everything. Regardless of what language you speak, Your intent manifests through words. The word is not just a sound or a written symbol. The Word is a Force; it is the power you have to create the events in your life.”

- Don Miguel Ruiz, The Four Agreements

There Are ONLY 5 Basic Acts of Speech

- Requests
- Offers/Promises
- Assertions
- Assessments
- Declarations
**Assertions**

- Designed to separate what’s true from what’s false.
- But assertions are not absolute – “facts” can change over time as we get more information.
- Assertions are based on some agreed-upon standard and accepted evidence.

**Assessments**

- Are never true or false, but only our interpretations of what we encounter in life.
- Assessments are “Our Stories” we carry with us – sometimes grounded, but often NOT!
- We assess everything!
- We often carry “Master Assessments” with us.
Why Do We “Assess” So Much?

- It conveys how we value things and how we “see” the world – often a window on our mind.
- Assessments are often full of cognitive distortions – e.g. “always”, “nobody”, “all the time” – they can become personally destructive.
- Assessments are greatly influenced by moods and emotions.
- Assessments are never the truth – but can sometimes be useful.
- Our ability to keep assessments and assertions separate and distinct from each other is CRITICAL.
- How we ground assessments are also CRITICAL.

Requests

- Are extremely powerful – if done right.
- Source of so many organizational problems, when done wrong.
- Requests create action.
- If there is no option to decline, or negotiate the request, then it is NOT a Request.
- People who confuse vague expectations for a clearly worded and effective request are creating a recipe for misery.
What makes for an Effective Request

- Need a **Clear Speaker** – who actually delivers the spoken request.
- Needs a clear and **Committed Listener** to the request – who is competent to deliver it.
- **Time** dimension in responding to the Request.
- **Context** of the Request – explain why?
- The **Mood** – emotionally receptive to Request.
- The **Conditions of Satisfaction**

Offers and Promises

- Same as Request – Clear Speaker, Clear Listener, Conditions of Satisfaction, Time, Context, Mood of the Offer
- Request + Acceptance = Promise
- Offer + Acceptance = Promise

- There are 4 ways to respond to a Request – Yes, No, Commit to Commit, and Counter Offer.
- Time Management is a misnomer – What we really have is Commitment Management.

- **Honoring Commitments & Promises Builds Trust!**
The most powerful and creative speech act of them all!

Only a Declaration if:
- The Speaker who declares has the authority to do so.
- Starts a process of creating something.

Declarations can determine moods (and moods can determine declarations).

The 10 Most Powerful Declarations

- “Yes”
- “No” – No does not equal rejection
- “I don’t know” – The first step in learning
- “I apologize”
- “I forgive you” – Creates peace, to go forward
- “Thank you” – Conveys both gratitude & closure
- “I love you” – Signifies complete acceptance
- “I am…..” – the Story you make up about yourself
- “This is not working”
- Declaring clear standards – not mind reading
A “Boot Camp Exercise”
Practice in Making a Clear Request

- Find a Partner
- Make a Request – of anything
- Use the clarity principles
- Other Partner – have fun with “testing the request” and showing areas of ambiguity.
- Notice and Observe – how easily it is possible NOT to make a complete request.
- Reverse the Exercise

The Body and Nonverbal

There are four ways – and only four ways – in which we have contact with the world. We are evaluated and classifies by these four contacts:

- What we do
- How we look
- What we say
- How we say it

- We are always communicating, whether we are consciously trying to or not.
The Body (continued)

- It is what we “say” without words.
- It’s the expression on our faces, our body language, our postures, the way we wear our clothes, the silence we keep.
- Learning the language of the eyes.
- The power of the “contagious smile”.
- The tell-tale handshake.

The Ontological Distinctions of The Body and It’s Posture

- In Resolution
- In Stability
- In Flexibility
- In Openness
Exercise # 2 – Walk the Walk

- **Walk in Resolution** – like rushing to catch a plan.
- **Walk in Stability** – like the Monarch overseeing the kingdom.
- **Walk in Openness** – ready to receive the world.
- **Walk in Flexibility** – in brainstorming and playfulness.

What shows up for you?
What opens?
What closes?

Exercise # 3
Move the Body – Move the Mood

Say the following:

“What’s the use. The situation is beyond my control. Nothing will change. We’re hooped.”

- Now say it in the posture of Stability
- Now say it in the posture of Flexibility
- Note the dissonance!
Emotions are the meaning of life – they are energy-in-motion.
It is because we are moved and because we feel, that life has meaning.
Exploring a better emotional vocabulary is an effective way to identify breakdowns and coaching issues.
Emotions are temporary and transient, but MOODS are the deeper, invisible and enduring emotional states that have a major impact on how the world is observed and engaged with.

The Ontological Model of Moods and Emotions

- Assess/Declare
- Facticity
- Possibility
- Uncertainty

NOT Accept (or oppose)  Resentment  Grieving  Resignation  Anxiety  Sadness

Accepting  Peace  Ambition  Wonder  Gratitude  Enthusiasm
Mood Management

- Emotional Acuity to...
- Emotional Flexibility to...
- Mood Management to...
- Emotional Wisdom

Some Sample Mood Managing Questions:

- What is going on with me emotionally right now?
- For the sake of what, I am in this mood or emotion?
- How well is this mood or emotion serving me right now?
- What can I learn by staying in this mood for awhile?
- Could another mood or emotion serve me better?
- What do I need to do to move to a more helpful emotional space?

Exercise in Emotional Acuity

- How are you feeling? The Check-In Exercise?
- Can you describe the emotion in more precise language?

Other Mood Modalities

- Visual
  - Describe the colour, shape, size, location and texture of your mood/emotion. Moving or static?
- Auditory
  - What type of sound is associated with the mood/emotion – volume, pitch, beat, etc.?
- Kinesthetic
  - What does the mood feel like to touch? What does its texture or moisture content and temperature feel like? Is there movement in this emotion?
Summary

- This just provides a small “glimpse” or taste of a more ontological approach to coaching.
- The idea is – like with all coaching – that coaches can respectfully intervene and ask questions to support clients become different observers and to help them develop a less limiting reality.
- Follow the same “Arc of the Coach” and other basic Coaching Principles, Ethics and Practices as other professional coaching.
- Other Basic Steps – Identify the Coaching Issue or Breakdown, Hear the Story, Challenge the Story, Draw Out Other Distinctions and Self-Awareness, Look for Other Choices, and Co-create new Practices or Homework for Action.

The Ontological Difference

- It’s like coaching in “3D” or added colour vs. the “black and white” transactional approach.
- Provides added tools and distinctions.
- It opens up new pathways for effective action that were not otherwise possible, by adding:
  - Shifts in language.
  - More detailed management of moods and emotions.
  - Added physiological shapes and exercises.
My Summary Emotion is Gratitude!
For the Opportunity to Share with my wonderful Colleagues!

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