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# Coaching Competencies Deconstructed

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Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics, College of Liberal and Professional Studies in the School of Arts and Sciences in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics at the University of Pennsylvania  
Advisor: Linda Pennington

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# Coaching Competencies Deconstructed

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this capstone is to explore four qualities considered essential to professional coaching: authenticity, coaching presence, empathy, and openness. Through research in psychology and coaching literature, as well as interviews with experienced coach practitioners, this study first deconstructs each quality, and then creates a reconceptualization of each to enhance their use and understanding by novice and experienced professionals alike. As practitioners who are focused on human development, professional coaches are committed to developing ongoing mastery. One way to cultivate coaching competence is through Mindfulness Meditation. The attitudinal foundations of Mindfulness Meditation are highly relevant to coaching. Mindfulness Meditation, in particular, facilitates integration of several coaching qualities, and ultimately leads us to maximum resourcefulness and creativity for our clients.

## **Keywords**

coaching

## **Comments**

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Advisor: Linda Pennington

COACHING COMPETENCIES  
DECONSTRUCTED

by

Kelly E. Payne

Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics,  
College of Liberal and Professional Studies  
in the School of Arts and Sciences  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics at the  
University of Pennsylvania

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

2017

COACHING COMPETENCIES  
DECONSTRUCTED

Approved by:

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Linda Pennington, MSOD, MA, Advisor

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Janice Jacobs, Ph.D., Reader

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this capstone is to explore four qualities considered essential to professional coaching: authenticity, coaching presence, empathy, and openness. Through research in psychology and coaching literature, as well as interviews with experienced coach practitioners, this study first deconstructs each quality, and then creates a reconceptualization of each to enhance their use and understanding by novice and experienced professionals alike. As practitioners who are focused on human development, professional coaches are committed to developing ongoing mastery. One way to cultivate coaching competence is through Mindfulness Meditation. The attitudinal foundations of Mindfulness Meditation are highly relevant to coaching. Mindfulness Meditation, in particular, facilitates integration of several coaching qualities, and ultimately leads us to maximum resourcefulness and creativity for our clients.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to give glory to God as the source of my significance and purpose. I thank God for giving me a second chance at marriage, parenthood, professional and educational pursuits. All good things come from Him!

To my life-partner, soul mate, best friend and husband Jack, the paragon of selflessness and unconditional love. You have taught me the true meaning of 1 Corinthians: 13. I can never repay your countless acts of service and support for my “big ideas” and “crazy schemes”! You have been my biggest cheerleader and encourager from the day we met; I am deeply grateful. Your indelible sense of humor is always delivered at the most opportune time. I cherish every moment we have together - it is an honor to travel this journey with you at my side. You are my hero!

To my three sons – Charles, Eric, and Tyler - you are my greatest teachers. Thank you for understanding your parents aren't perfect, and loving us anyway. We truly have your best interests at heart. I appreciate your flexibility with my attending class and spending copious amounts of family time on school-related matters. You never complained or made me feel I was short-changing you. I appreciate your support and hope to serve as an example as you pursue your dreams.

I would like to extend a gracious thank you to my thesis advisor, Linda Pennington, and reader, Janice Jacobs. Your confidence in my ability to complete this project kept me focused on the goal and the process to get there.

Your feedback was always delivered with kindness and warmth. I am grateful for your interest in my subject and constant encouragement.

Thank you to all my professors in the Organizational Dynamics program at Penn. I learned something valuable from each and every one of you. Most importantly perhaps, you modeled community, inclusiveness, passion, empathy, authenticity, openness, presence, and many other wonderful qualities. I entered the OD program wanting to be transformed. You provided a nurturing environment that allowed me to risk, challenge myself, grow and discover. Thank you.

I would like to thank my parents for giving me the gift of education. You raised seven children, all of whom attended college and went on to post-graduate education. At last count, your children have amassed a total of 18 baccalaureate and post- baccalaureate degrees! You made many sacrifices along the way for our betterment and encouraged us to do our best. My love of learning is a hallmark of your legacy.

The love and support of friends and family are what made this possible – my sister Tisa, my gracious friend Marilyn, as well as my other siblings, work colleagues, friends and extended family members, and the study participants who imparted their wisdom and experience. Thank you for your support and belief in me! May my life be a reflection of all that you have given!

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### A personal introduction

Five years ago, I hit the pause button to reassess my career journey. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was coaching myself to align my passions, skills and values with my work. Recognizing my proclivity for learning and self-development, the next question became, "Is there a profession that leverages my inclination to 'make meaning'?" In consultation with family, friends, and colleagues, I discovered organizational development and professional coaching – two professions that honor my work experience and exploit my natural curiosity.

A desire to make meaning and natural curiosity may be essential, yet are not sufficient. Effective coaches demonstrate a range of behaviors, skills and characteristics, including empathy, authenticity, flexibility, openness, courage, and self-awareness. (Grant, et al., 2010; Vandaveer, et al.; 2016, Bono, et al., 2009; Rekalde, et al., 2015) For me, these characteristics seemed more like first cousins twice removed than best friends.

Admittedly I was engaged in a process of self-growth, yet it was grounded in a deficit-based perspective. Sarahjoy Marsh refers to this as "shame-based discipline." (Marsh, 2015) Skilled at self-examination and judgment, rigid control strategies, and disconnecting, I became increasingly disintegrated.

My journey resulted in greater self-awareness, self-acceptance, and reconciliation. Self-awareness grew into the realization that self-defeating

thoughts and behaviors did not serve me. The most profound moment arose when I came face-to-face with my Enneagram Type: *Type One - The Reformer, the Rational, Idealistic Type: Principled, Purposeful, Self-Controlled, and Perfectionistic*. (Riso & Hudson, 1999) I couldn't deny it any longer. It was time to stop running from my resistance and lean into it, embrace it, and be curious.

People are multidimensional, resilient, creative, resourceful, and possess qualities that promote the full expression of who they are: their Essence. Unfortunately, many of us operate from a fixed mindset, default reactions, and limiting beliefs that translate into ineffective patterns of behavior. (Riso & Hudson, 1999) Coaching facilitates client discovery and awareness of life-giving choices. As I have become more integrated and congruent, my desire is to help clients achieve the same. This is why I want to coach.

### Purpose of the capstone

A review of the literature revealed coaching as a helping relationship between a client and consultant (Kilburg, 1996), a goal-focused form of learning (Hall, et al., 1999) conducted as an experiential and individualized process (Stern, 2004) to improve the client's effectiveness (Witherspoon & White, 1996). For purposes of this capstone, I will draw upon the International Coach Federation (ICF) definition of professional coaching:

Partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. Coaches honor the client as the expert in his or her life and work and believe every client is creative, resourceful and whole. ([www.coachfederation.org/](http://www.coachfederation.org/))

Coaching has enjoyed growth over the last 15 years, becoming one of the top five leadership-development practices. (Maltbia, et al., 2016) Due to the rapid and unregulated emergence of the coaching industry, there are proliferations of frameworks, competencies, standards, and definitions related to coaching. (Griffiths & Campbell, 2008) A coaching competency framework can be thought of as the knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics (i.e., competencies) important for coaching codified into a structure or schema. (Vandaveer, et al., 2016) Professional associations have failed to adopt a standard coaching competency framework, contributing to further confusion. Furthermore, the coaching competencies themselves are subject to multiple definitions and interpretations.

Navigating the terrain of professional coaching can be challenging for nascent coaches, like myself. Coaches integrate several aspects when forming their coaching approach: theory, process, qualities, skills, tools, models, and experience. As I refine my own coaching philosophy, I am called to explore areas in need of further development, focus, or understanding. My Capstone will explore four qualities suggested by the literature to be important or essential for professional coaching: authenticity, coaching presence, empathy, and openness. The essential thesis question is “How do authenticity, coaching presence, empathy, and openness show up in a coaching relationship?” In addressing this central question, several related questions require consideration: What are authenticity, coaching presence, empathy, and openness, i.e., how are they defined? Are they related to each other, or to other constructs in some way?

What inhibits the coach from demonstrating them? Can they be cultivated, and if so, how? The goal of this study is to create an in-depth conceptualization of each quality to augment coach practitioner use and understanding.

I am intrigued by this topic for two reasons: First, while studying coaching theory as part of my Organizational Dynamics curriculum, I grouped related concepts into categories, an early attempt to create a coaching competency framework. I'm interested in seeing these four qualities represented in an integrated framework; this broader context will enhance my perspective of their role in the coaching process. Secondly, limited comprehension restricts my efficacy as a coach.

Differing perspectives of what constitutes executive coaching core competencies by academic and coach preparation programs, credentialing associations, and practitioners obfuscate clarity of definition, roles, and implementation. (Maltbia, et al., 2016, p. 161)

By *deconstructing* and *reconstructing* these constructs, I hope to appreciate their full meaning and incorporate them into my repertoire of coaching skills with confidence.

Empathy (my definition) is the ability to see another person's perspective or point of view. Openness (my definition) is being free and welcoming to experiences, thoughts, emotions, and information. Empathy and openness were selected intentionally. In response to life experiences, I formed protective measures, or defenses, including emotional numbing and controlling, perfectionist tendencies. My hypothesis is these protective defenses challenge my ability to see others' perspectives and cause me to draw physical and

relational boundaries in an attempt to control my world, thereby limiting my openness.

While I have some semblance of empathy and openness, the concepts of coaching presence and authenticity are lesser understood. As defined by ICF, “coaching presence is the ability to be fully conscious and create spontaneous relationship with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible and confident.” (<https://www.coachfederation.org/files/IndCred/ICFCompetenciesLevelsTable.pdf>)

) Here is the first connection: openness is related to coaching presence. I plan to explore this relationship in greater detail through my literature review and data analysis.

Authentic (my definition) means being real. What does authenticity mean in terms of a coaching relationship? What does it look like, sound like? For example, does it mean telling your client they are a chronic whiner? The literature added to my confusion by offering multiple definitions. Barrett-Lennard defines authenticity as:

Involving consistency between the three levels of: (a) a person’s primary experience, (b) their symbolized awareness, and (c) their outward behavior and communication. (1998, p. 82)

Kernis defines authenticity as “the unobstructed operation of one’s true, or core, self in one’s daily enterprise” and argues “authenticity has four components: awareness, unbiased-processing, action, and relational orientation.” (2003, p. 1)

When analyzing the two definitions, I note the concept of *awareness* is common to both: possessing some level of awareness not only about myself but also about how I operate in relation to others. My interpretation of unbiased

processing refers to taking in information free from judgment or bias, being fair-minded, neutral or impartial. But how does the coach *demonstrate* authenticity in a coaching relationship? Being authentic does not mean telling your client they are a whiner; it may mean sharing your experience of them in an appropriate way.

Like me, you may want to know more about these qualities so you feel confident demonstrating them with your client. For other coaches, perhaps you possess a basic capability and want to develop it further. Regardless of your experience level - novice or seasoned professional - I hope to provide clarity and depth as one possible avenue for your further development.

### Capstone outline

The chapters in this capstone are organized in the following manner: chapter two provides an overview of the literature that was reviewed regarding the field of coaching and the psychological constructs of empathy, authenticity, (coaching) presence, and openness. In chapter three, I present the methodology used in my research for this capstone. My research included interviews with twelve active, experienced coach practitioners from various backgrounds. The purpose of this study is to explore, learn, and add depth to the understanding of the experience of empathy, authenticity, coaching presence, and openness from the perspective of coach practitioners using the phenomenological research method. To add evidence, anonymous quotations are included. Chapter four describes the process regarding interview data



collection and analysis related to the research questions. Chapter five includes my interpretation of the data in terms of what I learned and what questions remain unanswered. Chapter six concludes the research by sharing the meaning of what I found, my conclusions, and what the experience taught me.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter details the literature reviewed in the fields of coaching and psychology. The purpose of this review is to enhance my understanding of the constructs being examined, and forms the foundation for the research described in chapters three through five.

#### Coaching competency frameworks

A coaching competency framework defines the knowledge, skills, and attributes to ensure the coach practitioner conducts himself appropriately. A framework is a good place to start as it provides context for the qualities to be examined in this capstone. Beginner chefs typically don't cook without a recipe and some basic training, even if they have the ingredients. Likewise, a coach wielding skills without a framework puts him at risk of violating one of the Ten Commandments of Coaching: do no harm. (de Haan, 2008) If you don't know how to cook, better stay out of the kitchen.

Coaching has been described as 'the wild west' because there are no universally accepted standards. (Sherman & Freas, 2004) A competency model may serve as a useful guide. This section will illustrate several coaching competency frameworks. The four qualities subject to this capstone are underlined in ***bold italics*** where explicitly stated.

The mission of ICF is to advance coaching as a profession. ICF accomplishes this through membership levels and credential categories that

define professional standards. Its core competency model was developed to support greater understanding about the skills and approaches used within today's coaching profession, and contains 11 competencies (see Table 1).

Table 1: ICF Core Competencies  
(<http://coachfederation.org/credential/landing.cfm?ItemNumber=2206>)

Setting the Foundation	Co-creating the relationship	Communicating Effectively	Facilitating Learning and Results
1. Meeting ethical guidelines and professional standards	3. Establishing trust and intimacy with the client through an <b><i>open</i></b> and honest relationship.	5. Active listening	8. Creating awareness
2. Establishing the coaching agreement	4. <b><i>Coaching presence</i></b>	6. Powerful questioning	9. Designing actions
		7. Direct communication	10. Planning and goal setting
			11. Managing progress and accountability

The ICF model narrowly relates to the elements that are the focus of this study. Coaching presence and openness are considered important aspects of the coach-client relationship. Although the model is of limited use for this capstone, it is included given the prominent role of ICF as the largest coach credentialing organization globally, based on the number of professional members.

The European Mentoring & Coaching Council (EMCC) exists to serve the coaching industry by promoting and setting expectations for best practice. The EMCC competency model outlines eight competencies, three of which address the constructs under review (see Table 2).

Table 2: EMCC Competency Framework (v2, September 2015)  
<http://www.emccouncil.org/webimages/EU/EQA/emcc-competence-framework-v2.pdf>

Understanding self	Building the relationship	Enabling insight and learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Awareness</i></b> of one's own values, beliefs and behaviors</li> <li>• Uses <b><i>self-awareness</i></b> to manage their effectiveness</li> <li>• Responds with <b><i>empathy</i></b></li> <li>• Proactively manages own 'state of being'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treats client with respect and dignity</li> <li>• Attentive and responsive to client in the moment</li> <li>• Uses language client can relate to</li> <li>• Demonstrates <b><i>empathy</i></b></li> <li>• Develops trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offers feedback and challenge effectively</li> <li>• Uses range of questioning techniques</li> <li>• Flexible</li> <li>• Checks for understanding</li> <li>• Active listening style</li> </ul>

Empathy is noted as an attribute of the coach in understanding self, as well as a skill to build the relationship. Self-awareness, né authenticity, is mentioned twice, providing further evidence of genuineness/congruence as an important coaching quality. (Rogers, 1961)

The Association for Coaching (AC) is dedicated to promoting best practice and raising the awareness of standards of coaching worldwide. The AC competency framework includes nine competencies; four competencies pertain to the qualities under consideration in this capstone (see Table 3).

Table 3: AC Competency Framework (revised June 2012)  
<http://www.associationforcoaching.com/pages/accreditation/ac-coach-accreditation>

Establishing a trust-based relationship	Managing self and maintaining <b><i>coaching presence</i></b>	Communicating effectively	Raising awareness and insight
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treats client with respect and dignity</li> <li>• Encourages client self-belief</li> <li>• Establishes rapport with client</li> <li>• Accepts client 'as is' and believes in client's potential</li> <li>• <b><i>Open</i></b>, honest, use of self, tackling difficult conversations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stays full present and engaged</li> <li>• Focused on client agenda and outcomes</li> <li>• Flexible yet stays aligned with coaching approach</li> <li>• Aligned to personal values while respecting client values</li> <li>• Ensures interventions yield the best outcome for the client</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective listening and clarifying skills</li> <li>• Uses easy-to-understand language</li> <li>• Adapts communication style to client</li> <li>• Provides information and feedback to serve client's goals</li> <li>• Communicates clearly, confidently, and credibly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asks challenging questions</li> <li>• Broadens client's perception</li> <li>• Supports client to generate options</li> <li>• Provides observational feedback</li> <li>• Uses 'self' as resource for client self-awareness</li> </ul>

The AC Framework suggests openness is an aspect of the coach-client relationship. Coaching presence is described more fully, noting characteristics the coach maintains (engaged, flexible, focused) as well as how coaching presence serves the client. The AC framework provides limited insight regarding the constructs under question.

Advances in Developing Human Resources developed a core executive coaching competency framework, representing the synthesis of their competency-based coaching research and the Graduate School Alliance for Education in Coaching (GSAEC) Competency Standard 8.0 (see Table 4). (Maltbia, et al., 2016)

Table 4: Core Executive and Organizational Coaching Competencies, p. 177

Co-creating the relationship		Productive dialogue skills		Helping others succeed	
Forms the foundations for the designed alliance between the coach and client		Depicts interaction focused on meaning making to deepen client awareness by identifying patterns and values alignment		Translates commitments to structures, supports, and actions in service of goal attainment	
Social Competence (SQ)	Emotional Competence (EQ)	Listening	Questioning	Framing/ Reframing	Contributing
Building relationships to establish a personal bond with clients by creating a safe, supportive environment characterized by mutual respect, and freedom of expression. Goleman (2006)	Accessing one's <b><i>coaching presence</i></b> by being conscious of one's own thinking and effectively managing emotions (self and others) to ensure client engagements are experienced as <b><i>open</i></b> , flexible, and productive. Goleman (1995)	Focusing on what clients say (and do not say) to understand the meaning of what is said in the context of the client's desired results. Bentley (2000)	Inquiry to reveal the information needed for maximum benefit to the coaching relationship and the client. Heritage (2002)	Helping executive clients expand their worldview (i.e., mental models, points of view) by examining the learning embedded in experience and comparing the initial presenting problem, challenge, or opportunity to those informed by multiple perspectives. Kasl, Marsick, and Dechant (2000)	Communicating effectively during coaching sessions as a tool for balancing both the challenge and support needed to facilitate learning, growth, and renewal. Maltbia and Power (2009)

We clearly see the placement of coaching presence in this model; furthermore, the construct of openness appears to be an attribute of coaching presence. Though not explicitly stated, upon further exploration, we discover empathy is embedded in Goleman's concept of Social Intelligence. (See Table 5) (Goleman, 2006)

Table 5: Social Intelligence

Social Intelligence	
Social Awareness	Social Facility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Primal Empathy</i></b></li> <li>• Attunement</li> <li>• <b><i>Empathic accuracy</i></b></li> <li>• Social cognition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synchrony</li> <li>• Self-presentation</li> <li>• Influence</li> <li>• Concern</li> </ul>

This model teaches us coaching presence and empathy are skills the coach ought to master to foster the relationship between the coach and the client.

In November 2012, the AC, EMCC, and ICF formed an alliance, the Global Coaching & Mentoring Alliance (GCMA), to advance the professional coaching industry. The GCMA issued a press release in November 2015 stating:

The AC joined the work undertaken by the EMCC and ICF reviewing the commonalities across each body's coaching and mentoring competencies. It was found there was considerable alignment and, as such, no further work is planned in this area. This conclusion should give comfort and confidence to coaches and the wider coaching market that there is cohesion in what constitutes effective coaching and mentoring practice. [http://www.emccouncil.org/webimages/EMCC/Council/GCMA\\_press\\_release\\_15\\_12\\_16.pdf](http://www.emccouncil.org/webimages/EMCC/Council/GCMA_press_release_15_12_16.pdf)

By looking at selected skills – Communication, Listening, Questioning, Relationship Building, and Self-management – there is evidence of a high degree of alignment, supporting the GCMA conclusion (see Table 6).

Table 6: Selected skills: Communication, Listening, Questioning, Relationship Building and Self-management

	ICF	EMCC	AC	ADHR/GSAEC
Communication	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Listening	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Questioning	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Relationship building	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Self-management	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

In comparing the four constructs of this capstone across the frameworks, there is less coherence (see Table 7).

Table 7: Capstone qualities: Authenticity, Coaching Presence, Empathy and Openness

	ICF	EMCC	AC	ADHR/GSAEC
Authenticity	No	Yes	No	No
Coaching Presence	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Empathy	No	Yes	No	Yes
Openness	No	No	Yes	Yes

Rogers stated empathy is thought to be one of the six necessary conditions for constructive personality change (1992), yet it is not reflected in all models. Table 7 contains personal qualities, whereas Table 6 includes skills. Does the lack of consistent representation of personal qualities imply they are less important and skills are more significant? Are the four personal qualities so basic/fundamental, they are “assumed” as a given? The difficulty comparing frameworks stems from their different frames of reference. Furthermore, models



are highly summarized representations; one would have to analyze each concept to fully apprehend its meaning.

It seems challenging to create a universally accepted, comprehensive coaching competency framework that explicitly states *all* skills, capabilities, and personal characteristics. Perhaps examining the four constructs will enrich our understanding of these frameworks. Will we discover the four qualities are reflected in the models, even though they are not explicitly stated? Could the qualities be related to skills that are stated? There may be more commonality than it first appears. The analysis begins with Authenticity.

### Authenticity

Authenticity can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy and the statement 'To thine own self be true.' (Harter, 2002) Authenticity has been explored in psychology (Maslow, 1962; Rogers, 1961) and in the context of coaching. (Stober & Grant, 2006)

Table 8 presents various definitions for authenticity found in the literature. The research illustrates three key concepts associated with authenticity: self-awareness, being vs. doing, and courage. Self-awareness is defined as the process by which a person comes to reflect on his or her own unique values, identity, emotions, goals and beliefs. (Gardner et al., 2005) Self-awareness must precede authenticity as an individual "can only relate consciously to what they know consciously." (Fusco, et al., 2011, p. 127)

Table 8. Illustrative Definitions of Authenticity (in Chronological Sequence)

Source	Definition
Rogers (1961)	When the therapist is what he <i>is</i> , when in the relationship with his client he is genuine and without “front” or façade, <b><i>openly</i></b> being the feelings and attitudes, which at that moment are flowing <i>in</i> him. We have coined the term “congruence” to try to describe this condition. By this we mean that the feelings the therapist is experiencing are available to him, available to his awareness, and he is able to live these feelings, be them, and able to communicate them if appropriate. (p. 61)
Hepworth, Rooney, & Lawson (1997)	The sharing of self by relating in a natural, sincere, spontaneous, <b><i>open</i></b> , and genuine manner.
Barrett-Lennard (1998)	Involving consistency between the three levels of: (a) a person’s primary experience, (b) their symbolized awareness; and (c) their outward behavior and communication. (p. 82)
Harter (2002)	In accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings. (p. 382)
Kernis (2003)	The unobstructed operation of one’s true, or core, self in one’s daily enterprise. Authenticity has four components: (1) awareness, (2) unbiased processing, (3) action, and (4) relational orientation. (p. 1)

Therefore, unless we know our values, identity, emotions, etc. we cannot be authentic; conversely, when we do know our values, identity, emotions, etc. we can be true to ourselves.

Secondly, authenticity exists in two states: a state of *being (internal to the coach)* and a state of *doing (external to the coach)*, as an action in relation to another. Authenticity involves the coach both *knowing* his personal experiences (being/internal) and *expressing* himself in ways congruent with his beliefs, values and emotions (doing/external). Another way to frame this is as personal and interpersonal authenticity.

Kernis’ (2003) relational orientation involves achieving openness and transparency in relationship through self-disclosure and development of mutual

trust. Self-disclosure in relationship involves courage. Peterson and Park's Values-In-Action, or VIA, classification identifies authenticity as a dimension of 'courage' (see Table 9).

Table 9: VIA Classification of Character Strengths (2017)  
<http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths/VIA-Classification>

Wisdom/Knowledge	Creativity, Curiosity, Judgment, Love of Learning, Perspective
Courage	Bravery, Perseverance, <b>Honesty*</b> , Zest
Humanity	Love, Kindness, Social Intelligence
Justice	Teamwork, Fairness, Leadership
Temperance	Forgiveness, Humility, Prudence, Self-Regulation
Transcendence	Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence, Gratitude, Hope, Humor, Spirituality

\*Honesty [**authenticity**, integrity]: Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way and acting in a sincere way; being without pretense; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions.  
<http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths/VIA-Classification>

Brown draws a similar connection between authenticity and courage. Through her grounded theory research, Brown discovered people who cultivate authenticity work to let go of what people think:

Authenticity is the daily practice of letting go of who we think we're supposed to be and embracing who we are. Choosing authenticity means cultivating the **courage** to be imperfect, to set boundaries, and to allow ourselves to be vulnerable. (2010, p. 50)

Simply stated, authenticity is the coach's self-awareness to know and accept himself (personal) and the courage to express who he is in relation to others (interpersonal).

### Basis in coaching theory

Authenticity (congruence, genuineness) is a cornerstone of Carl Rogers'

humanistic, person-centered approach. (1961) In coaching literature, authenticity is referenced in two ways: 1) the authenticity of the coach practitioner, and 2) authenticity as an essential aspect of the coach-client relationship.

Regarding the practitioner, Natiello asserts congruence is difficult to achieve and requires a high level of

Self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-trust. It is a state of realness that exists in persons who have deeply explored the experience of self and accepted the truths they find in their exploration. (1987, p. 206)

Brown agrees wholeheartedly, noting our ability to be authentic depends on “our level of self-acceptance, our sense of belonging to ourselves, and our ability to express self-empathy.” (2007, p. 264)

Taking the attributes noted by Natiello and Brown as prerequisites for authenticity, we can place them in a diagram to show their relationship (see Figure 1). We can’t accept something until we know it is; as such self-awareness is the start of the process. Once we know, then we can choose to accept. Once we accept, then we trust.

Figure 1: Authenticity Process Model



Only when the coach is personally authentic can he be authentic in his relationships (interpersonal authenticity). The practitioner facilitates a

relationship encompassing empathy, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness. (Rogers, 1961) For interpersonal authenticity, Rogers notes:

The therapist should be, within the confines of this relationship, a congruent, genuine, integrated person. It means that within the relationship he is freely and deeply himself, with his actual experience accurately represented by his awareness of himself. (1992, p. 828)

Authenticity is a personal characteristic of the practitioner and also a characteristic of the coach-client relationship. When authenticity is present in the relationship, the client will discover the capacity for personal growth. (Rogers, 1961)

#### Authenticity as a coaching competency

One of the coach's roles in relationship is to serve as a "source of truthful information" (Stober & Grant, 2006, p. 31) and does so by giving honest feedback where appropriate. Failing to give feedback to the client regarding what the coach experiences is withholding vital information. The coach strives to come across in a way that ensures the client feels understood and accepted while sharing his perception of her. Being genuine does not require the coach to be brutally honest. The objective is to "deliver the message with sensitivity and respect while maintaining the connection and relationship." (Dagley, 2010, p. 69) By demonstrating empathy, unconditional positive regard and authenticity, the coach develops a trusting relationship with the client.

When authenticity is combined with empathy and unconditional positive regard, clients have a unique opportunity to gain clarity for themselves hearing another's genuine experience with them given in a context of caring and understanding. The coach employs these qualities in service of building rapport such that clients can actively engage in making choices

about the actions they will take in their growth. (Stober & Grant, 2006, p. 24)

Critical moments are moments when tensions, uncertainties, and anxieties arise, and can be recognized by one or both parties. Giving feedback to a client can be considered a 'critical moment'; these observations need to be communicated in a way that the client can listen to and consider them. De Haan further explains coaching relationships are a series of critical moments, and it is the result of such moments the client begins to learn and change. (de Haan, 2008) Authenticity plays another role in the relationship. Whitworth notes,

You, as the coach, must be yourself, authentically, so clients can feel the honesty and integrity of whom you are. You will be their model of what risk taking looks like, what it means to be real and honest." (Whitworth et al., 2007, p. 88-89)

In a sense, the coach teaches the client how to be authentic by being authentic with her. As stated earlier, being authentic means being courageous. Taking risks with your client shows the client they can take risks too.

### Coaching Presence

Presence is described in literature as a state of being. Dossey's work describes three qualities of existing: (1) physical presence (body), (2) psychological presence (mind), and (3) therapeutic presence (body-mind-spirit). (Dossey, 1995) Physical presence refers to the present location of the body. Psychological presence entails the present moment awareness of self or in relationship with another. The practitioner can be physically present and psychologically absent, i.e., the mind is elsewhere. Therapeutic presence is

described as bringing one's whole self – body, mind and spirit - as facilitator of healing. (VanKuiken, et al., 2016)

Presence is characterized by qualities of focused attention and **open**, alert awareness to what is occurring; an absence of an historical self or predetermined ways of being; **authentic** and transparent expression; connection with oneself, others, and the environment; a subtly sensed or intuitively recognized field surrounding the person; a stillness or silence that exists in the midst of activity; and non-judgment, or acceptance. The result of Presence is full engagement in the unfolding of life from moment to moment. One is receptive to one's internal subjective experience and **open** to perceive information about others and the environment. One is able to process this information in an immediate and spontaneous way, allowing for **authentic** movement or expression in alignment with both the internal and external environment. (Topp, 2006, p. 73-74)

Topp's explanation shows the connection between Presence and two of the other constructs – openness and authenticity. My interpretation is: openness is a necessary prerequisite *for* presence; authenticity is a resultant quality *of* presence. To display the relationship of inputs and outputs as a model might look like this (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Coaching Presence Process Model (version 1)



### Basis in coaching theory

While therapeutic presence is a quality of *being* more than it is *doing* (Gehart, 2012), in coaching both states are significant. The guiding theoretical perspectives of Gestalt Coaching define coaching presence and include three distinct features:

1) Integrated presence and intentional use of self as coach, 2) skillful tracking of and movement with the Cycle of Experience and the Unit of Work, and 3) mastery of working with awareness and the force of resistance to support new learning and new possibilities. (Siminovitch & Van Eron, 2006, p. 50)

“Integrated presence incorporates awareness and choice between one’s interior and exterior reality.” (Siminovitch & Van Eron, 2006, p. 50) *Integrated presence as intentional use of self as coach* can be understood as an approach where the coach focuses on his own subjective experience with the client and shares this appropriately as part of an authentic dialogue. (Bluckert, 2006) A central tenant of Gestalt coaching is the use of self as a coaching instrument in the role of the intervener. (Siminovitch & Van Eron, 2006)

Coaching presence, therefore, is the coach’s way of being with the client that contributes to the coaching relationship and increases the client’s self-awareness. Let’s analyze this definition a little further:

- 1) *Way of being* – Silsbee suggests presence as a *state*. The summation of the coach’s personal qualities - openness, vulnerability, curiosity, awareness, acceptance, etc. - personifies his presence. (Silsbee, 2008)
- 2) *Contributes to the coaching relationship* – “being there” is not enough. How the coach uses his presence affects the relationship; therefore, in this context, presence is an *action*. Use of self in service to the client.
- 3) *Increases the client’s self-awareness* – “presence can be understood as being empathetic, compassionate, nonjudgmental, accepting, and patient toward clients.” (Cravens & Whiting, 2014, p. 27) Engaging with clients in this way enables them to sit with and experience an issue and therefore transform their relationship with it. (Gehart, 2012)

### Coaching presence as a coaching competency

Coaching presence is a dimension of the coach and the coach-client relationship.



As a dimension of the coach, he establishes presence internally by being intentional about what he invites into his field of awareness. The practitioner consciously focuses his attention on that which will affect his resourcefulness as coach, such as bringing certain qualities into our awareness, qualities such as compassion, non-judgment, non-attachment, unconditional positive regard, and optimism. He can also hold a perspective of the client as resourceful, creative and whole; focus on the client's coaching outcomes; or focus on the client's potential. (Silsbee, 2008)

As a dimension of the relationship, the coach uses his presence in ways that are visible to the client. He shares his moment-by-moment observations, which in turn directs the client's attention to his present moment and increases her self-awareness. The use of silence (sometimes called "holding space") allows the client to work openly on her triggers, assumptions, biases, and habits free from judgment, comparison or fear. This openness creates space for new insight and understanding. (Patterson, 2011, p. 126)

The ICF competency model provides information regarding how presence is demonstrated in a coaching relationship:

- The coach is a completely connected observer,
  - The connection is to the whole of the client,
  - The coach evidences a complete curiosity that is undiluted by a need to perform, and
  - The coach trusts that value is inherent in the process rather than having a need to create value.
- <http://coachfederation.org/files/IndCred/ICFCompetenciesLevelsTable.pdf>

O'Neill's characterization of presence is worth noting. Coaches need to remain effective in working with ambiguity, conflict and tension. (O'Neill, 2007;

Dagley, 2010) If the coach cannot withstand the stress and handle his own discomfort, he is no longer useful to the client. He absorbs the anxiety and becomes ineffective. (O'Neill, 2007) Simply stated, coaches who maintain presence are comfortable being uncomfortable. They sustain their tolerance for the tension in the relationship. It stands to reason the coach's ability to be present serves as a model for the client to learn to be fully present with her own experiences.

While the coach's presence is his most powerful tool (O'Neill, 2007), it is not possible to be fully present 100% of the time. Internal impediments to presence include habits of mind; a desire to look good, avoid conflict, or be perceived as smart; an investment in maintaining equilibrium in the relationship with the client; or the need to be seen or see himself as a particular kind of coach. (Silsbee, 2008)

Barriers to presence as perceived by ICF include: the coach is attached to his own performance; the coach substitutes thinking and analysis for presence; the coach is attached to his view of the situation rather than the client's view; the coach is overly reliant on a coaching formula, tool or coaching questions; and the coach is teaching rather than coaching.

<http://coachfederation.org/files/IndCred/ICFCompetenciesLevelsTable.pdf>

We have concluded that presence is a wider, deeper, and more encompassing state of being that entails bringing our whole self to our work as coaches. The practitioner's ability to integrate several qualities – unconditional positive regard, acceptance, awareness, nonjudgmental - determines how open,

attentive, and connected he is to himself and others. The quality of his presence serves his efficacy as a developer of people and can be cultivated through mindfulness. Mindfulness is considered a high level of presence. (Silsbee, 2008)

Mindfulness is “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4)

Mindfulness has to do with attention and awareness. Meditation is the process by which we go about deepening our attention and awareness, refining them, and putting them to greater practical use in our lives. (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. xvii)

Cravens and Whiting elaborate on the benefits of mindfulness:

Through the process of mindfulness, a person is able to disidentify from the contents of the consciousness (i.e., thoughts, emotions, value judgments) and view his or her moment-by-moment experience with greater clarity and objectivity. (2014, p. 27)

The coach can bring mindfulness, or nonjudgmental present moment awareness, to his thoughts, body, or heart. (Silsbee, 2008; Riso & Hudson, 1999)

Mindful *thought* practices improve the coach’s ability to focus his attention, self-observe, and let go of thoughts that distract his meditation. He builds the ability to be an observer, or witness, which increases his self-awareness. (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Silsbee, 2008; Tan, 2012) As coaches, we become the “completely connected observer.” (ICF,

<http://coachfederation.org/files/IndCred/ICFCompetenciesLevelsTable.pdf>)

Mindful *thought* practices include breathing, self-observing and letting go of attachments/habits that get in the way, and journaling. (Tan, 2012)

Somatic awareness involves understanding the *body* is a source of information with respect to habits, attachments, and aversions. The coach's habitual reactions generally show up first as a somatic reaction. When he attunes to the sensations in his body, he can respond with greater choice and creativity. Mindful body practices help the coach become more attentive to these bodily sensations. (Silsbee, 2008) Mindful *body* practices include walking meditation, body scan, centering, mindful movement, yoga, tai chi, and observation of sensations. (Tan, 2012)

Coaching is a relational activity. Developing awareness of *emotions and feelings* will allow for greater connection with the client. Observing emotions is important; however, it removes the practitioner from the actual experience. Experiencing emotions brings all three aspects together: mind, body and heart. Observing and experiencing emotions are both relevant to coaching. (Silsbee, 2008) Mindful *heart/emotive* practices include just like me meditation, loving-kindness meditation, daily gratitude practice, multiplying goodness meditation, and tonglen meditation. (Tan, 2012)

The process model for presence can be enhanced to incorporate this additional information about mindfulness (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Coaching Presence Process Model (version 2)



## Empathy

Like many of the constructs subject to this capstone, the challenge in researching empathy is finding a definition upon which everyone can agree. Interpretations of empathy appear to depend upon the author's viewpoint (scholar vs. practitioner). According to Kerem, Fishman, & Josselson (2001), empathy has been conceived of as a mode of perceiving (Kohut, 1984), a mode of knowing (Greenson, 1960), a mode of feeling (Strayer, 1987), a mode of being (Rogers, 1975), and a mode of relating (Jordan, et al., 1991).

The various definitions noted in Table 10 demonstrate empathy is multidimensional and complex. While there is a lack of consensual definition, the literature concludes empathy contains both cognitive and affective elements.

Cognitive empathy, also called intellectual empathy, is

The ability to understand what another person is experiencing. It also includes the understanding of why other people may be feeling the way they do and involves an intellectual process to arrive at another's emotional state. (Parker & Blackburn, 2014, p. 15)

Emotional empathy, also called affective empathy, is "being able to vicariously experience the emotional experience of others." (Parker & Blackburn, 2014, p. 15). In short, empathy consists of a thinking component and a feeling component.

Table 10. Illustrative Definitions of Empathy (in Chronological Sequence)

Source	Definition
Rogers (1980)	The therapist's sensitive ability and willingness to understand the client's thoughts, feelings, and struggles from the client's point of view. [It is] this ability to see completely through the client's eyes, to adopt his frame of reference. (p. 85) It means entering the private perceptual world of the other. Being sensitive, moment-by-moment, to the changing felt meanings, which flow in this other person. It means sensing meanings of which he or she is scarcely aware. (p. 142)
Davis (1983)	1) Perspective Taking (PT) is the cognitive ability to take on the psychological perspective of another; (2) Empathic Concern (EC) is experiencing "other oriented" feelings of sympathy and concern for others' misfortune; (3) Personal Distress (PD) involves one's own feelings of discomfort and anxiety in emotional social situations; and (4) Fantasy (FS) is the tendency for one to transpose him- or herself into the thoughts and feelings of fictitious characters in books, plays, and movies.
Rogers (1992)	To sense the client's private world as if it were your own, but without ever losing the 'as if' quality—this is empathy . . . To sense the client's anger, fear, or confusion as if it were your own, yet without your own anger, fear, or confusion getting bound up in it, is the condition we are endeavoring to describe. (p. 829)
Wiseman (1996)	1) To be able to see the world as others see it; (2) to be nonjudgmental; (3) to understand another person's feelings; and (4) to communicate your understanding of that person's feelings.
Long, et al., (1999)	Six components of empathy: (1) empathic sensitivity, (2) suspension of one's thoughts and feelings, (3) empathic listening, (4) empathic communication, (5) the communication of an understanding through paraphrasing, and (6) empathic checking with a partner.
Ivey, Pederson, & Ivey (2001)	The ability to perceive a situation from the other person's perspective. To see, hear, and feel the unique world of the other.
Block-Lerner, et al. (2007)	The attempt by one self-aware self to comprehend nonjudgmentally the positive and negative experiences of another self. (p. 502)
Batson (2009)	Eight distinct concepts of empathy: (1) knowing another person's internal state, including his or her thought and feelings; (2) adopting the posture or matching the neural responses of an observed other; (3) coming to feel as another person feels; (4) intuiting or studying oneself into another's situation; (5) imagining how another is thinking and feeling; (6) imagining how one would think and feel in the other's place; (7) feeling distress at witnessing another person's suffering; and (8) feeling sorry for another person who is suffering.
Miller & Rollnick (2013)	Sensing and articulating the client's inner reality precisely and accurately; evolves through the clinician's skillful formulation of deep and accurate reflections of meaning in the client's own personalized context. It is seeking to understand the client's frame of reference and the logic that drives the client's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. (p. 33)
Brill & Nahmani (2016)	Understanding the point of view of another person including his or her emotions, experiences, behaviors, and interpretations. (p. 4)

The literature suggests empathy, like authenticity, exists as a *being/internal* mode and a *doing/external* mode. In the context of coaching, empathy in its *being* state refers to the coach sensing, understanding, and feeling the client's inner realities – an internal manifestation in the coach. In its *doing* state, the coach articulates his understanding of the client's reality – an outward manifestation by the coach.

### Basis in coaching theory

Empathy as a coaching construct comes from social psychology, including humanistic psychology and Gestalt psychology. There are many parallels between Rogers' humanistic, person-centered approach and professional coaching. Empathy is considered one of the "key qualities from the humanistic perspective to building a productive coaching relationship." (Stober and Grant, 2006, p. 21) In order to engage in the process of empathy it is necessary to maintain a stance of unconditional positive regard. (Rogers, 1951, 1975) It is an acceptance of the client for who they are. This acceptance does not mean the practitioner must agree with everything the client says or does; rather, it means the practitioner is able to maintain an attitude of refraining from judgment.

(Rogers, 1959) Elliott, et al. concur with Rogers:

Research has shown empathy to be inseparable from the other relational conditions; therefore, practitioners should seek to offer empathy in the context of positive regard and genuineness. Empathy will not be effective unless it is grounded in authentic caring for the client. (2011, p. 48)

Gestalt coaching finds its theory and practice from Gestalt therapy and Gestalt psychology. (Bluckert, 2014) Gestalt coaches strive to "develop a quality

of interaction grounded in inclusion, collaborative partnership, strong contact, and a commitment to dialogue.” (Bluckert, 2014, p. 89) The word “inclusion” stands for empathy as follows, “Inclusion is putting oneself into the experience of the client as much as possible, feeling it as if in one’s own body – without losing a separate sense of self.” (Yontef, 2006, p. 24)

### Empathy as a coaching competency

Empathy is a personal attribute used to co-create the coach-client relationship and achieve rapport; empathy establishes trust and intimacy with the client. “For all rapport, the root of caring, stems from emotional attunement, from the capacity for empathy.” (Goleman, 1995, p. 96) The goal is to understand the client’s experience, from what is spoken and unspoken, to find meanings that lie at the edge of the client’s awareness.

By demonstrating empathy, the practitioner is performing several important tasks: allowing clients to become more fully aware of their own construction of reality, demonstrating positive regard for the client, and building trust in the relationship. When this understanding is communicated, clients often feel a deeply rewarding sense of being known and can allow clients to know themselves more fully too. (Stober and Grant, 2006, p. 23)

Demonstrating empathy requires practitioners to:

- Maintain a stance of hypothesis, always checking their clients to ascertain whether they have accurately understood the essence of the client’s experience.
- Set aside their own feelings, reactions, and thoughts in order to sense the client’s world as if it were their own. (Stober and Grant, 2006, p. 23)

A practitioner’s ability to empathize with his client may be impaired by: 1) inner dialogue or chatter, 2) lack of self-awareness regarding one’s emotions, and 3) internal shame.



Containing personal thoughts, feelings, and suggestions for the client can be difficult, and interfere with the coach's ability to establish empathy:

A failure of empathy caused by listening to self-generated thoughts rather than the client-generated perspectives can prevent practitioners from engaging with the client's point of view, a precursor to mutual engagement. (Burke & Hohman, 2014, p. 34)

Burke and Hohman (2014) identify three behaviors, or traps, to which practitioners can fall prey:

Clinician thoughts and behaviors that interfere with effective communication and distort understanding of the accuracy of the client's perspectives can be considered "communication traps." They are termed "traps" because these behaviors often contaminate the integrity and objectivity of the listening and reflections practices that should build engagement, and, ultimately, help clients reflect upon, clarify, and strengthen their wants, reasons, needs, and plans for change.

- Premature Focus Trap – Identify a core focus for the discussion before the client has articulated a specific area of concern.
- Expert Trap – assuming the client's relative lack of expertise with this issue is the primary obstacle and the clinician must rely on personal "expertise" and install advice, education, and suggestions.
- Question-Answer Trap: reply on expertise to form questions that might yield diagnostic or assessment information that would allow the clinician to identify the key problem and formulate possible solutions. (Burke & Hohman, 2014, p. 34)

Coaches who are unable to recognize and/or manage their feelings are at their mercy. At one end of the spectrum is emotional avoidance. Emotional numbing is a diminished awareness of the coach's emotional state and compromises his ability to experience empathy for others. (Jones, 2013) At the other end of the spectrum is a fixation on emotions.

Preoccupation with intense emotions, judgments and other thoughts can also interfere with the practitioner's ability to be more attuned to and responsive to clients. (Schneider, et al., 2014, p. 21)

Goleman proposes, “Knowing one’s emotion in the moment – self-awareness – is the keystone of emotional intelligence.” (Goleman, 1995, p. 43) Self-awareness (Block-Lerner et al., 2007; Goleman, 1995) and a nonjudgmental stance are prerequisites for empathic responding. Practitioners with greater insight and understanding about their emotions are more attuned to the social signals from others.

Through her research, Brown identified another barrier to empathy – shame. Shame is the painful feeling of believing we are flawed, broken, and inadequate and therefore not worthy of belonging and acceptance. (Brown, 2007; Marsh, 2015; Riso & Hudson, 1999)

Regardless of the source of shame, the coach can build resilience to shame by giving and receiving empathy. (Brown, 2007) Empathy is generally thought to be a skill or behavior that can be developed, rather than a trait that individuals have high or low levels of. (Block-Lerner, 2007) Brown concurs, “I believe empathy is best understood as a skill, because being empathic, or having the capacity to show empathy, is not a quality that is innate or intuitive.” (2007, p. 33)

We cannot be empathic with others until we are empathic with ourselves. (Brown, 2007; Block-Lerner et al, 2007) Facilitating acceptance of *one’s own* emotions is an important step toward fostering empathy for others. (Block-Lerner et al., 2007) Brown agrees:

When we are ready to start practicing empathy, we should start with our most important relationship first – the one we have with our “self.” If we judge ourselves harshly and are incapable or unwilling to acknowledge our own emotions, we will struggle in our relationships with others. Empathy

and connection require us to know and accept ourselves before we can know and accept others. (2007, p. 49)

What is being referred to is self-care, activities that focus on and support kindness toward self. Tan identifies “kindness as the engine of empathy” (Tan, 2012, p. 166) and recommends mindfulness-based practices as a way to develop self-awareness, which leads to empathy for self and others. (Tan, 2012)

Continuing with the use of a model to portray the building blocks, the antecedent attributes of empathy could be represented as follows (see Figure 4):

Figure 4: Empathy Process Model



### Openness

In psychology literature, Rogers talks about openness from the perspective of the client. When talking about the “person who emerges” (Rogers, 1961, p. 115), he notes the individual becomes more open to her experience. Rogers indicates, in a safe relationship, defensiveness is supplanted by increasing openness to experience. The individual becomes more self-aware of her attitudes and emotions. She senses and is able to take in all evidence that exists, not just data that fits preconceived notions. When she protects herself, certain experiences are prevented from coming into her awareness. A person who is open to experience receives all data and processes it internally without distortion. She can tolerate ambiguity and conflicting information. Openness to

experience means being fully aware and engaged in the human experience – not avoiding or shutting anything out. It means she accepts and embraces all parts of herself. The self emerges from the experience. Instead of imposing structure *on* experience, discovery of structure *in* experience emerges. She becomes a participant in and an observer of the experience rather than being in control of it. Adaptability replaces rigidity. (Rogers, 1961)

### Basis in coaching theory

Gestalt coaching includes a set of core assumptions and beliefs, one of which is the paradoxical theory of change. (Beisser, 1970) “Change occurs when one is fully in contact with ‘what is’, the truth of our experience, rather than trying to be different or disowning parts of ourselves.” (Bluckert, 2014, p. 83) I equate the paradoxical theory of change with openness: when I am open to myself, accepting myself for who I am, then I can shift toward something new. Rogers provides supporting evidence with a similar paradox: “the degree to which each one of us is willing to be himself, then he finds not only himself changing; he finds that other people to whom he relates are also changing.” (Rogers, 1961, p. 22)

Openness is integral to the constructs of authenticity and presence. We will continue to explore openness in relation to those two qualities, as well as determine if there is a relationship with empathy.

### *Openness and Empathy*

The coach’s capacity for empathy is directly related to his degree of openness. To achieve empathy, practitioners must suspend, or set aside, their own thoughts, feelings, biases, and judgments in order to see the client’s world

as if it were their own. In a qualitative study of clients' experience of empathy, the practitioner's ability to be nonjudgmental, attentive, **open** to discussing any topic, and paying attention to details were perceived as empathic. (Myers, 2000)

In examining the relationship between empathy and compassion, openness plays a critical role. To be empathic, the coach has to be **open** to experiencing his feelings without shutting down or avoiding them:

- If empathy is the ability to tap into our own experiences in order to connect with an experience someone is relating to us, compassion is the willingness to be **open** to this process.
- When we practice generating compassion, we can expect to experience the fear of our pain. Compassion practice involves learning to relax and allow ourselves to move gently toward what scares us. The trick to doing this is to stay with emotional distress without tightening into aversion, to let fear soften us rather than harden into resistance.
- To practice compassion, we have to be willing to be **open** and present.
- We must be honest and forgiving about when and how we shut down. Without justifying or condemning ourselves, we do the courageous work of **opening** to suffering. (Brown, 2007, p. 44-45)

### *Openness and Authenticity*

“Authenticity, in the existential tradition, means being **open** and true to the experience.” (Stober & Grant, 2006, p. 24) This statement echoes Rogers' conceptualization of openness to experience. Brown's definition for authenticity aligns nicely with Rogers' conceptualization as well (see Table 11).

Table 11: Openness – Rogers & Brown

<b>Openness to Experience (Rogers, 1961)</b>	<b>Authenticity (Brown, 2010, p. 50)</b>
An individual becomes increasingly open to experience when he	Authenticity is
moves from distorting data to fit preconceived notions	the daily practice of letting go of who we think we're supposed to be
to accepting and embracing all parts of oneself.	And embracing who we are.

### *Openness and Coaching Presence*

Helping professions, such as nursing, explore the relationship between openness and presence. VanKuiken describes this connection: the nurse must be **open** physically, emotionally, and spiritually to be authentically present. When he is present, he is attentive to the whole of the client, not just the spoken words. He works to unearth the meaning in what is expressed and not expressed. As he listens deeply, “the vulnerable **openness** of presence creates a space where healing can occur.” (VanKuiken et al., 2016, p. 2)

### Openness as a coaching competency

Whitworth et al. refer to openness and spaciousness as qualities that make the coaching relationship work. Simply put, openness/spaciousness creates a safe environment where the client can dream, experiment, and explore possibilities. For the coach, it means

Complete detachment from any particular course of action. To preserve openness in the relationship, the coach must not be attached to whether the client takes his or her suggestions. (Whitworth et al., 2007, p. 20-21)

The coach acts as a facilitator by promoting an attitude of jointly searching for understanding, clarity, and potential answers. By reinforcing openness to experience, the coach models holding options open, recognizing the complexity of people and contexts, and not leaping prematurely to solutions. Coaches can demonstrate this is by framing their observations of the client and their situation as hypothesis to be tested. (Stober and Grant, 2006, p. 34-35)

Within the context of coaching, I discovered openness is inextricably linked with, and serves as a catalyst for, all three constructs discussed in this capstone – empathy, authenticity, and coaching presence. Cravens & Whiting (2004) hypothesize mindfulness increases the practitioner’s ability to be more

open. The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) provides evidence that increased mindfulness is correlated with increased openness to experience. (Brown and Ryan, 2003) As he becomes more open, the practitioner's capacity for empathy, authenticity, or presence increases. In other words, openness is the *extent* to which the quality is displayed. The conclusion, therefore, is openness is the construct upon which the other qualities are based. Whenever the coach is authentic, present, or empathic, he is, by default, open.

This last model brings the relationship of all four constructs together to show how they are interrelated (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Openness Process Model



In chapter three, I will detail the methodology used in my research. In chapter four, I will summarize the data that was collected in the interviews and how I applied the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. Chapter five will be an interpretation of the data, supported by evidence from literature where appropriate. In chapter six, I will conclude the paper.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Qualitative Research Design

For my capstone, I used two data collection methods: (1) literature from the fields of psychology and coaching, and (2) qualitative interviews with experienced coach practitioners.

#### Research through literature

The constructs of authenticity, presence, empathy, and openness are not unique to the field of coaching. In fact, coaching theoretical perspectives are rooted in psychological theory that support human growth and development, including the Humanistic perspective, Adult Development, Cognitive Psychology, and Gestalt Theory, among others. (Stober & Grant, 2006; Peltier, 2010)

My literature review initially focused on sources from psychology such as the Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, Journal of the Society for Social Work, Person-Centered Review, and Clinical Social Work Journal. My experience in healthcare verified these constructs being put to use in the clinical setting. Therefore, I expanded my scope to include clinical data sources such as the Journal of Holistic Nursing and Clinical Supervision. Coaching-related sources included The Coaching Psychologist, OD Practitioner, the ICF website, and International Journal of Evidenced Based Coaching and Mentoring. At one point, I was having difficulty locating sources of seminal theory. In consultation with my advisor, she suggested the ProQuest database to locate dissertations on related



topics. A review of the Reference sections helped me identify several relevant sources.

The erudite journals and articles provided frameworks, definitions and theories at the conceptual level, less than helpful for the pragmatic coaching tactics and techniques I was searching for. I returned to several of the books I read as part of my coursework in the Organizational Dynamics program: *Evidence Based Coaching* (Stober & Grant, 2006), *The Psychology of Executive Coaching* (Peltier, 2010), and *On Becoming a Person* (Rogers, 1961). I supplemented these readings with additional sources I discovered over the past year: *Co-Active Coaching* (Whitworth, et al., 2007), *Presence-Based Coaching* (Silsbee, 2008), and *Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart* (O'Neill, 2007). Perhaps it was the second reading of the course textbooks, or allowing more time for reflection, or making connections between the literature and the data being collected – whatever the cause may be, the practitioner-based sources proved highly applicable and beneficial.

### Interview methodology

The primary goals of this study were: (a) to define authenticity, coaching presence, empathy, and openness from the perspective of the coach practitioner, (b) to provide concrete examples of how the practitioner demonstrates these constructs in a coaching engagement, i.e., how do they “show up”, (c) to understand the antithesis of each construct and what that might look like, (d) to identify factors that inhibit the coach’s ability to demonstrate these qualities, and (e) to determine if and how active practitioners cultivate their ability in each area.

A qualitative research design was best suited to reach the primary research goals of this capstone. Qualitative research was appropriate because the capstone focus was on understanding practitioner’s described experiences of performing the identified personal qualities. An intended outcome of this capstone was to create my own reformulation of the constructs and incorporate them into my practice as a professional coach.

Five questions were developed for each construct, and I used a semi-structured format for the interviews. The questions were posed in the same sequence for each interview. Open-ended questions were designed to elicit concrete examples of coaching skills, both verbal and non-verbal, used to demonstrate the four personal characteristics. The essence is “If I were to observe you coaching your client, what would I hear, see, sense, taste, touch, and smell when demonstrating x.” In short, the complete experience – sensory, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral.

The interview questions were:

Question	What it is intended to reveal
<u>Question 1:</u> How do you define _____ ?	Determine if a consensual definition for each construct exists among active practitioners. Comprehend how each practitioner defines the construct – what is included, what is excluded, etc.
<u>Question 2:</u> How do you demonstrate _____ in a coaching engagement?	Provide concrete examples: - verbal – what is said and not said - non-verbal – what is done and not done
<u>Question 3:</u> What is the opposite of _____ ?	Further develops the definition of the construct (question 1) by looking not only at what it is, but also at what it is not, i.e., the antithesis.

<p><u>Question 4:</u> What inhibits you from being _____ with a client?</p>	<p>Understand facets within the coach, with the client, and/or within the relationship that may challenge the coach's ability to demonstrate the construct.</p>
<p><u>Question 5:</u> How do you cultivate _____ ?</p>	<p>Identify techniques, practices, and/or approaches used to intentionally foster the coach's capability/capacity to embody the construct.</p>

### Participants

Convenience sampling is common in qualitative research design due to practical considerations, selecting participants who are available and willing to participate. (Etikan, et al. 2015) My goal was to interview between ten and twelve coach practitioners. Eligibility criteria included coaches with five or more years of coaching experience; no other qualifications or credentials were required. I expected participants to have a range of experience in terms of duration as a coach as well as clientele. The researcher chose experienced practitioners for a few reasons: (1) allows participants to draw upon their vast experience when providing specific examples, (2) provide unique ideas less experienced practitioners might not have to offer, and (3) affords the researcher the opportunity to develop a hypothesis about what might be different had she selected practitioners with less than five years' experience.

I authored an invitation for the study and sent it to my advisor for review. The Director of the Organizational Dynamics program at Penn distributed the invitation to the Penn DYNAM Community via email. I also directly contacted five practitioners outside the Penn DYNAM community to solicit their involvement. The

results were successful – I had twelve interviews scheduled within a two-week timeframe.

The interviews were conducted either in person or by phone and lasted anywhere from 45 to 90 minutes, depending up on how much time the participant was able to give and the level of detail they were willing to provide. Each interviewee was afforded anonymity – all information received was kept confidential to protect participant identity. Several participants expressed interest in receiving my findings. I did not record the interviews, opting instead to type comments verbatim. About halfway through the interviews, I modified the questions slightly. Instead of asking, ‘How do you demonstrate empathy with a client?’ I would ask that question and then add, “In other words, if I were to observe you coaching your client, what would I see, hear, observe you doing or saying?”

#### Treatment of data

The qualitative data from participants was entered into Microsoft Word by question. Each participant had a separate Word document titled “Thesis Questionnaire <Participant Name>” and saved into a folder called “Interviews.” The data was then transposed to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, one spreadsheet for each construct for a total of four spreadsheets, titled using the nomenclature “Interview Results - <Construct>” and saved into the same folder.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA COLLECTED

Fifteen practitioners meeting the eligibility criteria agreed to participate. I elected to conclude data collection at twelve individuals as no new conceptual insights were being generated. The following table summarizes the participant demographics:

Participant	Gender	# of years coaching	ICF Certified? Level
A	Male	22	No
B	Male	8	Yes – ACC
C	Female	30	No
D	Female	11	No
E	Female	5	No
F	Female	14	Lapsed – PCC
G	Female	20	Lapsed – ACC
H	Female	5	No
I	Female	40	No
J	Female	10	Yes – ACC
K	Female	6	No
L	Male	32	No
Average		17	

The researcher had varying degrees of familiarity with the background of each individual. Familiarity of the participants is one method of ensuring trustworthy data collection (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

#### Analyzing the Data

My data analysis followed the guidelines for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). (Charlick, et al., 2016) Studies based on IPA examine how individuals make meaning of their life experiences. There are two aspects to IPA: 1) descriptive phenomenology – describing an experience

without giving meaning to it, and 2) interpretive phenomenology – revealing and interpreting implicit meaning in a lived experience. (Charlick, et al., 2016)

The process used to apply IPA is described as follows: After the interviews were completed and notes finalized, I organized the data by question to look across all respondents and their answers, in order to identify commonalities and dissimilarities. All data from each question was put together in Microsoft Excel as follows:

	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D	...	Participant L
<b>Construct #1</b>						
Question 1						
Question 2						
Question 3						
Question 4						
Question 5						
<b>Construct #2</b>						
Question 1						
Question 2						
Etc.						

I read through the data a number of times, reflecting back on each participant and the conversation. I highlighted words, phrases or sentences that included any of the following: comments that were consistent with the literature, provided an expanded view of the literature, consistent with data from other respondents, or something that particularly resonated with the researcher, i.e., a key insight. Each construct was considered a “case” for purposes of analysis. For each case, I wrote interpretative comments in the margin next to each answer. The interpretive comment might be like the following:

### Original Transcript:

I demonstrate openness by not being married to a model. If I come with a recipe and disregard what I am learning, that is the opposite of being open. I have to know enough about adult learning to know if I am making choices consistent with what I am learning about the individual, and reflect on the learning.

### Interpretative comments:

1. Coaching is not a recipe to follow, rather it's having a framework or model that you hold lightly and allow yourself to see what transpires with the client.
2. Theory can inform your coaching as you make choices based on what you learn about the client.

At this stage, I set aside the transcript and worked with my interpretative comments to formulate higher-level themes that reflected the source material. In some cases, themes were dropped due to lack of significant evidence. Where needed, sub-themes were developed. I also looked across themes for connections and relatedness. After completing the analysis for a specific case, e.g., Openness, I moved on to the next case, e.g., Authenticity. Once all cases were analyzed, I looked for patterns across the cases.

The data analysis occurred over a period of several weeks. During this timeframe, I found myself going back and re-reading the literature. I noticed the literature took on heightened significance and I gained new meaning. When I returned to the data analysis, the same phenomenon occurred – the data took on greater, deeper meaning. The interplay between the literature and the data was a circular dance, one informing the other.

Once the data analysis was complete, I wrote the narrative account of the study, contained in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### DATA INTERPRETATION

In this chapter, the study is summarized with an overview of the problem, the statement of purpose of the study, a review of the research questions, and key findings from the study.

To the age old question, “Are leaders born or made?” the same can be asked of coaches. Of course there are people whom naturally possess the characteristics of effective coaches: empathy, flexibility, assertiveness, sensitivity, emotional and social intelligence, self-management, etc. Other coaches, equally effective, build their skills with practice, experience, and structured learning – they are made. I believe I fall in the latter camp. This study is designed as a structured learning opportunity to examine four constructs – authenticity, coaching presence, empathy, and openness. The purpose is to create an in-depth conceptualization of each quality, ultimately to be incorporated into my way of coaching. This study seeks to answer the primary research question, how do authenticity, coaching presence, empathy, and openness show up in a coaching relationship? In addressing this central question, several related questions were considered: (a) What are authenticity, coaching presence, empathy, and openness, i.e., how are they defined? (b) Are they related to each other, or to other constructs in some way? (c) What inhibits the coach from demonstrating them? (d) Can they be cultivated, and if so, how? The key findings are summarized below.



## Authenticity

### Inner moves

Silsbee defines the term “inner moves as working on our inner state to be the best possible resource for our client.” (Silsbee, 2008, p. 79) The data suggests coaches develop authenticity by paying attention to their inner state. Authenticity is equated with ‘being yourself’ which fundamentally means knowing yourself – your values (as a person) and capabilities (as a coach). Emulating another coach or coaching style is to be inauthentic. Being authentic also includes possessing certain attitudes such as curiosity, non-judgment toward self and client, and being open and vulnerable. Therefore, being authentic means the coach understands and accepts he is human and not perfect – and doesn’t pretend otherwise.

### It’s all about the client

The key message emanating from the data was succinctly stated by Coach I, “It’s all about the client.” These are the relational moves the coach uses with the client to demonstrate authenticity. First and foremost is, as Coach K described it, is “creating the third space,” also referred to as the “coaching relationship” where the client and the coach each grant power to the coaching relationship. (Whitworth, et al., 2007) From the coach’s perspective, “you have to be willing to give up your self-interest and come from a place of focusing on the client – their needs and concerns,” noted Coach L. This philosophy is consistent with Whitworth, et al., who believe the coach must “make the shift

from 'I am powerful' to the 'coaching relationship is powerful.'" (Whitworth, et al., 2007, p. 16)

How do coaches grant power to the coaching relationship? Being a coach doesn't put you one up on the client; the coach has to be careful not to assume the mantle of that role.

We emphasize the peer relationship – the coach and client have equal, though different roles. They are co-active in the relationship so they are co-creators, collaborators, in a way. (Whitworth, et al., 2007, p. 16)

Several coaches mentioned the importance of setting clear expectations with the client at the beginning of the relationship, like setting the ground rules for engagement: asking the client if they are ok with you being real, is the client comfortable being real, and noting that nothing will leave the room so we can be as authentic and real as possible. Coach A strives to be

As authentic as possible by committing to the core principles of coaching by showing the right blend of courage to confront about what's being talked about while also providing adequate support to help the client see choice and possibility.

O'Neill refers to this as coaching with "backbone and heart." (O'Neill, 2007)

Confronting refers to the truth about how the conversation with the client affects the coach, what he hears, and what he thinks and/or feels as a result of what the client says. The coach shares his observations about what he sees the client doing without judgment – where the client is strong and where she gives up, denies, or holds back. The degree of openness in being authentic depends on the level of the relationship, as evidenced by Coach F, "Filters are high in the early stages of the relationship and become more porous over time." The more the coach gets to know the client, the more he learns what resonates with her

and are better able to construct a message she can receive. Therefore, the coach assesses the level of receptivity of the client before sharing his truth.

The coaches offered examples of confronting clients, which I found particularly helpful. In one case, there was a gap between what had been agreed to (in a prior coaching session) as a way to approach the situation and the route the client ultimately took. Coach A, remaining curious, said,

We were looking to tackle this issue in a way that was for the good of the organization rather than your department, and the approach you described put your needs further out there. Tell me more about why you chose that approach and how did it work?

In another case, the client was complaining and deferring responsibility to others.

Coach I switched roles and began talking like the client.

This is how I am hearing you. Do you think others are hearing it the same way? There is a general concern for you in the organization. People are noticing a difference in you.

That's courage. "When you are courageous on behalf of your client, you demonstrate that you are as committed to their success as they are, on some days even more committed." (Whitworth, et al., 2007, p. 90) Being courageous means being fearless and is risky. Lacking courage to address difficult things is being inauthentic. As Coach G noted, "being fearful of the client reaction is about the coach. You have to learn to let go of the fear."

Holding back, playing it safe, to settle for less from our clients. When we do that, we betray an unspoken trust. Those are the times when we as coaches need to find the courage to speak up, to insist or challenge or even demand, on behalf of our clients that they live up to the capabilities we see in them. (Whitworth, et al., 2007, p. 95)

Another way of challenging the client is through the use of intruding or immediacy. A coach works with whatever comes up, whatever the client brings you, and you leave your ego and agenda at the door. When the coach spots a behavior or habit that is central to the client's outcomes, he should create immediacy. (Silsbee, 2008; O'Neill, 2007) There are times when holding back doesn't serve the client and the coach needs to take charge, trusting his intuition to intrude. (Whitworth, et al., 2007). He helps the client make the connection to what is happening in the moment. The conversation invites the client to see the counterproductive behavior and opens her awareness. When this happens, Coach B tries to normalize the client's reaction by labeling the client's emotion, "I get the sense you're angry about this, but you haven't mentioned anger." Labeling feelings allows the client to confirm or clarify. Normalizing the client's reaction also helps her learn to work through the emotion rather than over-identify with it. (Silsbee, 2008)

On the flip side, coaches also support their clients.

At some level, coaches are always supporting whom clients must be in order to make the changes they want. The skill of acknowledgement helps the coach celebrate the client's internal strengths. By acknowledging that strength, the coach gives the client more access to it. (Whitworth, et al., 2007, p. 45)

While it is the coach's job to look for inner strength and capacity for the client, it may also mean calling the client out of her sense of defeat by "speaking fearlessly to the courageous part of the client while ignoring the part that is self-sabotaging for the sake of their life and possibility." (Whitworth, et al., 2007, p. 90)

### It's also about the coach

The coaches enumerated several things that can interfere with their ability to be authentic. I came to realize the process of becoming a coach is learning how to handle challenges that test your capacity to be authentic in the moment with your client, whether it's your inner critic/self-doubt, making mistakes, focusing on self and not the client, or being seduced by the agreement trap. "It's important to recognize these disruptive experiences are part of the learning and growing stronger as a coach and practitioner" (Whitworth, et al., 2007, p. 110) and calls for the skill of self-management. Self-management is a combination of self-awareness and the skill of recovery. This also includes situations where the coach uncovers something about the client that is beyond the extent of his skills/capacity as a coach and he needs help, or realizing the client and he are not a match, in which case it is best to refer the client to another coach.

### What about perfectionism?

Although perfectionism didn't present itself as a central theme in the data, a few coaches mentioned it. Perfectionism warrants attention because, "most of us fall somewhere on a perfectionist continuum." (Brown, 2012, p. 131)

In the data, I saw a connection between authenticity and vulnerability. We show we are real when we are open and vulnerable. We pretend we can avoid vulnerability, but experiencing vulnerability is not a choice – the only choice we have is how we respond to it. Brown refers to this pretending as "vulnerability armory" and goes on to say in order to let ourselves be seen (*be authentic*), we

must take off the armor. (Brown, 2012) While the armor of perfectionism is employed to shield us from vulnerability, in reality, that shield is a myth (see Table 12).

Table 12: Perfectionism is and isn't

Perfectionism is (p. 130)	Perfectionism is not (p. 128-129)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A self-destructive and addictive belief system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Striving for excellence</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An unattainable goal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-improvement</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About earning approval</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keys to success</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A form of shame</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A way to avoid shame</li> </ul>

We make the journey from perfectionism to freedom by appreciating our imperfections. Brown discovered people who authentically practice self-compassion. Self-compassion includes self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. (Brown, 2010). I'll have more to say on mindfulness later in this chapter.

### Building the construct of authenticity

Defining authenticity simply as “being real” doesn't give full credence to the complexity and depth of the construct. In the context of coaching, being authentic is something a coach does in service to his client and manifests as behaviors that both challenge and support the client. As coaches, we are subject to experiences – both internal and external – that can affect our ability to be authentic. Handling these critical moments in a generative way is one pathway to mastery.

After researching the construct of authenticity through literature and qualitative inquiry, the following reconceptualization addresses the central thesis question and sub-questions, ultimately demonstrating how authenticity “shows up” in coaching (see Table 13).

Table 13: Authenticity Reconceptualization

What is it?	What is it related to?	Conditions that inhibit	Methods to cultivate	How demonstrated in coaching?
Being yourself as a result of knowing your values and capacities  <i>State:</i> Awareness of one’s beliefs, values, and emotions.  <i>Coaching behavior:</i> Sharing your genuine experience with the client given in the context of caring and understanding	Openness  Genuine  Presence  Non-judgment  Self-awareness  Empathy	Fear of client reaction  Perfectionism (Inner Critic)  Focus on self as coach  Client behaviors  Agreeing with client  Lack of self-awareness	Mindfulness  Reflection on coaching sessions  Consultation with coach network  Solicit client feedback  Experiment with client permission  Establishing expectations  Practice coaching	Listen  Admit mistakes  Saying “I don’t know”  Confronting and Supporting  Share your reaction nonjudgmentally (State your truth)  Check your assumptions with client  Immediacy  Humor

### Coaching presence

When the coach practitioners were asked the question, “How do you define coaching presence?” an interesting thing happened. Several coaches hesitated. Silence, followed by, “Hmmm . . .” All of the constructs in this study can be considered elusive, vague, or abstract, and yet coaching presence flummoxed the participants more than any other. Coach A stated it this way, “I

have never thought about that as a construct when it comes to coaching.” Coach E offered this perspective, “You know when it’s happening, but it is difficult to describe.”

Coaching presence is a nuanced construct, with several layers and facets. At the most fundamental level, Coaches E, L and B describe it as ‘how you show up’ – a definition subject to broad interpretation. Another common definition is ‘paying attention’ (Coaches I, B, G, and F). Digging a little deeper, I discovered coaching presence is a matter of two states working together simultaneously: the coach’s mental state and physical state.

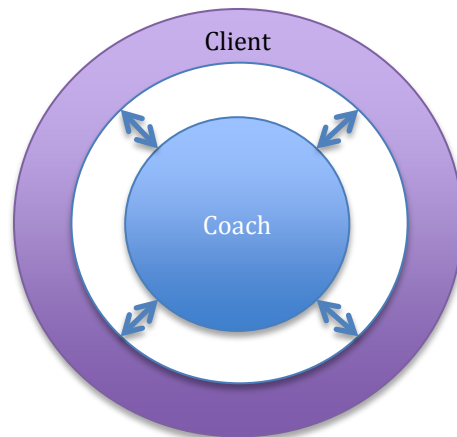
### Mental state

The coach’s mental focus dances between self and client. At the center of Figure 6 is the coach. When the coach’s internal mental state is in equilibrium, he is able to shift from an internal focus (the coach) to an external focus (the client). The data suggests a coach’s internal mental state achieves equilibrium when they feel confident and competent in the role as coach; they are highly self-aware. Once this internal balance is achieved, the coach orients to fully focus on the client. There is a shift in energy from self to other, or as Coach C put it, “the recognition that you know you have a human being in front of you with skills and needs.” Three coaches (E, F and I) described a pre-meeting ritual to prepare themselves for coaching and preparing for the client. It means holding this mental state from two vantage points: 1) as coach, reminding yourself you assume the role of coach in this moment, serving as researcher, guide,



challenger, supporter, etc., and 2) the client, remembering her goals, challenges, strengths, patterns, etc.

Figure 6: Coach is connected to the Client



The arrows in Figure 6 represent the coach's intuition about what is happening in the dynamics of the relationship in the moment and his ability to respond and remain present. "Speaking from your intuition is extraordinarily valuable in coaching." (Whitworth, et al., 2007, p. 52) Intuition is a resource available to the coach as long as equipoise is maintained. The coach can manifest presence in the conversation by recalling something the client said earlier in the conversation, or in a prior session. Other ways include use of silence, asking powerful questions, active listening, intentional choice of language, nonjudgmental statements, and rephrasing what was stated. A powerful way to demonstrate presence is to serve as the counterpoint for the client's emotional state. If the coach senses the client is agitated, a calm demeanor and disposition can help ground the client.

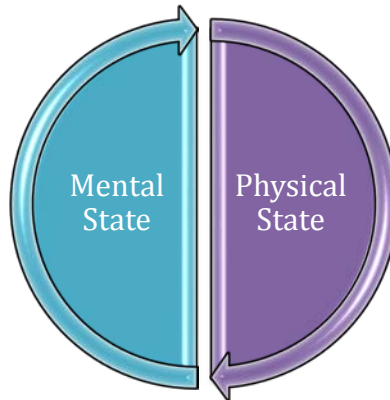
### Physical state

The coach's physical state also contributes to his ability to be present. Coach F explained, "I make sure I am physically comfortable so my attention is completely devoted to the client." It might mean turning off electronic devices, or paying attention to surroundings such as the layout of the room. The physical needs of the client are important as they may help the client be present. Though not mentioned by the study participants, Silsbee comments on the importance of developing "somatic literacy" (Silsbee, 2008, p. 153), or harnessing the intelligence of our somatic experience. Sensations provide information about how conditioned habits arise in our bodies. Being present to these sensations allows opportunities for choice. "Somatic awareness is fundamental to presence." (Silsbee, 2008, p. 165)

The arrows in Figure 6 also represent the coach's intuitive physical actions or reactions: non-verbal responses such as leaning in, mirroring, eye contact, open body posture, stillness, projecting confidence, and listening at a highly engaged level. Coaches can become distracted by external environmental factors such as temperature, sound, and comfort. Nervous mannerisms (e.g., fidgeting), gesturing, not listening, and looking at the clock frequently are signs of inattentiveness that erode rapport.

When the mental and physical states are addressed, the coach is primed for presence (see Figure 7). He creates an environment where the client feels comfortable and promotes the idea he is open to any topic. The client is the center of his focus. Coach I summarizes it as follows, "You're with that client, in

Figure 7: Mental &amp; Physical States



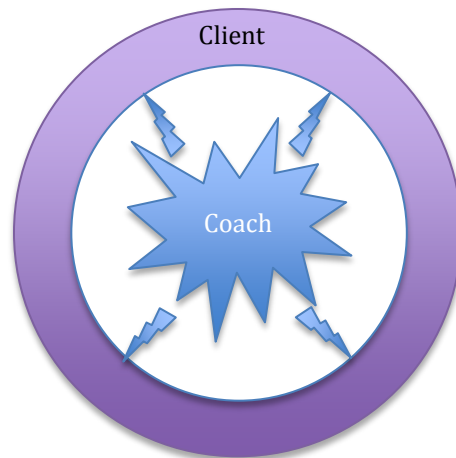
that moment, in that space, and nothing else exists. You engage with the client on several levels: visually, mentally, physically, psychologically and intuitively.” The coach bring his full self – thoughts, emotions, discernment, creativity, resilience, and authenticity – with the purpose of being a contributing partner with the client.

### Recovery

We noted above internal equilibrium fosters presence. If there is a break in the balance, the coach becomes disconnected from the client and is no longer present (Figure 8). “Presence is easy when you are not anxious, and elusive when you are.” (O’Neill, 2007, p. 21) Distractions include internal thoughts, both conscious and unconscious. Coach G finds self-doubt, anxiety, and thoughts such as, “Am I doing this well enough?” derail her ability to be present. This same coach mentioned attachments and aversions (Silsbee, 2008) as a detractor. Coach C indicates her attitude toward the client (irritated, frustrated,

bored) can interfere with her ability to be present, as well sensing the client's negative attitude toward the coach or coaching itself.

Figure 8: Coach is disconnected from the Client



A coach must bring her own presence to bear in order to be effective. Otherwise, the client's dilemmas can pull in the coach and neutralize her work. When the coach succumbs to the same dilemmas as the client, instead of helping, the coach may well contribute to the problem. (O'Neill, 2007, p. 19)

All coaches experience disconnection from their client. Despite your best intentions, coaches will get off track. These are human reactions. "You will always react. It's not about perfection, that is, never reacting. It's about recovery, the ability to come back," notes Coach G. The literature confirms this perspective: reactivity (loss of internal balance) causes us to respond in automatic, ineffectual ways. Since it is not possible to avoid reactivity, our goal should be to minimize how often it happens and recover equilibrium quickly. (O'Neill, 2007) Whitworth, et al. agrees. "The most obvious skill for this context is the skill of recovery: the ability to notice the disruption or disconnection and to

reconnect.” (Whitworth, et al., 2007, p. 113) When this happens, Coach G suggests explaining to the client, “I’m sorry. I got distracted.”

Admitting that you disappeared actually creates trust. You may think you hide your vanishing act from clients, but they often sense your disappearance even if they don’t articulate it. (Whitworth, et al., 2007, p. 111)

How does the coach get back on track in the moment? When Coach L recognizes disconnection, he asks himself, “How am I being right now? Do I manifest presence?” Coach J and G use mindfulness practices such as breathing and letting go to refocus and center themselves. Coach J indicates an attitude of non-striving, that is, holding “it” lightly, whatever “it” is, allows her to maintain presence. Outside of the coaching session itself, the participants use a wide array of techniques to cultivate presence. “Reflection is key,” Coach G emphasized. Similarly, Coach A subscribes to being a reflective practitioner, meaning after the session he reflects on the experience and attempts to identify what triggered the internal reaction, thereby increasing his self-awareness. Several coaches noted being triggered was more prevalent early in their coaching career; they became less prone to it over time. The inference drawn is that the practice of coaching itself is a means to cultivate presence. Another key technique for cultivating presence is to develop the ability to listen at a highly engaged level. Listening is a skill that can be learned and developed. Coach F asserts, “Engaged listening is a practice, like meditation, that comes over time.” To underscore the importance of listening, Whitworth, et al., states, “Everything in coaching hinges on listening.” (Whitworth, et al., 2007, p. 40)

### Building the construct of coaching presence

Presence is a state of being and doing, and requires self-awareness in the moment. The coach can be present individually or in relation with the client; either circumstance means being fully attentive and available to the extent he is able. In the context of coaching, the coach's presence serves to strengthen the client's presence. The reconceptualization of coaching presence is as follows (see Table 14):

Table 14: Coaching Presence Reconceptualization

What is it?	What is it related to?	Conditions that inhibit	Methods to cultivate	How demonstrated in coaching?
Includes both the mental and physical state of being  Observing and experiencing the present moment  Independent and interdependent  State of being AND a process or behavior	Empathy	Distractions – internal and external	Engaged listening	<u>Verbal:</u> Asking questions
	Authenticity		Self-reflection	Silence
	Flexibility	Lack of time	Coaching practice	Immediacy
	Openness	Reactivity	Pre-coaching ritual	Recalling client comments from earlier sessions
	Self-awareness	Anxiety	Mindfulness	Neutral language
	Non-judgment	Inner critic/Self-monitoring	Centering	<u>Non-verbal:</u> Engaged listening
	Vulnerability	Focus on internal dialogue	Intentional focus on client	Eye contact
	Self-acceptance	Lack of self-care	Non-attachment	Open body posture
	Compassion	Need for control, judgment or preconceived ideas	Non-striving	Leaning in
	Patience		Recovery	Mirroring
Curiosity		Centering	Attentive	
			Self-inquiry: “What is my way of being with this person in this moment?” or “What is the quality of my relating to this person in this moment?”	Available  Tolerating difficulty or ambiguity without becoming overwhelmed

## Empathy

Empathy involves understanding another's thoughts and feelings, trying on their perspectives including their biases, assumptions, and convictions, and identifying with the client's full reality as if it were your own. Empathy requires the practitioner remain curious and non-judgmental. Coach E explains,

It means getting out of yourself and really trying to put on the other person's situation, essence, issues, wherever they are. Trying to understand who they are, why they are, and what is going on void of your judgment, biases, cultural orientations and things that make us judge and think the way we do. Stripping yourself down, to the degree that you can, and try to relate to that person where he/she is.

Empathy has two aspects: what is experienced within the coach (internal/being) and within the relationship (relating). Empathy as a state of being means the coach has a clear understanding of the client's reality at a cognitive and emotional level. Coach K provides a cognitive definition:

To completely understand the other person's world: their mental models, tacit assumptions, biases, what they hold dear and necessary for their psychological view of the world.

Coach C understands the felt experience of the other through emotion:

Empathy is the capacity to feel what another is feeling. The ability to project yourself into the other's emotional perspective, and at least perceive what they are feeling, if not feeling that yourself.

*Being* empathetic alone does not build relationship. As the coach "voices meanings in the client's experience" (Rogers, 1992, p. 829), he actively engages with the other. Using empathy *in your interactions* with clients builds relationship, safety, trust, and rapport. In other words, the coach works both independently (being) and interdependently (relating) with the client. Coach B defines it this

way, “Demonstrating the ability to truly understand what the client is feeling or experiencing allows you to *connect* with them.”

Connection – that’s what empathy is all about. Connections are made through verbal skills and attending behaviors. *Verbal skills*: “Being mindful of the tone and tenor of your voice and framing your language (e.g., appropriate word choice)” are insights offered by Coach C. Other verbal skills mentioned include responding (allows the coach to confirm with the client they are being heard correctly), reflecting (the coach conveys understanding of client experience based on spoken and unspoken articulations), asking questions (to gather information), and minimal encouragers (“uh-huh”, “mmm”, “yes”, “I see”, “oh”). Three coaches also mentioned normalizing as a way to help the client process and move through strong emotions. For example, Practitioner B was coaching a manager who received harsh feedback from the employee satisfaction survey. The manager broke down in tears. Coach B shared his conversation with the manager: “Every leader I’ve coached has gone through this stage. It’s a normal part of development and looked at as part of growth. Many people go through this to get to the other side.” Coach C agrees, “One way to be empathic is to help them see what they need and devise how they can move forward, that is, how the client can help himself get out of it.”

*Attending Behaviors*: “Attending is the behavioral aspect of building rapport. Attending behaviors encourage clients to talk and show that the practitioner is interested in what’s being said.” (Hanna, 2001, p. 6, 17) The coaches in the study listed listening skills almost universally, a strong indicator of



its importance to building the relationship. “The effective practice of active listening is at the core of empathy,” states Coach A. When people feel listened to, they feel known, understood, safe and secure. Whitworth, et al., (2007) describe a hierarchy of listening effectiveness, providing the coach with range and the ability to listen at a very deep level. Effective coaches frequently switch between Levels 2 and 3.

At Level 1, our awareness is on ourselves. We process the other person’s words in terms of what it means to us personally. What does it mean to me? At Level 2, the focus is on the other person, as if there is nothing else. Level 2 is the level of empathy because the coach suspends his/her own agenda, thoughts, opinions, and judgments. Level 3 includes the nuances of the space between coach and client, beyond the words, including all the energy and emotion that were spoken and unspoken. (Whitworth, et al., 2007, p. 34-40)

Other attending behaviors include head nodding (indicates acknowledgment), eye contact (demonstrates genuine interest), mirroring body language (assists clients to relax), open and relaxed body posture (encourages clients to be open), leaning toward the client (indicates empathy and understanding), and use of silence (coupled with supportive body language shows the client you are with them).

You are with them. These modes of expressing empathy are ultimately about building connection with the client. “Right away, I try to find that point of connection,” said Coach H. Stober supports this practice by “looking for positive points of connection – positive aspects of the client with which the coach resonates” (Stober & Grant, 2006, p. 31) Coach D offers a related insight based on her experience, “Sometimes the connection is there right away. Other times it comes after a few sessions; you need more time to build the connection. And in

other cases, it never comes.” Rogers notes it is all but impossible to be empathetic if you cannot warmly accept the client. (Rogers, 1951) Therefore, it is important for the coach to realize he can’t be empathetic with everyone. Several coaches’ recounted situations where they could not find a comfortable level of unconditional positive regard toward the client. Knowing this would impair their ability to be effective, they disengaged from the relationship and suggested the client consider an alternate coach.

Although a coach may not establish a comfort level with everyone, empathy is a skill that can be developed. While everyone has the capacity for empathy, everyone’s capacity is not the same. The word “capacity” implies a limit or an upper bound, which varies from person to person. Rogers confirms this:

It is probably evident from the description that complete unconditional positive regard would never exist except in theory. ... It is in this sense that unconditional positive regard exists as a matter of degree in any relationship.” (1992, p. 829)

The same is true for empathy. Several coaches commented knowing yourself helps to recognize the limits of your empathic ability. Coach A shared,

I obtained a really deep understanding of self as instrument and learned about a couple of things I can easily fall into: the advice-giving trap, the intensity trap – being quick to respond with a strong tone that shuts people down – and my closed body language. I didn’t realize what these things could do to others.

Why is this important? Empathy is a necessary and required element of the working alliance. (Rogers, 1992) There is no connection without it.

Therefore, it is important for the coach to know the conditions, in self and in the client, which inhibit his ability to demonstrate empathy.

### Building the construct of empathy

Empathy is a complex and multidimensional construct. In the context of coaching, empathy is the ability to sense, understand, feel and communicate the client's inner reality, to do so requires coaches be curious, non-judging, accepting, open, and sensitive. These attributes allow the coach to connect with clients on multiple levels – cognitively, emotionally, and intuitively. As a coach, you can demonstrate empathy even if you haven't experienced the same situation as the client. (DeGeorge & Constantino, 2012) Feelings are universal; you can find something that would be reflected in your own emotional life someday. As Coach I eloquently stated, "It's the humanity of it." The reconceptualization of empathy is noted below (see Table 15).

Table 15: Empathy Reconceptualization

What is it?	What is it related to?	Conditions that inhibit	Methods to cultivate	How demonstrated in coaching?
<p>The ability to nonjudgmentally comprehend and communicate the point of view of another person including all (positive and negative) emotions, experiences, behaviors, and interpretations.</p> <p>Independent and interdependent</p>	Openness	Mental chatter (Level 1 listening)	Meditation/ Mindfulness	<u>Verbal:</u> Tone of voice/ vocal quality
	Attunement		Pre-meeting ritual	Choice of language
	Compassion	Lack of UPR for client	Coaching practice	Responding
	Sensitivity	Client holding back	Silence	Paraphrasing
	Self-awareness	Client attitudes	Everyday relationships	Minimal encouragers
	Presence	Unable to find common connection	Improve listening skills	Normalizing
	Non-judging	Judging	Personal growth & development	Asking questions
	Curiosity	Counter-transference	Intentionally engage people with different perspectives than you	Encourage exploration using emotion words
	Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR)	Beyond coach's level of expertise	Coaching supervision	<u>Attending Behavior:</u> Eye contact
	Trust	Focus on self not client	Strengths-based perspective	Leaning forward slightly
	Acceptance	Lack of self-awareness	Empathy training	Open & relaxed body posture
	Genuineness	Shame-based discipline		Head nodding
		Over- or under-identification with emotions		Appropriate facial expressions

## Openness

### Coach orientation

The data suggests an *orientation toward openness* as the single-most important factor in coaching. Coaches believe an attitude predicated on openness to be indistinguishable from coaching. Coaching is a process of facilitating discovery; without openness there is no coaching. As such, openness can be considered a core and indispensable principle of coaching.

Coaches orient themselves toward openness by promoting a mindset that holds several principles. Coach C offers,

There's openness that you are willing to receive things from the client that are not necessarily a match for your internal constructs. You are not going in with a predetermined template and having them fit in that. Instead, there's willingness, even eagerness, to be surprised about what is beyond the boundary of your expectation.

It is not about being open to what you are comfortable with or what you expect to hear. It's being open to everything and a willingness to try on new thoughts, ideas and perspectives. To do so requires two things: 1) suspending judgment; and 2) adopting a learning orientation. Suspending judgment doesn't mean denying yourself. It means placing your stuff – the things that can get in the way of serving the client - on a shelf until you can deal with it later because it's not about you; it's about the client. As Rogers noted, it means, "caring for the client as a separate person, with permission to have his own feelings, his own experiences." (Rogers, 1992, p. 829) When Coach C experiences negative feelings associated with the client, she applies this litmus test: "Is it that I don't like the client's style, thoughts or behaviors, and therefore it's irrelevant, or does

it get in the client's way, and therefore it's a topic for coaching?" In other words, learning to diagnose what pertains to the coach versus what pertains to the client. Not only does the coach suspend judgment of the client, he does the same with himself. Inner thoughts and criticisms compromise the coach's ability to be open. Judgment constricts. "Rather than expand us or liberate us, our judgments exhaust us and limit us." (Riso & Hudson, 1999, p. 114)

The second aspect noted by the practitioners relates to curiosity. Openness is about the consistent demonstration of a learning orientation to the client experience and demonstrating a willingness to go with what is learned about the client. Explore whatever the client brings you. A coach has beliefs about a situation; if the client brings up something that is outside of those bounds, this is where the choice to be open and learn comes into play. It's an opportunity. Ask a question. Tell me more about what you tried to do? Are there other choices here? Would they lead to a different result? Coach C uses the following metaphor, "Coaching is like cooking without a recipe. All the ingredients are there and together you'll cook something up." Ultimately openness equates to freedom for the client – freedom to experiment, freedom to examine possibilities.

### Use of self

The coach uses the construct of openness in service to the client in various ways. Coaches use theories, frameworks, and models as part of their approach to coaching. Throughout the process, a coach should hold lightly to any tools, theories, etc. and making choices based on what he learns about the

client fosters openness. Coach A “avoids being married to a model” to remain open to what unfolds with the client. Theory can and should inform your coaching, but not at the expense of being prescriptive.

Spaciousness (or openness) means complete detachment from any particular course of action or any results clients achieve. The coach continues to care about his or her clients, their agendas, their health and growth, but not the road they take to get there, the speed of travel, or the detours they might make along the way – as long as they continue to move toward the results they want. (Whitworth, et al., 2007, p. 21)

Another way coaches create and maintain openness is to remain curious, even when they spot something and think they recognize it. Coach A states,

If I am not being aware, in the moment, of what is happening in my mind, I can fall into the trap of expertise and say, “I recognize this. I know the answer. Here you go.”

As a way to demonstrate openness, some coaches noted they share their thoughts, views, and/or perspectives with the client under two caveats: 1) always ask permission to share first, and 2) make the distinction between coaching and providing something for the client to consider. “You may decide to share but with the caveat that you are offering your own experience and opinion, not advice or judgment.” (Whitworth, et al., 2007, p. 107)

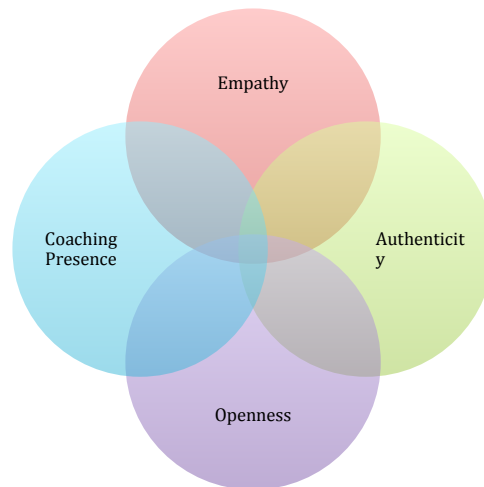
As long as you are conscientious about framing the conversation as your experience and encouraging clients to find their own best way while exploring a number of alternative pathways, your experience will be seen as one more potential course of action and not the ‘expert’s’ way. (Whitworth, et al., 2007, p. 112)

Coaches view sharing as an act of openness, and allow the client to see they are human. While practitioners agree sharing can enhance the relationship, there are risks associated with it, such as the uncertainty feedback will be delivered in the right way or at the right time without the client becoming

defensive. As a result, it can be concluded openness exists as a matter of degree in any relationship. This is the distinction between authenticity and openness: being authentic includes sharing your subjective experience of the client with them; the degree to which you do that is openness. Determining when and how much to share, i.e., how open to be, is a reflection of the strength of the relationship.

Coaches also saw linkages between openness and presence as well as empathy. As Coach G noted, “All of your constructs are swimming in the same pool and are cross-fertilizing, like a Venn diagram.” (See Figure 9)

Figure 9: Venn diagram of Capstone Qualities



Coaches view openness as foundational to coaching. To cultivate the capacity for openness, several agreed professional development is essential, recognizing it as an ongoing process – you never arrive. This can be accomplished through various means such as reflecting on coaching sessions and identifying missed opportunities, reading through notes from coaching



sessions, receiving coaching supervision or being coached yourself, willing to work with different clients and different modalities, reflecting on tendencies that prevent you from being open and catching yourself in the moment, experimenting in coaching sessions, recognizing that moving from a judging to a learning mindset occurs in steps and takes time, reflecting on past coaching engagements the capacities you've developed over time, and requesting feedback from the client.

### Building the construct of openness

Openness is essential to coaching. You can have openness without coaching, but you can't have coaching without openness. Openness can refer to the state of the coach, the state of the client, and/or the state of the relationship. Coaches cultivate openness either individually (inner moves, such as reflection) and/or with and through others (relational moves, such as obtaining feedback from clients). Being open requires a mindset of continuous learning and exploration, remaining curious about the client. It shows up in a number of ways in the relationship but can be hindered if the coach is too focused on self or the coaching process rather than the client. The reconceptualization of openness in the context of coaching is shown below (see Table 16).

Table 16: Openness Reconceptualization

What is it?	What is it related to?	Conditions that inhibit	Methods to cultivate	How demonstrated in coaching?
<p>A mindset that requires:</p> <p>1) suspending judgment, and</p> <p>2) adopting a learning orientation</p>	<p>Authenticity</p> <p>Empathy</p> <p>Coaching Presence</p> <p>Accepting</p> <p>Non-judging</p>	<p>Judging</p> <p>Inner thoughts, e.g., performance anxiety</p> <p>Expert trap</p> <p>Premature focus trap</p> <p>Excessive focus on "being a good coach"</p>	<p>Meditation/ Mindfulness</p> <p>Reflection</p> <p>Exposure to new things</p> <p>Self-acceptance</p> <p>Soliciting feedback</p> <p>Travel to new places/cultures</p> <p>Therapy</p> <p>Artistic expressions</p>	<p>Flexible coaching approach (hold lightly)</p> <p>Exploring what client brings</p> <p>Suspend judgment</p> <p>Ask permission</p> <p>Use of metaphor</p> <p>Choosing when/what/how to share</p> <p>Framing observations as hypothesis</p> <p>Detachment from course of action or results</p> <p>Holding options open</p> <p>Recognizing the complexity of people and contexts</p> <p>Open to information</p>

## Meditation/Mindfulness

Mindfulness presented itself repeatedly throughout the literature as related to the constructs under consideration. To a lesser degree, it showed up in the interviews with the coach practitioners. It also kept turning up in my life in subtle and not so subtle ways starting in the spring of 2015, as if the universe were telling me, “You need to explore this.” When I am mindless, distracted, or on autopilot, I often miss the insights the universe has to offer. I finally woke up. Here is what I discovered.

Riso & Hudson eloquently describe the paradox of Personality. Personality is the conditioned parts of ourselves, our self-defeating, familiar reactions, fears, beliefs, and behaviors that limit our potential. Essence is the grounded part of us, our Being, our true self. (Riso & Hudson, 1999) Think of Essence as operating at your most high functioning self, with full access to all of your capacities. Personality and Essence are opposite sides of the same coin. Herein lies the paradox: We demand our Personality supply the qualities only our Essence can give. We don't experience our Essence when our awareness is dominated by our Personality. (Riso & Hudson, 1999)

My signature theme is serial self-development. Making the connection between my inclinations toward personal growth and coaching as a profession revealed my purpose. This is easier said than done. The qualities associated with the Enneagram Type One Personality (my personality profile) are often contrary to what is needed to be an effective coach (see Table 17):

Table 17: Type One Personality vs. Coaching Qualities

Type One Personality: The Reformer	Coaching Qualities
The Educator/Teacher	Non-Directive, Learner, Curious
Anger, Resentment, Resistance, Frustration	Compassion, Patience, Acceptance
Striving after the Ideal	Authentic
Being Purposeful, Making Progress	Non-Doing (Being), Presence
Being Right, Pointing out Problems	Empathy
Order, Consistency, Punctuality	Spontaneity
Self-Control, Self-Restraint	Openness
Being Critical, Judgmental	Non-Judging
The Inner Critic, Perfectionism	Witness, Holding lightly

The answer lies within myself, in reconnecting with my Essence. Just as we recognize in ourselves behaviors of all nine-personality types, so do we have our Essential self within us, looking for ways to reveal itself. (See Table 18)

When revealed, our true nature is “integrity, love, authenticity, creativity, understanding, guidance joy, power, and serenity.” (Riso & Hudson, 1999, p. 35)

Our Essence emerges through self-awareness and self-acceptance. “The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.”

(Riso & Hudson, 1999, p.123)

“Instead of trying to transcend the human experience, only by embracing it fully do we arrive at the fullness of our true nature.” (Riso & Hudson, 1999, p.

338) Choosing a practice helps us be present to our experience.

The important thing is to set aside some time each day to reestablish a deeper connection with our true nature. Along with regular practice, life presents us many opportunities to see our personality in action and allow our essential nature to come forth. (Riso & Hudson, 1999, p. 347)

Table 18: Personality and Essence: Contrasting Qualities  
(Riso & Hudson, 1999, p. 60)

	<b>Personality (Asleep)</b>	<b>Essence (Awake)</b>
Feeling Center (Types 2, 3, 4)	<i>(Past orientation)</i> Self-image Stories Emotionality Holding on to moods Adapting to affect others	<i>(Here and now)</i> Authenticity Truthfulness Compassion Forgiveness and flow Inner-directed
Thinking Center (Types 5, 6, 7)	<i>(Future orientation)</i> Mental chatter Figuring it out Strategies, doubt Anxiety, fear Anticipation	<i>(Here and now)</i> Quiet mind Inner guidance Knowing, clarity Support, steadiness Open to the present moment
Intuitive Center (Types 8, 9, 1)	<i>(Resistant to present)</i> Boundaries Tension, numbness Defending Dissociating Irritation	<i>(Here and now)</i> Connected with life Relaxed, open, sensing Inner strength Grounded Acceptance

My capstone seeks to address how I can move toward my future state, professional coaching, by developing coaching qualities rooted in self-awareness, self-acceptance and non-judgment. Since mindfulness is central to the development of the qualities of authenticity, presence, empathy and openness, I chose to experience it firsthand to see what transpired within myself.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., of the University of Massachusetts Medical School's Center for Mindfulness, developed a program called "Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)." (<http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/mindfulness-based-programs/mbsr-courses/about-mbsr/history-of-mbsr/>) I attended the 8-

week MBSR program, not as a way to manage stress, but to learn the practice of mindfulness. During the first class, I was delighted to discover meditation and coaching have a lot in common (see notes from Class 1) including the attitudinal foundations of mindfulness practice: non-judging, patience, beginner's mind, trusting ourselves, non-striving, acceptance and letting go (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

*Kelly's notes from Class #1:  
 We come here whole, not to be  
 fixed.  
 Meditation is not about giving  
 advice.  
 You already have the tools;  
 meditation helps fine-tune them.  
 Non-judgmental.  
 Showing kindness to self.  
 Establish a safe space.  
 This isn't therapy.  
 Non-striving.  
 Letting go.  
 Trust the process.  
 Open-minded.  
 Curious.  
 Trust.  
 You are the expert of your own  
 experience.*

The classes were highly experiential. During each class, we spent most of the time practicing various meditative techniques: body scan, mindful movement, awareness of breath, walking meditation, mindful eating, sitting meditation, lying meditation, and others. The facilitator guided all meditation practices. Sometimes we sat in chairs in a circle; sometimes we brought our yoga mats and lay on the floor. A typical session began

with a brief sharing of what we noticed in ourselves over the past week – mindful moments, catching ourselves – or sensations we were experiencing in the room, at the present moment. We moved into a guided meditation practice for the remaining time. Between classes, we were encouraged to incorporate the techniques into our daily routine to hardwire meditation as a new habit. All participants noted this was challenging. Two useful mindfulness techniques I learned are R.A.I.N. and guided meditations.

“Working with Difficulties: the Blessings of R.A.I.N.” offers in the moment support for working with intense and difficult emotions. It directs our attention in a systematic way and gives us a framework to call upon in a challenging moment.

(<https://www.tarabrach.com/articles-interviews/rain-workingwithdifficulties/>)

- R** Recognize what is happening (awareness)
- A** Allow life to be just as it is (let it be)
- I** Investigate inner experience with kindness (thoughts, sensations, feelings)
- N** Non-attachment (refrain from identifying ourselves to what is happening)

R.A.I.N. is similar to the Enneagram of Letting Go, a process model we can call upon when we notice our personality in the form of a habit or reaction that we want to get rid of. (Riso & Husdon, 1999) In using both of these process models, I have experienced greater awareness and openness.

Before starting the MBSR program, I came across narrated meditations by Kabat-Zinn on iTunes, and started using them regularly. Upon graduation from the MBSR program, we were given a thumb drive with several guided meditations narrated by a female. Try as I did, I could not connect with the MBSR recordings (the female voice) – it was a combination of many factors: her voice, word choice, recording quality, inflection, and pacing. I found myself repeatedly returning to the Kabat-Zinn iTunes recordings. His calm, gentle, balanced, and neutral tonal qualities, coupled with this word choice, resonated with me. He is my guide, my friend. No judgment.

Commit yourself to being fully awake, fully present in this moment; allowing yourself to dwell here moment by moment; intentionally cultivating an attitude of patience and gentleness toward yourself; choosing as best you can not to react to or judge any of your thoughts or feelings or perceptions; in this work of mindfulness absolutely anything that comes into the field of awareness is ok, we simply sit with it, and breath with it, and observe it. Open and awake in the present moment, right here, right now. A continual process of seeing and letting be, seeing

and letting go, rejecting nothing, pursuing nothing. Dwelling in stillness and calmness. (Kabat-Zinn, Mindfulness Meditation, Series 2)

This experience informed me there is no “one right way” to meditate. Each person determines what works for him or her.

I can't say I have faithfully practiced meditation daily since completion of the course in July 2016. It is challenging. I have many excuses: after the puppy is housebroken, after we get back from vacation, after my capstone is finished, etc. However, I can share my subjective reality in the way I experience life pre- and post-meditation. My frame of reference has shifted. I experience joy, calmness, clarity, creativity, resilience, and other qualities of my Essence regularly. I am also becoming more comfortable with being uncomfortable. My inner restlessness has finally abated. “We are all driven by a deep inner restlessness. ... What are we really looking for?” (Riso & Hudson, 1999, p. 1) At this point in my life, my answer to that question is: having access to the high functioning qualities of my Essence at every moment in all circumstances.

I recognize practice leads to mastery of my inner state. Practice gives me greater access to my Essence. And practice is how I become the coach I aspire to be – the greatest possible resource for my client. This is where I am today, knowing I will continue to ebb and flow, and continually moving forward on a journey of self-knowledge/awareness that has no end. “Once we start moving toward Presence, Presence increasingly supports the activity.” (Riso & Hudson, 1999, p. 366) Perhaps my current challenge to incorporate mindfulness meditation in my daily life will remind me to be empathic with clients who are similarly motivated but also find it difficult to change.



Recognize these capacities of the Essence are available to all of us. I wonder if this is what is meant when it is said clients are creative, whole, resourceful, etc. In coaching, we know these qualities are in our client; we have the unique privilege of helping the client access them. Our clients come to us disintegrated, and they leave us less so.

### Summary

Coach G summed it best with her observation, “All of your constructs are swimming in the same pool and cross-fertilize.” The data and literature clearly show the four qualities are interrelated. First, they share common foundational attitudes or capacities such as acceptance, non-judging, and self-awareness. Second, cultivating one quality, let’s say openness, will simultaneously develop another quality, such as empathy. Lastly, they are expressed in similar ways. For example, attending behaviors can demonstrate empathy, coaching presence, and openness. While there was a significant correlation between the literature and the data - one seemed to reinforce the other – there were surprises contained in each.

### Surprises from the literature

In conducting the literature review, I encountered a few surprises, two of which were most significant to me personally. Recently, I became aware of my tendency to intellectualize; not realizing it is considered a defense mechanism. I thought I was mature in not letting emotions get in the way! While researching empathy, I came across the term “emotional numbing” and saw myself in the

mirror. (Brill & Nahmani, 2016) Emotional numbing leaves one with a compromised ability to experience and perceive empathy. (Jones, 2013) If empathy requires you to feel the emotions of the other person, my capacity for empathy was limited. To express empathy, I had to learn to feel emotions – both pleasant and unpleasant – and not over- or under-identify with them. The practice of mindfulness meditation (see Chapter 6) provided a pathway to accomplish this.

Secondly, seeing the connection between shame and empathy was equally compelling. (Brown, 2007) In December 2015, I came to fully realize I was using shame as a form of self-discipline but didn't know how to move past it. The missing pieces were: my Enneagram Type and the relationship between shame and empathy. Armed with this additional information, the answer revealed itself: mindfulness meditation. All roads pointed to mindfulness meditation as a way (not *the* way, but *a* way) to lessen my reactivity and increase my creativity.

### Surprises from the data

The data offered a few surprises as well. Perhaps this shouldn't have come as a surprise, but it was something I noticed but wasn't looking for. Each coach's response mirrored their "way", "mindset", or "worldview." By the end of the interview, I could see each coach's response reflected his or her personal beliefs and convictions. Each practitioner's way of being and coaching is unique. To use a metaphor, think of each coach as a house. The foundation is the same – poured concrete. They all have windows, walls, doors, and a roof. They all

provide shelter. Yet Coach A's house is a 2 story colonial; Coach B's house is a duplex; Coach C's house is a cape cod; and so on. Stylistically, these houses are all slightly different; the same is true with each coach.

The second surprise is the concept of 'holding lightly' whether it is your belief about something, your way of coaching, or your tools, theories, techniques. This concept reminds me of holding a wet bar of soap. If you hold too tightly, the bar will shoot out of your hands like a bullet. If you hold too loosely, it will slip through your fingers. It seems to be about finding the balance between strength and flexibility. Translating this concept to coaching, it is providing guardrails that are neither too narrow nor too wide, and always leading toward the direction of the client's goals.

Another delighter was realizing coaching is your sandbox. Coaching itself cultivates the four qualities, as well as others. Through the process of coaching, your capacities grow and expand. It was apparent these experienced coaches had "worked out the kinks" through their time in the trenches of coaching. The qualities in the study were such a part of their way of being, they didn't see them as separate and distinct attributes. For some, it was difficult to respond to certain questions because these things "just are." I surmise the answers might have been different if the practitioners were less experienced, which brings us back to the cooking metaphor. In Chapter 2, I stated, "Beginner chefs typically don't cook without a recipe and some basic training, even if they have the ingredients." In Chapter 5, Coach C stated, "Coaching is like cooking without a recipe. All the ingredients are there and together you'll cook something up." Both statements

are true. It's a matter of experience and familiarity. My hypothesis is novice coaches are more reliant on models, techniques, and process, whereas master coaches are less so as they have honed their skills, developed their competence, and rely on their intuition.



preserve itself. If I want to be an effective coach, understanding essential coaching qualities takes on significance, not just what they are and how they are demonstrated, but more importantly, can they be cultivated and if so, how?

Development is essentially about engaging intentionally in the business of transcending an existing definition of our identity, in order to literally conceive of ourselves in a different, new sense. (Silsbee, 2008, p. 48)

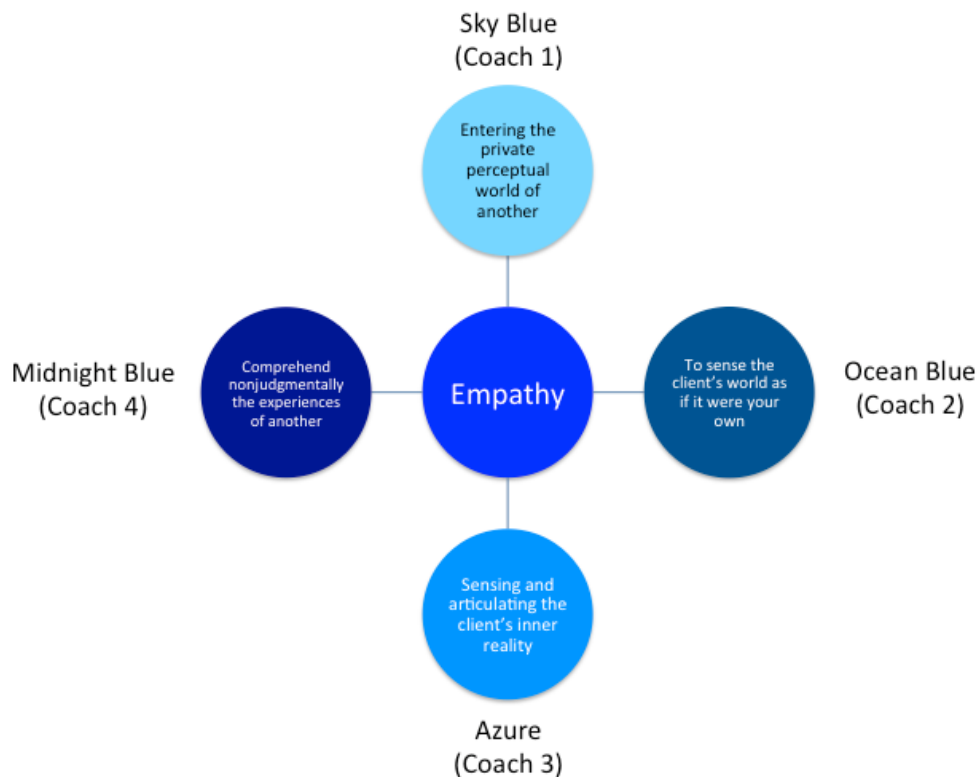
I am authoring a new story for myself – shifting my narrative – to discover a new identity, acquire new behaviors, and access internal capacities relevant for coaching. Authenticity, coaching presence, empathy, and openness are essential elements of my new identity.

The goal of this paper was to examine four coaching qualities and create a reconceptualization of each for my use in coaching. From this research, including the review of existing literature and analysis of the interview data, I gained a deeper understanding of each construct and how they can be cultivated. The conclusions are as follows:

*Diversity is apparent in coaching:* There is no universal coaching competency framework, or single standard set of skills and techniques, nor should there be. “Competency frameworks and standards carry with them assumptions of control, simplification, reductionism, predictability and compliance.” (Garvey, 2011, p. 63) There is no secret decoder ring. Coaching requires risk-taking, innovation, creativity, and novel strategies. No two coaches are alike. Coaches practice in a way that is congruent with their values and draw upon their repertoire of skills, qualities, experience, and competencies.

*Diversity is evident in the definitions:* The literature helped me realize the constructs are complex, nuanced, and multidimensional. While a quality entertains several definitions, each one can be condensed to a core meaning. Each coach demonstrates the core principle in a slightly different manner, reflecting that coach's frame of reference. To illustrate using an analogy, let's say empathy is the color blue. Each definition/coach is a different hue, illustrating the varietal forms of expression (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Shades of Blue/Empathy



*The coaches' lived experiences illuminate the literature:* At times, the literature was challenging to comprehend; the personal accounts and examples from the study participants made the concepts 'come alive' with sincerest appreciation. The variety of coaching styles was interesting to discern; each

practitioner was authentically himself or herself in the conversation. Hearing experienced coaches share their concerns, fears, struggles, and learnings was reassuring for someone ready to venture down this path.

*'Hold lightly' to techniques and interventions:* Another way of stating this is de Haan's 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment: "Don't worry too much about the specific things you are doing." (2008, p. 51) The concept of holding lightly was a theme across several practitioners. Overthinking only seems to get in the way. Furthermore, the practitioners don't see their coaching as a set of distinct qualities or skills they deploy. The coaching qualities and skills have been assimilated in their way of being, as if part of their DNA. The qualities and the coach are indistinguishable. This reminds me of when I learned to drive at age 16. In the beginning, I had to be mindful of so many things – disengage the brake, put the car in reverse, check all mirrors, release the clutch, and so on. It was overwhelming, trying to remember all of the things you needed to do, and hard to imagine it wouldn't be that way forever. In time with practice, the thoughts and actions become second nature; we don't even realize it is happening. We respond when needed, adjusting to changing road and/or weather conditions. Coaching seems to be a lot like that. With sufficient time and practice, the qualities become part of you.

*I am not my personality:* For me personally, discovering I can transcend my personality and access qualities of essence through the practice of mindfulness meditation is liberating! I am not beholden to my conditioned habits; I can re-write my narrative by redefining myself around a purpose – coaching.



Authenticity, presence, empathy, and openness are commitments to that purpose – in all my relationships, not just coaching interactions.

The experience of conducting this research proved valuable for personal and professional development. I have come to appreciate authenticity, coaching presence, empathy, and openness as constructs that stand on their own, as well as their use in coaching. In the introduction, I mentioned these qualities seem more like first cousins twice removed rather than best friends. Through the capstone process, their status has been elevated; I imagine they will become my best friends after time spent coaching. I plan to continue my coaching journey through participation in a coach certification program well as through application with clients. I look forward to opportunities to apply what I've learned to facilitate client discovery, awareness, and possibility!

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