

Life Coaching

A Manual for
Helping Professionals

Dave Ellis

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With special thanks to

JoAnne Bangs
Stan Lankowitz
and
Bill Rentz



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For my parents, Ken and Maryellen Ellis, who gave me one piece of advice, which was not to give advice. From their instruction and example, I discovered that assisting others to create a wonderful life usually involves more listening than advising.

People do not have to become something they are not. They need to learn only who and what they really are.

EKNATH EASWARAN

Go to the people, live with them, love them, learn from them, work with them, start from what they have, build on what they know, and in the end, when the work is done, the people will rejoice and say:

We have done it ourselves.

LAO TZU

Preface

This book is written for currently practicing professional life coaches and for people who intend to enter this profession. Of course, this book alone is not sufficient preparation to become a life coach. *Life Coaching* is a comprehensive manual for assisting someone who is already trained as a helping professional (such as a counselor, social worker, minister) to begin a career as a life coach.

There has been a flood of news articles and books written about life coaching in the last few years. And there are a variety of places where life coaches can receive training. As with many new professions, there is little agreement about what life coaching really is. In this book, I do not intend to review the ideas of others or to reach a consensus regarding the nature of this profession. Instead, I present a model of what I believe works in assisting people to create the life of their dreams.

This model is based on work that I have done over the last 25 years with college students, college faculty and administrators, and professionals involved mostly in non-profit organizations. This model is described in detail in my other books and is particularly well presented in the book *Falling Awake*. *Falling Awake* and the accompanying workshops, video and audio programs, and website are companion materials for *Life Coaching*. Clients of the coaches who use our style of coaching can also use this material. *Falling Awake* is like a textbook and is designed for use by clients who are receiving life coaching.

My definition of life coaching differs from the way that many people understand this term. I almost wish I had a different word for this way of being with people, since I often hear the word *coaching* used in a way that I would never use it. Many people think they are coaching when they say: "Let me give you some advice," "I can

consult with you,” or, “I can teach you some skills to solve that problem.”

There’s nothing wrong with a vision of coaching that includes consultation, teaching, and advice, but what I mean by coaching is something entirely different. *In life coaching, my aim is to assist people to create their own solutions, arrive at their own answers, and discover options for themselves.* When we promote this kind of creativity in our clients, they’re far more likely to bring the results of life coaching into their daily lives and produce lasting change.

Others who write about or teach life coaching may therefore read what I’ve written here and say that it does not represent what they mean by life coaching. With respect, I say, “I know, but it is what I mean by life coaching. I don’t present this material as an argument for a point of view but rather as a possibility for how we can help others to discover their passions and unlock their brilliance.”

A note about gender-fair language

In order to be gender-inclusive while avoiding awkward sentence constructions, I chose to alternate the use of male and female pronouns throughout this book.

More about Falling Awake

Falling Awake: Creating the Life of Your Dreams is an interactive book that assists life coaching clients to identify what they want in all areas of their life for the rest of their lives and to develop ways to achieve those dreams. This book is often the “textbook” that can provide the teaching that most life coaches do not have time to do during their sessions. It covers a wide range of life skills from stress management to communications to long range planning.

In addition to the *Falling Awake* book, this material is also presented for life coaching clients in workshops, video and audio programs, and a comprehensive website. The website provides for free: 1) a Wake-Up Call™ service, 2) a life-planning program, 3) data-based journaling, and 4) a downloadable version of *Falling Awake*. You can

find out more about all of these services and a schedule of upcoming workshops by visiting www.FallingAwake.com or by writing to:

Falling Awake
P.O. Box 8396
Rapid City, SD 57709
USA

Acknowledgments

Stan Lankowitz was one of the first people I used as a life coach, and he soon became my best friend. He now works as a full-time life coach. Stan edited this book in a way that was more cowriting than editing. I appreciate all that I have gained from him as a friend, coauthor, and coach.

JoAnne Bangs, Richard Kiefer, and Bill Rentz have been assisting me in the last many years to teach our particular style of life coaching to beginning and experienced life coaches. Through our work together they have taught me much about how we can assist others to have a great life.

I also thank Doug Toft who is an amazing writer and editor. He has been wonderful at helping me express in writing what I generally present verbally. I thank him for being such a joyful coworker and coauthor.

Thanks also to the many people who have been my life coaches over the last 25 years. I am amazed at how much they have contributed to my life by saying so very little but saying it so very powerfully. I also thank the people who have let me be their life coach. It is through this practice that most of the ideas in this book were developed.

The people who have participated in the workshops I have given over the last 25 years have taught me a great deal about trusting the genius in each of us. I also thank the people who participated in the life coaching schools I have conducted. They have added dozens of ideas to this book.

One of the most wonderful things about my life is that I get to work with a group of people that I deeply love and admire. It is this community that gives birth to my work. In addition to those

I have already mentioned, I also want to acknowledge Duane Elgin, Robbie Murchison, Doane Robinson, and Leonard Running.

Any list of acknowledgements regarding my work would be incomplete without celebrating the wonderful support and partnership of my wife, Trisha Waldron, and my daughters, who continually support me to reach the life of my dreams.

Request for feedback

Having written several books that have gone into multiple editions, I know that a book is never complete after only one edition. One of the books I authored is now in its eleventh edition and has improved with each rewrite because of the input of thousands of people. Please help me with the next edition of this book by letting me know what you think of it. Send your ideas, suggestions, complaints, and compliments to:

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USA

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Chapter One

The Power and Possibility of Life Coaching

Discovering passion, unlocking brilliance

The purpose of this book is to describe a specific type of life coaching called, "Life Coaching from Falling Awake." In general, life coaching is a process whereby the coach assists the client to improve the quality of his or her life. Of course, this is a purpose similar to what people receive through counseling, consulting, teaching, ministry, and friendship. The difference is that life coaching provides this partnership without any agenda other than the client's. This career is relatively new.

In 1996, I set a goal that by the year 2006 there would be 10,000 practicing life coaches. At the time, I thought that was doable but unlikely. Now, it looks like a reality. I also had a goal that by 2001 many people would want life coaching as much as they want a house. I've met a few people for whom that is also a reality. For me, having this kind of a partner—someone who is totally committed to helping me achieve what I want in all areas of my life—makes a huge difference. If necessary, I'd give up my house, rent an apartment, or even live in a tent so that I could hire a life coach.

Life coaches assist people to discover what a great life they already have, what they want in every area of their lives for the rest of their lives, and ways to unlock their own brilliance to achieve their dreams. To do that, life coaches usually meet with clients many hours a month over several years, assisting them to achieve the life of their dreams by discovering their passions and uncovering their genius.

By meeting with a life coach, people can create and achieve goals in every area of life. This happens through frequent contact with a

life coach who serves as the clients' full partner in their personal transformation.

Life coaching is not just a collection of techniques—it's a form of relationship that's both confidential and life changing. People usually reveal more to their life coach than to their friends, counselors, or even to their spouse. Through this relationship, clients can move quickly from problems to solutions, from insight to action, from the status quo to completely new outcomes in their lives.

Life coaches provide a service for people who are already happy and successful. Basically, life coaching clients have got life "handled." As a life coach, I am committed to bring these people to that deep, soulful sense that they are free—free from their obligations, their limitations, their fears, and any other obstacles to realize their full passion and brilliance. I don't know of a greater gift that we can bring to people.

Our clients can quickly create the life of their dreams

I think it's possible to learn to be with people in such a way that their lives transform *quickly*. By the word quickly, I don't mean in a few days, but I do mean in a few weeks, a few months, and absolutely within a few years. What I offer in this book are ways that you and I can be this way with more people, more consistently.

We succeed as life coaches when our clients feel empowered and valuable—confident, secure, and filled with new options. When clients leave their sessions with a renewed burst of energy, then we know the coaching is working. And when we're skilled in the art of life coaching, clients can experience this in a five-minute interaction as well as in a five-hour session.

You can dramatically improve your ability to be with people, such that in a few months they can authentically report that they won the lottery of life. As a life coach, you can assist people in a short time to authentically say, "Today, I'm living the life of my dreams."

Life coaches trade in miracles

It is miraculous to me what people can create when given the opportunity to solve their own problems without advice—when given the possibility and support to create the life of their choosing.

Life coaching is an amazing career. I don't see any profession that does more for people. For over 25 years, I've coached people and I've received life coaching. From the conversations I've had with my coaches, I've dramatically shifted my daily activities. I've changed how much I delegate, how much I work, how much I spend, how I take care of my health, how I relate to my wife, how much pleasure I experience, how I contribute to people, and much more.

I believe that anyone who receives life coaching can experience this same level of transformation. People can have a wonderful life almost instantly no matter what their circumstances—no matter the state of their health or their finances, their home or their relationships. With a life coach, they can overcome almost any obstacle to a wonderful life. Clients can leave a life coaching session with dozens of viable options for getting past obstacles—including many options that are wildly creative.

Life coaches are unbiased partners who support their clients' agendas and keep bringing them back to a conversation of 1) celebration, 2) dreams (what they passionately desire), and 3) actions (ways they can fulfill their desires). You and I can be life coaches—people with the rare and precious job of keeping that conversation alive.

As much as anything else you bring to a life coaching relationship, you bring the miraculous possibility that your clients can become totally alive. This is a way of being that people very seldom experience. Think about the number of people you meet who regularly enjoy deep intimacy, vibrant health, full celebration, and daily ecstasy. As a life coach, this is what you help clients create. In doing that, you are probably giving as much as one person can give another.

Please let in my enthusiasm about life coaching. On every page of this book, I want to communicate how enamored I am with this new career and how much it benefits people. Opening up to the power and possibility of this new profession can propel you toward full effectiveness as a life coach.

Major benefits of life coaching

Life coaches create value by assisting clients to solve problems. But if that's all that we do, then our clients continually need problems in order to keep working with us.

Efficient problem-solving is only part of the power and possibility of life coaching. When we coach from a larger context, we can bring all of the following benefits as well.

Constant celebration

Life coaches promote celebration and a deep appreciation of life. We encourage our clients to truly see how fortunate they are in every area of life.

Many people go through their life not realizing how wealthy they are in comparison to all of the other people on the planet. Most people don't appreciate how healthy and loved they are. One of the jobs of a life coach is to help our clients wake up to what a great life they have.

A larger vision

Life coaches can bring a vision of people that goes beyond their vision of themselves. When we see others as bigger than they see themselves to be, we empower them. We imagine our clients experiencing profound shifts in their lives and generating projects that will outlast them for many lifetimes. We listen to our clients and take their dreams seriously in a way that no one ever has before.

You and I have the potential to be with people in such a way that their lives are altered forever. When we go beyond what they *have* and *do* to who they *are*, clients can see themselves as creative, intelligent, loving, and generous. That's really how I see my clients, and I don't have to make it up. I ask you to bring this attitude to everyone you coach. And if it happens that you don't see someone this way, then do whatever you need to do so that you can—or get him a different coach.

Inspired creativity

A life coach consistently listens, speaks, and occasionally asks questions in a way that draws forth his client's genius and creativity. For any given problem, clients can generate a long list of great solutions. Often this happens when the life coach simply brings full listening and full commitment to the interaction and just invites people to stay in the inquiry: "Well, what could you do about this problem? Okay, now what else might you do?"

Sometimes life coaching seems like a think tank where clients are constantly creating and inventing new options. Life coaching is about people generating their own answers, not looking outside of themselves for solutions. This process is not about teaching what you already know or about clients acting as students. Instead, life coaching is empowering people to invent something new—to think something they've never thought before and to say something they've never said before.

Expanded possibilities

Our clients can expand their sense of what's possible to be, do, and have during their lifetimes. If people who enter life coaching have a common denominator, it's probably a spark of realization that life can be ten times better than it is now, even if life is currently great.

Part of my job as a coach is to bring forth possibilities that aren't immediately obvious to people, no matter what arena of life we're discussing.

A potential client might say, "What I really want from working with a coach is a life that's free of debt."

"Great," I'll reply. "Yes, you can get out of debt. And, if you want, you can take on the goal of having two years' worth of your salary in savings. You could even manage your money so well that you're able to give away 20 percent of your income every month. Those are just a couple of possibilities available to you in addition to getting debt-free."

What I'm doing here is creating new possibilities for people—not telling them what to do. I don't say, "You know what you *should* do? You really should put two-years' worth of money in the bank and then give away 20 percent of your income." I think that "shoulding" on people disempowers them. My goal is to open up new possibilities.

In my experience, people do not hold the possibility that they can create a life filled with joy, intimacy, pleasure, health, and financial well being. Some people even feel guilty about the prospect of having a life that grand. We as life coaches can be the voice for a wonderful life. We can just keep bringing this conversation about possibilities to clients—a conversation that they seldom get anywhere else.

Someone who listens fully

In addition to bringing a larger vision, inspired creativity, and an expanded sense of possibility, we create tremendous value just by listening fully and deeply. This is something that few people experience in any of their relationships.

Full listening happens when we allow people to survey all areas of their lives and speak with total candor about what works and what doesn't. Full listening happens when we allow clients to share, to celebrate successes, to cry, to grieve, and to laugh—all without fear of judgment.

Another way we listen fully is by releasing all of our personal agendas. Life coaching is assisting people with their agenda on

their terms. If a client is clear that picking weeds in her garden or crying for an hour is the best use of our time together, then that's what we can do.

We give people something they probably get nowhere else—a partner that has no agenda except theirs. What a huge and rare contribution to bring to people!

Unconditional acceptance

Life coaches can offer unconditional love. In my experience, this type of relationship is rare. If we provided only this, we would be bringing enough to help people create miracles. And we can provide much more.

Loving unconditionally means that in each interaction with a client we are gentle, non-antagonistic, and non-confrontational—no shame, no blame. Relating to people with an “in-your-face,” confrontational approach can sometimes work, but I do not recommend that this take place in coaching. My goal is that life coaches don't “get on a client's case”—and that clients don't get on their own cases. When people are made to feel “wrong,” or make themselves wrong, they often stop setting goals, especially big goals, and that's contrary to my vision of life coaching.

Some clients might ask you to “get on their case” or to “hold them accountable” in order to help them keep a promise, change a habit, or move forward in their life. I usually tell people that I won't do this. What I can do is remind them of their promises and goals without blaming them for not doing what they have said they would do.

Focused attention beyond sessions

Between coaching sessions, your clients can still be in your thoughts. I tell clients that one of the benefits of having me as a life coach is that I'll spend time every day thinking about them: “I will hold you in my consciousness more than anyone else does, except

possibly your mother or your father. I will review your goals and dreams and think about your struggles. I'm there for you constantly. That's how much of a partner I am for you."

Often I request photographs of my clients. That way I can look at an image of each person every morning, remember my commitment to their success, and bring their visions, dreams, and goals into my heart.

When I hear these things from a life coach, I feel valued in a way that's absolutely unique. Even when I am not in contact with my own life coaches, I still know that there are people who are rooting for me—people who are completely committed to my agenda and who care for me unconditionally.

Change in all domains

Clients can create the life of their dreams in three domains: *having*, *doing*, and *being*.

Many people are out of balance because they focus primarily on what they have—their jobs, their money, their cars, their houses, and their relationships. These people often act as if they are human "havings"—as if the only thing they need to do to be happy is to rearrange their circumstances.

Others can become "human doings." They can be dominated by what they do—the work they do, the community service they do, the trips that they take, and the exercise they do.

I am not saying that there's something wrong with having or doing. I am saying that people often minimize or forget about another domain—the domain of being. When we coach in this domain, we assist clients to define the core values and fundamental commitments that constantly shape what they choose to do and have. As life coaches, we can keep bringing clients back to a conversation about who they are, beyond their actions and circumstances. We can bring the domain of being to lives dominated by doing and having.

My goal is to achieve balance and help clients get what they want in all three of these domains. I want them to live effectively in the domain of being—to make moment-to-moment choices based on their deepest values. I also want them to be able to do most everything they've ever dreamed of doing and to have the circumstances of their dreams.

While keeping balance among these three domains in mind, I will bend over backwards in assisting people to achieve the life of their dreams in *any* one of these domains. As a life coach, I resist the temptation to steer clients away from “materialistic” goals in the domain of having and guide them toward goals that are more doing- or being-oriented. If a client comes to me and says, “What I want is an expensive house and a fancy car,” then I'll say, “Great, I can help you have those things.”

Benefits to people beyond the client

In 1995, Stan Lankowitz and I completed a book titled *Human Being: A Manual for Happiness, Health, Love, and Wealth*. When we conceived this book, our aim was to communicate ideas in a way that would dramatically alter the quality of each reader's life. What's more, we wanted *Human Being* to have a similar effect on people who knew the reader—even if these people didn't read the book.

As life coaches, we can adopt a similar goal. When our clients bring more happiness, health, love, and wealth to themselves, they benefit their coworkers, friends, and families as well as their organizations and communities. This fact reinforces the usefulness of multi-year and even multi-decade relationships with our clients. When we partner with people over the long-term, we help them win the lottery of life *and* create value for the people and projects they love.

Freedom from suffering and self-discipline

I often meet people who subscribe to the philosophy of “no pain, no gain.” Even though people can create value from their suffering and self-discipline, this is not the path that I recommend to my clients. I

want people to live out their visions, dreams, and goals with a minimum of pain, struggle, upset, and turmoil.

Suffering and self-discipline are not always necessary to personal growth and development. Through life coaching, clients can get to the life of their dreams while staying lighthearted and taking actions that seem almost effortless.

Full commitment

Tremendous progress can be generated simply out of our commitment to clients. This is 90 percent of what life coaching is about—being completely committed to the client's agenda in life. This commitment gives people power.

You don't need lots of techniques or years of experience to be an effective life coach. What contributes to people most is your level of commitment to them. That commitment doesn't come from technique or experience—it comes from the depths of your being.

Key qualities of life coaches

Life coaches are committed to joyful service

Service without joy can too easily turn into resentment and, rather than being a gift, can become a burden for both the giver and receiver. As life coaches, we experience joy when we serve others and consider it an honor. We are committed to leaving people in better shape than we found them and are thrilled when given the opportunity to assist clients to get what they want in their lives.

In order to serve clients effectively, we suspend our own thoughts about what's most important and, instead, commit solely to our client's purpose and agenda.

As a life coach, I enjoy knowing specifically how I can serve my client. To find out how I can be most empowering from moment to

moment, I can look to my client for direction. I could ask, “Do you still want to talk about money issues today, as we’d planned, or is there something else that is more important to you right now?” Or I could ask, “Would you like me to just listen or would you prefer that I facilitate some problem-solving?”

Life coaches have confidence in clients

Life coaches facilitate miracles in people’s lives. This can be a daunting and even frightening challenge if we think we have to do this all by ourselves. But we don’t. We know that our clients are brilliant, loving, and generous partners in the process. We trust that our clients can quickly and permanently create wonderful lives.

Life coaches do more than listen *to* people—we listen *for* people. We listen for what might be dormant or hidden. We listen for evidence of positive qualities that our clients might not have distinguished in themselves. We listen *for* people’s magnificence. We listen *for* the greatness in who people are becoming.

When life coaches listen for people in this way, these positive qualities rise to the surface and manifest more frequently and more powerfully. The way life coaches interact with clients is a contribution that helps clients know in the depths of their souls that they are geniuses.

Even when a client is feeling low on confidence and is self-deprecating, a life coach can stand in contradiction to the client’s current mood or point of view. While having empathy and complete understanding, a life coach knows that a foundation of brilliance and competence lies just beneath their client’s negative self-esteem.

Now, I can’t prove that you, I, and our clients are all geniuses. I don’t have your IQ scores and I don’t have your clients’ IQ scores. But I just know in my heart that the people I interact with are geniuses. When I trust that of myself and of them, then what we create during a coaching conversation rises to the level of genius.

One of the most powerful tools I use in my coaching is to communicate this promise to each of my clients: "I will interact with you knowing that you are brilliant, capable, loving, contributing, resourceful, generous, and creative. And if you ever appear differently than this, I'll know that I've just made an error and that I'm not seeing you as you really are."

In addition to having confidence in our clients, we as life coaches also trust the desires of our clients. We are confident that clients know what is best for themselves. We believe that when clients follow their own authentic desires, they end up promoting the highest good for the largest number of people.

Even if a client follows a well-examined desire and it gets the client into some kind of trouble, coaches trust that the consequences of the client's actions and what is learned as a result of that action is an effective way to move the client forward. Of course, if the client is planning some illegal, unethical, or immoral activity, I do my best to stop it.

Life coaches trust what their clients say. Even when their words seem to conflict with some of their behaviors, life coaches still trust what their clients say. If, for example, a client says that he wants to lose weight and yet does not exercise and maintains the same poor eating habits, a life coach knows that the behaviors are just a bunch of habits that have not yet changed to be consistent with the client's stated goal. The behaviors in no way dilute the integrity of the client's words that he truly wants to lose weight.

Life coaches trust the process

Life coaches know that life coaching works. We are very certain that clients can use life coaching to create miracles in their lives. This clarity is not theoretical. It is gained through their own direct experience and through the reports of others. This belief is contagious when we have an unshakable belief in the value of life coaching. The more confidence clients have in the process, the more effectively they will be able to use it to create more of whatever they want in their lives.

Life coaches are accountable

We are not only trusting, we are also trustworthy. We keep appointments, we keep whatever agreements we make, and we keep confidences. As life coaches, when we make mistakes and do not keep our word, we report the mistake, do what we can to repair any damages, and assure our clients that we remain committed to keeping our word and being accountable.

In many settings and relationships in the world, when a promise is not kept, it's no big deal. In these cases, keeping promises is not valued very highly. Coaches set a different standard. We have different expectations and model the power of keeping promises. Life coaches know that when a promise is made, words float out into the universe bearing a vision of what is to come. When actions are aligned with those words, intentions become realities. This is a process that clients can use to create the life of their dreams.

Life coaches are passionate about personal and professional growth

Life coaches are passionate about ongoing personal and professional development. This is a big part of why I coach people. I want to constantly learn, grow, and improve. I want to be more effective both as a life coach and as a human being who enjoys high levels of health, happiness, love, and wealth in my own life. Life coaching keeps me in conversations about personal and professional effectiveness and helps me make continual progress toward achieving my goals.

Life coaches are neither stuck nor positioned. We are open to change, willing to take risk, and comfortable trying on different points of view. We are constantly looking for ways to improve.

Life coaches are not too proud to ask for and receive help. Many coaches are so very clear about the benefits of coaching that they have their own coaches. I certainly do. Actually, I have several coaches, and I use them all the time.

Even though coaches have challenges and ups and downs just like everyone else, we are knowledgeable about a wide variety of success strategies and are practiced at using them. They are generally living balanced, fulfilling, joyful, and contributing lives.

Life coaches are life-long learners. We are able to offer many current personal examples, refer to a wide variety of literature, and bring relevant, accurate information to our conversations. We use what we've learned to inject useful analogies and metaphors whenever appropriate.

Life coaches establish rapport

A relationship with a life coach is one of the most personal and intimate relationships that a person can have. When conversations are safe, when listening is effective, and when strong rapport has been developed, clients are willing to reveal their deepest desires and most troublesome concerns.

One of the most effective ways to establish rapport is to use the first strategy on the coaching continuum, which is to listen fully and affirm. Fully understanding and accepting clients' thoughts, emotions, and actions strengthen the bond that holds relationships together.

Life coaches think creatively

When life coaches are adding to clients' lists of possibilities or presenting their own, the ability to think creatively can help clients break out of old paradigms and create new interpretations that are more empowering. Generating many different (and even contradictory) ideas, options, solutions, and menus can give clients a greater sense of freedom.

When holding up a mirror, life coaches use our creative thinking to polish up and enhance whatever the client has spoken before sending it back.

Life coaches think creatively to accommodate special preferences and unique needs of our clients. We can invent a wide variety of options regarding times of sessions, duration of sessions, places to meet, methods of communication, styles of feedback, menus of topics, and just about anything else related to the structure and dynamics of coaching our clients.

Life coaches think critically

Life coaches assist clients to apply critical thinking skills to achieve goals. We also understand that critical thinking is just one helpful tool, and that other tools, such as intuition and emotions, can access powerful domains of intelligence and wisdom.

There are numerous ways that life coaches can effectively use critical thinking. Here are just a few:

- The ability to categorize and prioritize can turn a loosely formulated and random set of ideas into a thoughtful, meaningful, strategically organized life plan.
- Assisting clients to distinguish between fact and opinion can open up possibilities of new paradigms and interpretations that result in happier, more fulfilling lives.
- Using critical thinking to challenge even the most cherished convictions can lead to more freedom.
- Critical thinking skills can assist clients to untangle complex situations so that they can think more clearly about them and develop action plans more appropriate to the various elements of the problem or goal.
- By comparing their behaviors with their values, clients can be less influenced by the immediate pushes, pulls, desires, and aversions of their circumstances and make choices more consistent with who they intend to be.
- Life coaches can help clients gain clarity about something by gently suggesting that clients consider the possibility that they are making some of the more common errors in thinking such as using double standards, stereotyping, and accepting unsubstantiated assumptions.

Life coaches facilitate powerful processes

As life coaches, we have a variety of processes in our toolboxes to assist clients in resolving current problems, exploring new possibilities, designing effective and powerful action plans, creating visions for the future that are clear, compelling and wonderful, and living the life of their dreams.

These processes include facilitating emotional release, promoting promises and commitment, inventing powerful interpretations, and creating multiple solutions and pathways to achieve any goal. Processes that life coaches use are content free and can be applied to many different issues, circumstances, and goals.

Life coaches pay attention to language

The way clients speak and their choice of words reveal attitudes, values, beliefs, and intentions that are fairly good predictors of outcomes, both successful and unsuccessful. Client language offers clues than invite strategies that promote progress.

In my book, *Falling Awake*, I talk about the ladder of powerful speaking. The main purpose of this approach is to offer a way for people to use their language to move from being victims to being more self-responsible. When clients use words like "I should," "I have to," "I must," or "They made me," they are giving their power away to others and are playing the role of victims. When clients use other words like, "I could," "I'd prefer to," "I'd love to," "I plan to," and "I promise," they are moving closer to being responsible and taking effective action. Life coaches can discuss this use of language with clients and assist them to be in more control of their lives.

You can read the article about the ladder of powerful speaking for free by visiting my website www.fallingawake.com and clicking on "Get the Book Free" and then on "Table of Contents." In the chapter "Success Strategy #4 – Take Responsibility", the article is titled "Escaping victim mud." In fact, you can read any article in the entire book for free at this website.

The article immediately following “Escaping victim mud” is titled “Speak from ‘I.’” It offers a way to use the less threatening language in “I” messages instead of the more blaming language in “you” messages. Listening for and discussing this distinction is another way to empower clients.

Another example of the benefits of paying close attention to language is that life coaches can help their clients turn complaints into requests. For example, “We never have any fun anymore” can be heard as “Can we plan to go for a hike or do something that’s fun next weekend?”

Life coaches can also translate complaints they receive from their clients into requests that lead to positive changes. “I have a problem because I really want to talk with you next week but I’ll be on a cruise ship in the Caribbean” can be heard as “I’ll be on a cruise ship in the Caribbean next week and would you help me find a way to talk with you?”

Life coaches coach from a blank canvas

Great life coaches come to a session with a carefully prepared agenda and then completely release that agenda.

Before I see clients or talk to them over the telephone, I mentally review their life and their commitments. And then I review my notes where I have kept track of the highlights of their lives and the topics we discussed in our last several meetings. From this, I create an agenda that reflects what I think the client wants and what she might have said that she would like to do during this meeting.

Setting this agenda prepares me to be of the most service. Then, I throw the agenda away.

Michel Renaud, a life coach in Montreal, once asked the painter Peter Max how he could be so productive as an artist. “The discipline I have is to just walk into the studio and be in front of the canvas with no agenda,” Max said. With a background in

meditation, Max can completely let go of everything on his mind. He creates a space inside himself resembling a blank canvas, staying present moment-to-moment with nothing predetermined. Then he just paints one stroke after another and an amazing work of art shows up.

Renaud says his intention is to do the same thing when coaching people: "I create a space for that person to discover what they have to discover and then be pertinent to that moment. Meeting Peter Max showed me that my job is to bring emptiness and a blank space instead of all my history and baggage with the client."

Coming to this blank space can be hard when we bring assumptions about the differences between people. For example, I could assume that there's a huge difference between coaching men and coaching women. I could also assume there is a big difference between coaching someone who is 20 years old and someone who is 40. And, I could assume that coaching someone who grew up in a rural area is different than coaching someone who grew up in a large city.

The trick is to acknowledge all those differences and go beyond them. I don't like to assume that people's gender, income level, race, or age explains who they are or why they do what they do. I think that categorizing people and then coming up with ways to coach them based on those categories is a mistake. I want to coach to the soul, not to the category—male versus female, black versus white, gay versus straight, old versus young.

I do not want to depend on any preconceptions about the differences between people when I coach them. While coaching, I want to continually return to the blank canvas that Peter Max and Michel Renaud talk about. I want to release any thoughts such as, "When I'm with men, I'm going to coach them one way, and when I'm with women, I'm going to coach them a different way." My commitment is to let go of such thoughts and approach each human being with a blank canvas. From that infinite space we can call forth all possibilities.

Life coaching as a distinct career

Many roles overlap with the role of life coaching. To some people, a life coach looks like a paid friend. There is some overlap between friendship and life coaching, but they are not the same. To other people, a life coach looks like a counselor. Again, there is some overlap, but these two professions are quite distinct.

We could compare life coaches to people in many other roles: managers, supervisors, consultants, rabbis, priests, ministers, sponsors, mentors, teachers, occupational therapists, advice columnists, and even psychics. Knowing distinctions between these roles and life coaching can help you do the job more effectively.

You can get most of these key distinctions by understanding how life coaches differ from both consultants and counselors.

Life coaching is not consulting

Consultants are paid to give advice. For example, a financial consultant advises people about how to handle their money, and a health consultant—a physician—advises people about how to improve their health.

Giving advice has a place, and it is not life coaching. As a life coach, you can talk to people about their finances, their health, their relationships, their career, or any other aspect of their lives—all without giving advice. This attitude toward advice underscores the fundamental difference between consultants and life coaches.

Consultants are paid to share their expertise in a given subject and to recommend certain courses of action. Sometimes, in life, that's valuable and even essential. When I go to a mechanic, I want some clear advice on how to keep my car running. When I go to a physician, I want clear advice on how to keep my body running.

When I go to a life coach, I want something different. I want someone who understands that I can usually generate my own solutions

to my own problems. I want someone who realizes that I can create my own goals and discover dozens of ways to achieve them. I want someone who assists me to discover my own passion and unlock my own brilliance. I don't want to leave a life coaching session feeling that my coach is a genius because she gives great advice. I want to leave the session knowing at a deep level that *I* am a genius.

When working with a consultant, I let someone else be the expert on a particular part of my life. When relating to a life coach, *I* get to be the expert on every aspect of my life. That's one way that a life coach empowers me as few consultants can.

Life coaching is not therapy

Life coaches also differ in major ways from social workers, counselors, clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, and other kinds of therapists. Consider the following distinctions:

- Most of a therapist's clients have mental disorders as defined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. A life coach works mainly with people who have no mental disorders, but when a client does need therapy, they get that in addition to life coaching.
- Therapists often assist people to gain insight by dwelling on the psychodynamics of their thinking and behavior. While life coaches value insight, they assist people to move quickly from the realm of insight into setting goals and taking action.
- Therapy, especially when it's based in psychoanalysis, often delves into the patient's past and inquires into the origins of a behavior. Life coaching is more about assisting clients to change behavior in the present and create the future they want.
- Therapists are often focused on a specific problem—the patient's "presenting issue." Life coaches start with a survey of the client's whole life, including health, relationships, career, spirituality, and much more, and then deal with every aspect of life.

- Therapists often build short-term relationships with patients—perhaps a few weeks or few months. This is especially true in the age of managed care. Life coaches build relationships that last for years, even decades.
- Often a therapist’s job can be summarized in the phrase, “There’s something wrong that needs fixing.” Life coaches are more likely to say, “There’s nothing wrong here. My client has a great life and wants it to get even better.”

