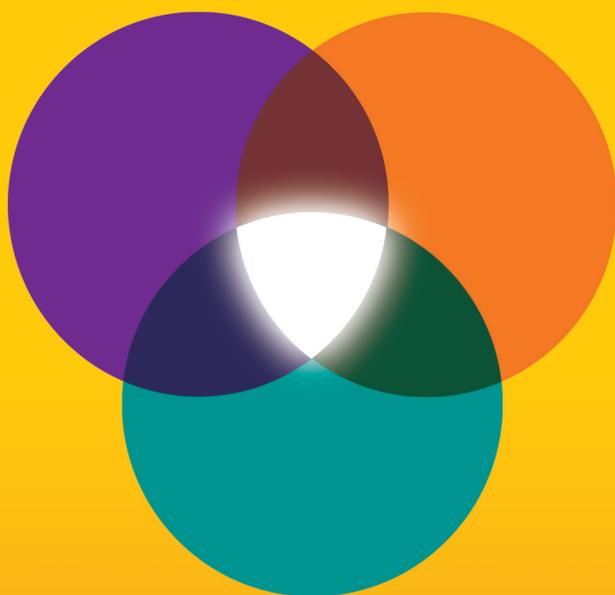


Coaching to the Human Soul

Ontological Coaching and Deep Change

Volume IV



ALAN SIELER

Coaching to the Human Soul

Ontological Coaching and Deep Change

Alan Sieler

First published by Newfield Institute 2020

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National Library of Australia

Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

Sieler, Alan

Coaching to the human soul: ontological coaching and deep change :
volume 4: towards professional artistry and ontological coaching.

Bibliography.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-0-646-98594-7

1. Ontology. 2. Language and languages. 3. Learning, Psychology of.

111

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Blackburn, Victoria 3130

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Edited by Emma Gilmour

Indexed by Karen Gillen

Cover Design by David Constable

Printed in China

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**Towards Professional Artistry
with Ontological Coaching**

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Introduction

About Volume IV

Readers familiar with Ontological Coaching will be aware that its distinguishing feature is a focus on the Way of Being of clients. Way of Being contains our perceptions and attitudes, many of which are deep-seated and out-of-awareness, and is regarded as the underlying driver of our behaviour and communication.

This book builds on Volumes I, II and III of *Coaching to the Human Soul: Ontological Coaching and Deep Change* by integrating and deepening the many ways available to coach in each of the three existential domains of language, emotions and body that constitute Way of Being. It is worth briefly recapping what is covered in each of the first three volumes.

- Volume I, subtitled *The Linguistic Basis of Ontological Coaching*, articulated in detail how language is a process (referred to as languaging) humans are continually immersed in that generates what is real for them. Ontological coaches have unique distinctions in language that enable them to: (i) observe how clients may be generating unhelpful realities through the way they use and do not use language and (ii) how to support them develop more helpful languaging skills and habits.
- Volume II, subtitled *Emotional Learning and Ontological Coaching*, established that emotions and moods are integral aspects of our biology and that to be human is inevitably to be an emotioning being. By recognising that moods and emotions continually shape perceptions and behaviour, and being able to discern the effects of specific moods and emotions, ontological coaches assist clients to make constructive shifts in their emotional worlds that enable them to engage more effectively in life.

- Volume III, subtitled *The Biological and Somatic Basis of Ontological Coaching*, introduced the field of Biology of Cognition, which provides a powerful understanding of the centrality of the nervous system in human perception, learning and behaviour. The inevitable involvement of the nervous system means that the entire body is involved in learning and change. Gaining a biological, philosophical and physiological appreciation of the body as a domain of learning and change provides a foundation for knowing how to utilise specific ways of respectfully coaching to the body to maximise the possibility of deep change.

Throughout each book the crucial importance of legitimising clients by coaching sensitively and respectfully is emphasised, which includes sometimes ensuring permission is provided to explore aspects of the client's Way of Being.

The project of integrating and deepening the ontological approach to coaching that takes place in this volume is explained through a number of interrelated themes:

- understanding the nature of artistry and professional artistry;
- detailed awareness of how artistry in Ontological Coaching can be developed;
- the relevance of Ontological Coaching to the challenge of dealing with existential issues in contemporary societies;
- the contribution of artistry in Ontological Coaching to the professionalisation of coaching.

While most of the book covers the process of moving towards artistry in Ontological Coaching, an appreciation of the potentially invaluable social contribution of this approach can be gained by situating it in an historical context. There are two components of this context, which are expressed as “dealing with existential issues” and “the professionalisation of coaching”. Although this historical context occurs in the last two chapters of the book, gaining an initial overview of the context will be helpful for being oriented to this final volume of *Coaching to the Human Soul*.

The growing challenge of dealing with existential issues

The increasingly fast-changing nature of the world, sometimes described as unprecedented in human history, and its ramifications for our wellbeing have been addressed at different stages in each of the previous three volumes. It has become apparent that one of the consequences of current historical circumstances for many societies has been the increasing incidence of what are expressed as mental health concerns, such as depression and anxiety. These breakdowns in the wellbeing of individuals are the province of skilled mental health practitioners, such as psychologists and counsellors.

Coaches are not mental health practitioners and should not attempt to be so without appropriate education and training. However, it can be interpreted that the growth of coaching since the mid nineteen nineties as a means of supporting people in their personal and professional lives indicates an important social need that is separate to mental health concerns. This need can be framed as the continual challenge of effectively dealing with existential issues.

Experiencing persistent difficulties in life, a general sense of dissatisfaction and not making desired progress can be regarded as existential issues. The ever-present challenges of organisational performance, leadership effectiveness and workplace satisfaction are existential issues.

People act or behave on the basis of their perceptions. Perceptual and behavioural patterns are learned through the history of life experiences. These patterns often serve us well and sometimes not, and we can become stuck in outdated patterns that render us ineffective. This means that we have not been successful in developing more helpful ways of perceiving and acting in the circumstances we find ourselves in. In times of rapid change there is a risk that our habitual ways of perceiving and responding to different aspects of the world no longer work and the quality of our existence becomes compromised.

Existential challenges can also be framed as the challenge of living well, experiencing a satisfactory quality of existence

and being effective in different areas of life without feeling the need for mental health support. Living well especially includes experiencing life as fulfilling, meaningful and suitably stimulating. It also involves effectively dealing with significantly unsettling life events that are inevitable aspects of human existence, which can be intensified in times of rapid change.

There is also a risk that continuing ineffectiveness in dealing with existential issues can lead to the development of mental health and deeper psychological issues. When done well coaching can provide invaluable support for enhancing people's abilities for dealing with existential issues, reducing the risk of mental health issues developing and contributing to the overall wellbeing of society. However, there is a crucial consideration that is not to be overlooked if coaching is to provide the required support for existential issues. This is ensuring that coaches have a well-honed conceptual and practical working knowledge of human perception and behaviour.

If coaches are to be sufficiently skilled in supporting clients to deal with existential issues it is essential that they have *a deeply grounded understanding of human perception and behaviour*, which this is informed by a body of knowledge or a discipline that enables extensive practical learning of the application of the discipline.

Ontological Coaching is grounded in a discipline of human perception and behaviour known as *Ontology of the Human Observer*. The ideas of renowned thinkers in different areas of philosophy and biology have been integrated to form a discipline that has a substantive theoretical foundation and a well-articulated coaching methodology for effective practice.

The professionalisation of coaching

Despite statements that position coaching as a new profession¹ coaching is not yet a profession. While various associations and tertiary institutions in different parts of the world provide coaching certification, coaching is an unregulated industry and unfortunately falls well short of what is required to be a profession.

One of the requirements of a profession is that it is based on

a substantive and coherent body of knowledge – a discipline. If coaching is to develop long-term standing in the community as a viable means of providing support for existential issues, it is vital that it is seen to be based on a sound discipline. As was stated in the Introduction to Volume I:

In the absence of sound theory and practice, there is a risk that coaching could be marginalised and trivialised, and it will be seen as a fad, which anyone can do by attaching the label ‘coach’ to themselves. If this happens, it will be a huge blow to the potential of coaching to make the world a better place by enriching people’s personal and professional lives.²

Being effective in assisting people to make progress with existential issues requires more than developing a set of minimal coaching competences. It requires experiential understanding of the complexities and nuances of human perception and behaviour through immersion in a discipline and its practical applications. While competences are an important starting point, coaching proficiency goes one step further through the acquisition of complex skillsets that equip the coach to be sufficiently versatile and adaptable to engage deeply with clients across a wide range of existential issues.

By being a coaching discipline Ontological Coaching can make an important contribution to enhancing the professionalisation of coaching.

The development of coaching artistry

The elegant, graceful and highly effective application of one or more complex skillsets in any area of human endeavour can be regarded as a form of artistry. A typical view of artistry is that it only applies to those with extraordinary talents in artistic fields such as painting and dancing. However, artistry can be observed in the everyday activities of people who are highly skilful in dealing with complex issues, such as smoothly managing three young children on an extensive shopping trip or the deftness of a business leader in how they relate with their team in managing the change associated with merging with another company.

Donald Schön recognised that artistry could be observed in the work of professional practitioners and invented the term “professional artistry”.³ He observed some practitioners who seemed extraordinarily skilful in successfully handling unexpected non-routine situations, without appearing to have more content knowledge than other practitioners. He assessed that they seemed to know the most appropriate thing to do in the most appropriate way at the most appropriate time. Such action can appear simple on the surface. However, this impression belies the deep commitment of the practitioner and embodiment of skills through years of dedicated practice and experience, underpinned by a constant desire to learn and continually improve.

As coaching is not a profession it is premature to refer to coaches developing professional artistry. However, we can consider how: (i) coaching artistry can be developed in the application of a discipline of human perception and behaviour, such as *Ontology of the Human Observer* and (ii) the development of such artistry can contribute towards the professionalisation of coaching.

Moving towards artistry in Ontological Coaching involves the gradual embodiment of fundamental coaching principles and skills, as well as a range of complex skillsets in each of the three existential domains of language, emotions and body. Foremost in the embodiment process is the coach’s continual engagement in ontological design and transformation of their Way of Being. This requires engaging in self-coaching as a regular practice of applying the methodology of Ontological Coaching for addressing their own existential issues.

Cultivating artistry in Ontological Coaching comes not only from extensive coaching experience, but also from continual reflection on each coaching engagement. This consists of the coach reflecting on:

- their Way of Being in each session and if it allowed them to effectively utilise their coaching skillsets for the benefit of their client; and
- how skilfully they used appropriate aspects of the coaching methodology to facilitate the coachee to develop helpful new perceptions and behaviours.

The reflection process includes the coach's individual reflections, as well as regular shared reflections with fellow coaches and mentor coaches.

Outline of Volume IV

Towards Professional Artistry With Ontological Coaching consists of four sections.

Part I, Professional Artistry, contains three chapters on the notions of artistry and professional artistry, which includes the views of notable philosophers that are consistent with the philosophical underpinnings of Ontological Coaching. Also included are two chapters outlining a framework of complex skill acquisition that illuminates the inevitable phases to be passed through on a path to coaching artistry. Finally, in this section the crucial role of intuition in the development of artistry in the latter phases of complex skill acquisition is expounded.

Part II, Ontological Design, outlines in detail the importance of the coach being continually active and increasingly skilled in applying the ontological methodology to enhance the quality of their own existence. This is regarded as an indispensable basis for becoming proficient in supporting clients to deal with existential issues in their personal and working lives. Engaging in ontological design consists of three components.

Firstly, the coach ensuring they are open to continually learn about and expand their own Way of Being, as well as other aspects of human perception and behaviour. Being an ontological learner is indispensable for the development of coaching artistry.

The second component of ontological design is the utilisation of a framework called Permanent Domains of Human Concern to reflect in detail on the quality of existence that is being experienced in the wide range of areas or domains of life that the coach is inevitably involved in. Identifying the specific areas of life that are going well and the areas of life in which there is a desire for improvement is an essential part of what can be called "existential goal setting".

The third component of ontological design is Ontological Self-Coaching. Enhancing the quality of existence comes from self-

generated shifts in perception and behaviour, which is greatly facilitated by self-coaching. Ontological Self-Coaching is oriented toward the coach developing the practice of the self-transformation of their being and becoming more self-authoring in this process.

Part III, *Cultivating Artistry in Ontological Coaching*, is based on a dynamic process model of Ontological Coaching that identifies five phases of the coaching engagement. Coaching artistry is evident when coach works proficiently through each of the five phases, providing a conversational context in which the coachee can make important discoveries and undergo a significant shift in their Way of Being. A detailed exposition of the complex skillsets associated with each phase is provided, which includes the skilful application of the fundamental principles and generic competences of Ontological Coaching.

Part IV, *Historical Positioning of Ontological Coaching*, contends that Ontological Coaching is an innovative and history-making endeavour that can facilitate clients enhancing their ontological security and adaptive resilience, enabling them to make progress with their existential issues. In addition, this section advances the interpretation that because Ontological Coaching is based on a solid theoretical foundation, has a well-articulated methodology and ensures extensive practice and experiential learning, it has a significant contribution to make to advancing the professionalisation of coaching.

Two additional points are important to note in reading this book.

- As with the previous volumes, a combination of examples of Ontological Coaching in action and Reflective Activities are provided to ensure that you gain an experiential understanding of in-depth aspects of the coaching methodology.
- References are continually made to each of the three previous volumes of *Coaching to the Human Soul* and these are written as Volume I, Volume II and Volume III.

Welcome to Volume IV of *Coaching to the Human Soul: Ontological Coaching and Deep Change*.

Notes

- ¹ For example, “Coaching is a profession regulated by ethical standards reflected in the ethical codes of professional coaching institutions.” Mikhail Klarin, “The new educational practice of coaching and the new profession of the coach.” *Russian Education and Society*, Vol. 57, No. 6, June 2015, p. 422.
- ² Alan Sieler, *Coaching to the Human Soul: Ontological Coaching and Deep Change. Volume I: The Linguistic Basis of Ontological Coaching*, p. xi.
- ³ Donald Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*.