

Praise for *Sticky Outcomes!*

Sticky Outcomes is refreshing. It isn't about learning coaching skills but, instead, about how coaching works. Lyssa deHart provides a crash course in human psychology and highlights the many ways that it is at the heart of coaching. She draws on neuroscience, clinical psychology, communications, and other sources to reveal the inner workings of change. In doing so, *Sticky Outcomes* mirrors the coaching process itself: she invites readers to reflect on and experiment with their practice. deHart provides transcripts of her own coaching as well as refreshingly honest appraisals. She isn't here to wow you with her brilliance but, instead, to model the humility, awareness, and intentionality that lie at the heart of coaching. This book is essential for coaches looking to understand and apply coaching skills.

Dr. Robert Biswas-Diener, author of *Positive Provocation*

I refer to Lyssa deHart's work frequently to add creative and essential dimensions to the coaching skills I use and teach. Her research and transcripts of coaching sessions give depth to *Sticky Outcomes* that make the book a useful guide to refer to frequently on your coaching journey. As deHart says, have the courage to stay present when coaching. Let the thinker you are working with create the dots, connect the dots, and own the dots, and you will be amazed at the insights and wisdom that emerge.

Dr. Marcia Reynolds, MCC, author of the international bestseller *Coach the Person, Not the Problem* and *Breakthrough Coaching*

Sticky Outcomes gets to the heart of what makes change last. Lyssa deHart blends science, compassion, and real coaching experience in a way that feels grounded and encouraging. She shows how psychological safety, partnership, and the ICF Core Competencies all come together to create conversations that truly transform. If you're committed to helping your clients grow in meaningful, lasting ways, this book will resonate deeply.

Valorie Burton, MS, MAPP, MCC, CEO of The Coaching and Positive Psychology (CaPP) Institute and author of *Rules of Resilience: 10 ways Successful People Get Better, Wiser and Stronger*

Sticky Outcomes is a tour de force. Lyssa deHart blends multidisciplinary insight, practical tools, and lived experience to ground readers in coaching's core competencies. Her coach-client dialogues arrive precisely when you want to see her teaching in action, and her "Choice Points" highlight the creative coaching possibilities inherent in every conversation. This book is sure to become a coaching classic—don't miss it.

Carrie Sackett, MS, PCC, author of *Social Therapeutic Coaching: A Practical Guide to Group and Couples Work*

Lyssa deHart masterfully bridges the science and soul of coaching. *Sticky Outcomes* is a love letter to the art of true partnership in coaching. deHart's journey from 'fixing' to facilitating is one every coach must make, and she guides us there with science, stories, and soul. Her focus on client-led direction, metaphor, and vertical development makes this essential reading for anyone committed to coaching that creates lasting change. *Sticky Outcomes* will deepen your practice and remind you why this work matters.

Betsy Salkind, PCC and **Amy Warshawsky, MS, MCC**, co-authors of *Coaching with a Twist: Improv for Coaches*

Lyssa deHart has an uncanny ability to spot the stories people are living inside of and then open the kind of conversation that helps them see the choices they didn't realize were already available to them. In *Sticky Outcomes*, she offers, with the precision of a master coach, a practical way to work with the beliefs that drive our behavior and shows us how transformation happens when the thinker does the thinking. After reading *Sticky Outcomes*, you walk away with a profound understanding of what great coaching requires and a strong sense of your own agency. It's an essential read for coaches, both for its depth and, more importantly, because it reminds us why this work matters in the first place."

Jon Rosemberg, MBA, PCC, author of *A Guide to Thriving*

Sticky Outcomes is a fresh and dynamic contribution to our field of coaching! Lyssa deHart's body of work offers a brilliant leap forward in presenting the evolution of consciousness that we are experiencing today in our field of coaching and personal/professional development. You will be empowered by this literary masterpiece.

Fran Fisher, MCC, author of *Calling Forth Greatness*

I just want to say WOW! This is a resource I really wish I had when I started coach training. *Sticky Outcomes* offers a refreshing, grounded approach to professional coaching that goes beyond surface level techniques. Lyssa deHart masterfully integrates neuroscience, emotional intelligence, and decades of practical experience into a comprehensive guide that treats coaching as both art and science.

What sets this book apart is her commitment to partnership over fixing, and her insistence that coaches develop themselves as their primary tool. She demystifies the ICF Core Competencies through real transcripts, relatable examples, and her signature metaphor work, making complex concepts accessible without dumbing them down.

deHart's voice is warm, honest, and occasionally self-deprecating as she shares her own coaching failures alongside successes. Her emphasis on "client-led" coaching, neuroplasticity, and creating psychological safety provides a robust framework for transformational work. It's exactly the book I wish I had when I was studying for my first ICF exam. It's more than a book of information; it's an invitation to grow into the kind of coach who creates lasting change.

Loren Sanders, MBA, PCC, author of *Empathy Is Not a Weakness: And Other Stories from the Edge*

Typical coaching focuses on transactional approaches that address symptoms and taking action for action's sake. In *Sticky Outcomes*, Lyssa deHart takes you beneath the surface to learn how to ask powerful questions that uncover root causes, leading to deeper and sustained insight and transformation for clients. Instead of our tendency as coaches to be "doers," Lyssa helps us learn to be "be-ers" and create more ease, trust, and responsiveness to handle even the toughest coaching conversations.

Using a combination of science, anecdotes, and prose (and of course, metaphors!), deHart provides simple, clear guidance that teaches to the MCC level. Whether you're a new or seasoned coach, you'll be able to immediately apply her concepts and take your coaching to the next level.

David Franklin, MA, MCC, Director of Education for the HeArt of Laser-Focused Coaching

Sticky Outcomes is more than a coaching book. It is a reminder of what actually creates change. Lyssa deHart shows that the real power is not in clever techniques or perfectly crafted questions. It is in presence. Curiosity. Paying deep attention. She uses the word “thinker” in a way that shifts the whole frame. Suddenly the work becomes less about fixing and more about witnessing someone open up in real time. If you want to coach with more depth, more courage, and more humanity, this book will set you up to do so.

Peter Reek, MSc, PCC, author of *Shift: 7 Mindsets for an Inspired Midlife*

Sticky Outcomes is the kind of business book every leader should read. Lyssa deHart combines a great blend of theory, philosophy, science, and actual experience while staying grounded in the very real application of effectively coaching towards transformation. Her writing is humorous and digestible, punctuated by poignant metaphors and real-life examples throughout. She demystifies the balance between the art and science that goes into the practice of coaching with humility, humor, and intentionality. In a nutshell, *Sticky Outcomes* is a must-read for anyone looking to either begin or upgrade their coaching skills.

Marissa Waldman, CEO, Leaderology, developing fearlessly authentic leaders who change the world

Sticky Outcomes!

at the Intersection of Coaching,
Neuroscience, & Lasting Change

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Lyssa deHart, LICSW, MCC



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The author of this book is not dispensing medical advice or prescribing the use of any technique as a form of treatment for mental, emotional, physical or medical problems. The reader is responsible for appropriate medical care with their doctor or therapist. The intent of the author is only to offer information to support getting curious about metaphors and how they show up in the work of coaches and therapists. The information is for you alone. The author and the publisher assume no responsibility for how you use the information.

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For Elsa

You set me on a curious path,
and it has led me to some very
interesting places.

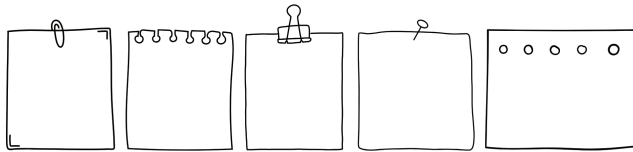
Thank you.



PREFACE

“Give a man a fish and feed him for a day,
teach a man to fish, and feed him for his life.

—Anne Thackeray Ritchie



Coaching is not about having the perfect questions or being the perfect coach. If anything, the longer I’ve coached executives, leaders, and ordinary people, the more convinced I am that learning to bring your whole self as a thought partner into the conversation leads to better outcomes and lasting change. I’m also convinced that an obsession with perfect questions, tools, and “getting it right” can get in the way. Perfection kills presence. Prescribed questions tempt you to sound perfect, leaning on formulas for safety. This book is about learning what it takes to show up fully present.

I’ve done this myself in YouTube videos, and the ones I scripted were wooden. Unless you’re acting, leave scripts aside. This doesn’t mean we abandon the coaching framework or structure; an effective coach understands the grounded framework that holds the container of a coaching conversation. Leaders aren’t looking for you to be perfect. Whether they know it or not, they need you to be fully present and to support them as they explore what’s between where they are and where they want to go.

For example, when the president of a corporate division came to our coaching session after being told, with no warning, that a vice president had to be fired by the end of the week, there wasn’t a script that could have prepared me for the intensity of that moment. The executive was anxious, overwhelmed, and stuck. My job wasn’t to tell them what to do, nor was it to build a step-by-step plan.

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I was there to listen and be curious on their behalf. My job was to sit with the tension, be with them, and offer the space they needed to slow down and breathe.

They needed one simple question: “Given the circumstances, what’s the very first thing you need to focus on right now?”

Then I waited. The calm and the pause gave them the chance to find their own clarity and begin the conversation they needed to have.

In another session, a founder sat stuck, looking at three options: sell one company, grow another, or try to keep both and juggle them as best they could. We could have gone down the rabbit hole of pros and cons. Overwhelmed by the magnitude and implications of each decision point, he just couldn’t make a simple decision; there were too many parts.

Instead, I asked, “Do you buy every outfit you try on?”

“No,” came the immediate reply.

“When you try an outfit on, what do you do next?”

He responded, “I look in the mirror and then decide if I want to walk around in it.”

My response: “What if you tried on each choice like an outfit and walked around in it?”

This perspective took the pressure off the decisions. He didn’t have to decide right away; he could try on all the options and see how each felt, not just how each looked on paper. Over time, their decision-making stopped being about fear and became more aligned with what felt comfortable to wear. This approach allowed them to align their decision-making process with their personal values.

And then there was the vice president of sales who prided himself on serving his customers above all else, yet whose team felt unseen and unvalued. I wasn’t there to knock his loyalty to his customers.

What I did was ask, “How do you treat your team compared to your customers?”

First there was quiet, then a lightbulb moment: “I treat them

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very differently.”

That single insight led to his new leadership goal.

He got excited and said, “I treat my team like I treat my customers.”

A way of being that reshaped how this leader showed up for his people and, ultimately, how the team showed up for the organization.

These moments remind me why I wrote this book. *Sticky Outcomes* is about what it takes to be the sort of thought partner people need as they navigate complexity and work toward outcomes that have sticking power.

And while coaching isn’t about following rules, you still need to understand the basics. Mozart practiced his scales, and Picasso drew lines until he mastered the fundamentals. Only then could they improvise, innovate, and transform their art. Coaching is no different. The International Coaching Federation (ICF) Core Competencies represent a set of structures. They are the foundation you need in order to develop your own authentic voice as a coach. For the full and official ICF Core Competencies, visit www.coachingfederation.org and search “Core Competencies” to download the current version.

You’ll hear me use the word “thinker” instead of “client.” I explore Nancy Kline’s work in chapter 5, “From Client to Thinker.” For now, know that it’s the language I use most often to describe the client.

This book isn’t about being a perfect coach; it’s about real conversations, sometimes messy, sometimes deep, and sometimes filled with “ahas.” It’s about coaching conversations that invite leaders at every level to pause the noise, hear themselves clearly, and leave not with your answers but with their own insights and actions. That is what it means to get to sticky outcomes.

Why Me?

My path into leadership and confidence coaching wasn’t planned. I was a recovering trauma therapist, and after almost twenty years, I was looking for new ways of being with people. I completed my original coach training in 2007–08, which opened up new possibilities for me.

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The more I worked with leaders, the more I recognized that, at the end of the day, executives, founders, and entrepreneurs are people. And I knew how to work with people. And these people came into coaching to talk about business challenges, yet their humanness always emerged. They brought their fears, doubts, values, blind spots, and their moments of overwhelm and joy.

I know what it is to build something from the ground up. I built my own business from a little shared office in Albuquerque, New Mexico, into something that allows me to work with the world. This gave me a window into the struggles that leaders wrestle with daily: the weight of responsibility, the balancing of priorities, and the sheer determination it takes to keep moving forward when the way isn't clear.

I have never run a division of a multibillion-dollar international company. I didn't need to have that experience to be useful. What I am able to do is put myself in the leader's shoes, getting a felt sense of what they might be wrestling with. Call it emotional intelligence or empathy, and I allowed myself to feel into what they were sharing. This vantage point lets me use what I know, not as expertise to hand them answers, but as experience to inform my curiosity. It shaped the kinds of questions I asked and the degree to which my curiosity supported their awareness.

Coaching, I have come to learn, isn't about being the smartest person in the room or knowing what a leader "should" do. My value was in bringing fresh eyes that opened windows and doors the leader hadn't yet considered.

In a conversation with a colleague in 2017, she said, "People spend 80 percent of their time at work, working or thinking about work. How leaders show up matters. It matters to employees, to the business, to innovation, and it ripples out into everyone's personal life, affecting their health and how they engage with their communities."

As I nodded, she continued, "Lyssa, we aren't coaching just one person; in leadership and organizational coaching, we are impacting a system."

That struck me deeply because it clarified why this work matters. Coaching leaders is about creating healthier systems so that people can thrive. For me, that means supporting positive ripples that extend far beyond the coaching conversation. This was confirmed in an interview I did on *the Coaching Studio* podcast with Professor

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Peter Hawkins (2026), where he made a very important case that we are all part of systems within systems. And to solve the world's issues, we must think about our work from a systemic lens.

In this book, we will look at the ICF Core Competencies not as rules for coaching but as a powerful framework for working with human beings. Along the way, I will invite you to play with the competencies because they give us a clear, grounded, and effective way to partner with people.

What I Wish for You

Whether you are a beginning coach or a seasoned one, my wish is that you expand your ability to understand how to work with human beings. I hold a fundamental belief that coaching is a learned skill. Reflecting on my background as a trauma therapist, I realize how understanding coaching could have enhanced my work in the mental health field. I was a good therapist. I could have been better.

As a mentor once said to me, “Lyssa, if you aren’t learning new things that you wish you had known before, you are going in the wrong direction.”

I fully resonate with this, and it has led me to adopt a growth mindset that continues to support my personal and professional development. Regardless of background or profession, coaching skills make us better human beings, full stop.

Here is a truth: when you dedicate yourself to helping others grow, you inevitably discover that you, too, must do your own work. Coaching, like many professions, can let you stay in a superficial, problem-solving, transactional place. If you want to cultivate transformation and truly teach others to fish, it calls for self-awareness, courage, and a willingness to do your own work. It asks you to keep looking inward, to build on your self-awareness, and to cultivate the humility that allows you to truly partner with another human being.

*We are not fish mongers,
we're fishing & adventure guides.*

There is a place of humility, insight, and awareness you will

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find, one that helps you create the conditions that allow others to do their most important work: standing next to them, but not doing it for them. Ultimately, the purpose of a coaching conversation is to create a safe place for struggle and breakthrough, for the questions that matter, and for the courage needed to make change.

So here is my request of you:

- Step into this work with bravery.
- Commit to your growth.
- Hold up the mirror so your thinkers can see themselves.
- Ask questions that open doors to insights.

I hope you see this book as an invitation to grow into your fullest capacity as a curious thought partner. May you discover, session by session, how to trust yourself, trust the wisdom of the people you coach, and trust the process that creates partnership. Coaching with presence, courage, self-awareness, and compassion contributes to making this world a better place.

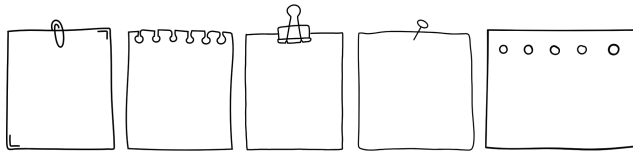
Lyssa deHart
Bainbridge Island, WA
January 2026

CHAPTER ONE

BEYOND THE CHECKBOXES

“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.

—Marcel Proust



Whether you're stepping into coaching for the very first time or you're a seasoned leader wanting to bring coaching into your way of leading, this journey begins with a simple truth: coaching is a partnership. And like any meaningful partnership, it rests on trust—trust in your thinker, trust in yourself, and trust in the process itself.

This guide is your first companion on that path. Think of it as both a map that lays out the terrain ahead and a mirror that reflects back to you the kind of coach you have the capacity to become. Inside this book, you'll find the deeper principles that support coaching becoming transformative.

Before we proceed, it's important to clarify that this guide is not about becoming a 'check-the-box' coach. Here, we don't rush to fix or solve. We slow down to listen; instead of leading with answers, we partner with powerful questions. We learn to stay curious, to notice what's alive in the moment, and to trust that awareness itself has the potential to open up new ways to explore and will often lead to answers that we would never have expected.

This book is grounded in the International Coaching Federation (ICF) Core Coaching Competencies, and it's also rooted in something less tangible: the belief that coaching is a relational art. People grow in safe and brave spaces, and your way of being is your most transformational tool. So, while I may discuss the competencies at times, I'm going to share the behaviors and examples of how we are

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being in our capacity as a coach. These ideas will work for you if you are a parent, a manager, an entrepreneur, a leader, or if you decide to become a professional coach.

You'll Learn How To

- Understand the value of clear agreements
- Create trust and psychological safety
- Maintain presence, even when things get messy
- Listen with your whole self to another human being's whole experience
- Evoke awareness through curiosity and inquiry
- Support sustainable, client-owned growth
- Explore how the brain changes, how the nervous system regulates, and how metaphors can unlock meaning

And, hopefully, learn how to have fun while doing good work.

Before we dive into the heart of coaching, it helps to get your footing. These first practices aren't busywork; they're the structure that will support you as you play, experiment, stretch, and grow. Think of them as tools for your coaching toolbox, the essentials.

Recording Yourself

One of the most useful and humbling practices you'll take on is recording yourself. At first, it might feel uncomfortable, though some people enjoy the sound of their own voice. I personally get annoyed with my questions; they're often better in my memory than they are when I hear them in the recording. Yet listening to our recordings is a form of biofeedback. It grounds us in reality and gives us real data—what was said, what was asked, the energy in the room, tone, timing, and where the questions led the thinker.

Raenotes

Raenotes is one of my favorite tools for looking at transcripts, reflecting on my work, and providing feedback. You'll use it to

Beyond the Checkboxes

upload your recordings, markup the transcripts, and notice emerging coaching skills. You'll also start tracking your choice points, the moments where you could have asked one question but went with another. Even when you love your questions, come up with several more options; this is how we develop our ability to get comfortable asking open-ended questions that benefit the human being we're working with. Over time, those little moments of awareness change the way you listen and shape how you partner with your thinkers.

Learning Triads

Another key part of development is coaching in triads. In these small groups, you'll take turns being the coach, the thinker, and the observer. Each role gives you a different view. In the coach seat, you practice. In the thinker seat, you feel what it's like to be coached. When you're in the observer seat, you begin to catch things you might have missed—the shifts in tone, the moments that land, the silence that opens something new.

In *The Artist's Way*, Julia Cameron said, "It's impossible to get better and look good at the same time," so no judgments needed as you play with what is possible.

If you are not in a coaching program that offers triads, find friends who are also working on becoming coaches and form your own development triad. Three people is a minimum, as it gives each person a different coach/thought partner and a different client/thinker. Plus, there is always an observer to share things we might miss when we are in the thick of a coaching conversation.

Reflective Practice Journal

Coaching isn't just about what you do. It's also about who you are. That's why I encourage you to keep a reflective journal. Some people write every day. Others jot a few notes after a session. The format doesn't matter; the habit of capturing your learning is what matters. A journal illuminates insights, tracks hooks, and exposes discomfort, and allows you to play with who you are as a coach. You will most likely capture the moments that surprise you.

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So, What Is Coaching?

According to Sir John Whitmore, coaching is “Partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential” (Whitmore 1992).

Let’s break that down:

In partnering, coaching isn’t something done to or for someone; it’s something done with them. Coaching is about fostering thought-provoking conversations in which we invite awareness; it’s not the place to offer ready-made solutions, or even our opinions on what the thinkers should do.

Maximizing potential =
a focus on growth & forward movement

What Coaching Is Not

Many people come to coaching from roles where advising, treating, or managing others has been the norm. It’s vital to clearly distinguish coaching from other helping modalities:

Professional Roles: A Framework

Coaching Works to move the thinker forward	Therapy Works with dysfunction, often from the past.	Mentoring Offers expertise & guidance	Managing Oversees performance	Consulting Provides expert solutions
Client-Led	Therapist-Led	Mentor-Led	Manager-Led	Expert Led
Non-Directive	Can be Directive	Often Directive	Usually Directive	Highly Directive
Based on Partnering	Based on Diagnosis	Based on Experience Transfer	Based on Organizational Hierarchy	Based on Expertise

Coaching may touch on similar content, such as emotions, values, decisions, or relationships, but the approach to these topics is fundamentally different from that of other modalities. This is

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why clarity matters. As coaches, part of the job is to maintain the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy and other support professions.

Coaching the Person, Not the Problem

In her book *Coach the Person, Not the Problem*, Dr. Marcia Reynolds points out that when people come to us, they *almost always* bring what looks like a problem to solve.

- “I need a plan.”
- “I don’t know how to talk to my boss.”
- “I’m overwhelmed by all my priorities.”
- “I need next steps for XYZ.”

It can feel natural, even helpful, to dive in, offer suggestions, or structure steps. But Reynolds’s point is that **the “problem” is rarely the real issue**. And I have found this to be true from my experience as well.

If we stay at the level of the situation or problem, we are coaching symptoms. The deeper work of coaching happens when we listen for the assumptions, beliefs, and stories that give rise to the problem in the first place. As Reynolds writes, the real gift of coaching is not in solving what’s on the surface, but in helping people see themselves differently.

This is where coaching distinguishes itself from consulting, advising, or mentoring. Consultants solve problems. Advisers provide expertise. Mentors share knowledge. What coaches do is create a reflective space where the thinker can pause, hear themselves, and surface what is driving their choices, fears, or stuckness. Reynolds calls this reflective inquiry, mirroring back not just the words but also the emotions, shifts, and inconsistencies the thinker may not notice on their own.

A leader comes into coaching convinced they need tips for time management. But what unfolds is not a lack of time management skills, rather a deeper belief, “If I don’t do it all myself, it won’t get completed perfectly.”

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Once that belief emerges in the conversation, then we can really explore what is impacting the management of time. We might discuss beliefs around delegation, trust, and capacity building that no checklist of productivity hacks could possibly unlock.

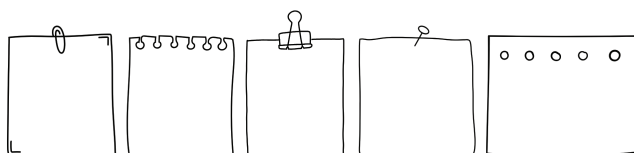
Sure, giving advice feels good; we feel helpful. Yet—and this is strong language—***we're stealing another person's opportunity to learn.*** When we give room for the thinker to uncover their drivers of behaviors, actions, and outcomes, they discover for themselves what they need to learn and focus on.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ROAD TO MASTERY

“Mastery is not a function of genius or talent.
It is a function of time and intense focus
applied to a particular field of knowledge.

—Robert Greene



If you're going after an International Coaching Federation (ICF) credential, you've probably wondered what really shifts between the credential levels of Associate Certified Coach (ACC), Professional Certified Coach (PCC), and Master Certified Coach (MCC). While the learning hours, coaching hours, and recordings are essential, the challenge can be in developing your mindset and approach to coaching. Ask yourself, what changes as you develop, show up, and create the container of a coaching conversation? My guess is that it's the mindset you carry into your practice.

Carly Anderson, MCC, a coach I admire, inspired me to think about this developmental arc in a new way. Carly uses the analogy of “Helicopter Coaching” in her article of the same title, to describe the shift from skillful to masterful coaching (Anderson 2019). Her words inspired me to craft my own analogy for how coaches grow, using something I am familiar with: **driving**.

Driving School → Road Trip → Embodied Travel → Tada!

Okay, there is a little more to it. Let's take a look.

Driving School

At the ACC level, you are working at a driving school, and you are an instructor. You may even be the best instructor. You've studied

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the manual, and your focus is on making sure you are applying these ideas correctly in your coaching. Like any good driving instructor, you're sitting beside the thinker with a second steering wheel, blinker, and your own brake, just in case.

Picture this: you ask a question, and when the thinker pauses, you feel that desire to jump in and either ask another question because maybe they didn't understand or explain the question. When they answer, it could feel like they are taking a left turn; in your mind, they need to go right. You gently redirect them back to the stated goal or offer another question to keep things moving. The session feels contained because you're holding the controls, and if needed, you can jump in to keep the conversation on track.

At this stage, you're in practice mode, plain and simple, trying the competencies on, using the structure, staying in the lines. It can feel like you're working hard to be a good coach.

The Road Trip

By the time you reach PCC, the dynamics are changing. Fingers crossed, you are no longer the driving instructor; you have morphed into a passenger. The thinker is fully in control of the steering wheel and the radio, and you are sitting next to them as the thought partner.

Imagine this: the thinker suddenly takes an unexpected turn down a side road you didn't notice. Instead of steering them back to the original path, you get curious about what's happening. You might ask, "*What feels important about this turn?*" What is clear is that you have let go of the wheel; but you're noticing the landscape with them, whether the road feels bumpy or smooth. You hear a rattle, and you are willing to ask these sorts of questions, co-discovering what's important to the thinker and exploring where the road might lead.

At PCC, you're fully present. You're watching, listening, and noticing not only what's being said, but *how* it's being said, and powerful beliefs that are emerging. You might reflect something back or ask a question that helps the thinker choose where to head next. The big shift is partnership. You're not only tuned into what the thinker wants to do, but also who they want to be as they're doing it. You trust their pace and their choices enough to let them lead you through what they believe is important.

Becoming the Vehicle

At the MCC level, there is a huge shift. You're not the driving instructor anymore, sitting there with a second brake and wheel just in case. You're not really the passenger either, pointing out turns or keeping an eye on the map. What starts to happen is that you begin to take the role of the vehicle or vessel that holds the conversation.

Think about it this way. When you head out to your car and get in, you start it, and off you go. The car doesn't tell you where you should drive. If you've got a GPS on, the map may give you a list of turns, but the car itself doesn't argue if you suddenly cut through a neighborhood or decide to take a back road instead. The car goes where you lead, following your direction wherever you decide to go.

That's the kind of partnership that shows up in MCC coaching. The coach becomes the vehicle, simply holding that container of trust and curiosity so the thinker can do the navigating. Sure, you may notice a sign on the side of the road and bring it into awareness with such questions as "*What was that sigh?*" Or "*What have you learned about yourself?*" But this comes from what the thinker is already seeing or saying, not from your own agenda about where they should be going.

Imagine the thinker sitting in silence, thirty seconds, maybe more. You can see the wheels turning, and instead of jumping in the way you might have done earlier in your development, you let them process.

By the time you're coaching at this level, your questions sound different. They are often very simple, coming from deep listening, and they are offered in a way that helps the thinker turn inward to look at what they're learning about themselves, their situation, and the meaning that's emerging for them. They're creating their own dots, connecting those dots, and taking ownership of what emerges.



The important piece here is that the thinker is the one driving.

Fran Fisher, MCC, says "Coaching isn't being *done to them* or *done for them*, it's happening *with them*" (Fisher 2021). And the vehicle that carries them, the curiosity, the presence, the silence, the partnership, that's you.

Sticky Outcomes!

Why This Matters

At each stage, there is value. Yet each level represents a deepening relationship with trust. At ACC, you are learning to trust yourself. At PCC, you are learning to trust the thinker. At MCC, you embody trust in the process itself. This unfolding is the real path of development.

This is also true of the thinker. Not every thinker is ready to be fully autonomous; we may all find ourselves moving between the levels to meet the thinker where they are. But my caution to you is this: don't assume that the thinker needs more guidance. Start by giving less and let them surprise you.

Comparing the Three Levels

Level	Coach Role	Partnering	Directionality	Thinker Experience
ACC	Instructor	Developing	More coach directed	Guided support
PCC	Passenger	Collaborative	Co-created direction	Empowered choice
MCC	The Vehicle	Embodied, fluid, + partnering	Fully client lead	Autonomy + insight

Progression Matters

These levels mark the journey of learning within your development. The movement from unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence.

→ **Unconscious Competence**
I now know & can do with confidence

→ **Conscious Competence**
I have to think & spend energy to be competent

→ **Conscious Incompetence**
I now know what I don't know

→ **Unconscious Incompetence**
I don't even know what I don't know

This progression is reflected in how you practice and develop this craft of coaching through the lens of the competencies. Note the following examples:

Road to Mastery

- Establish and hold agreements (Competency 3) You get clearer (and more consistent) about partnering on what the thinker wants to accomplish, and what success looks like in the conversation.
- Use silence and presence (Competencies 4 & 5) Silence stops being awkward and becomes space you intentionally create, so the thinker can hear themselves think.
- Evoke awareness without attachment (Competency 7) You can offer an observation, knowledge, or a feeling without needing the thinker to take it, agree with it, or do anything with it at all.
- Celebrate the thinker's ownership of growth (Competency 8) You notice progress and ask about it, in a way that reinforces the thinkers autonomy and momentum.

Credentialing Paths at a Glance

To earn an ICF credential, you'll need a mix of training, practice, and assessment:

Level	Training Hours	Coaching Hours	Mentor Hours	Perform eval	Exam
ACC	60+ hours	100 hrs	10 hrs	1 recorded session	ACC exam
PCC	125+ hours	500 hrs	10 hrs	2 recorded sessions	PCC/MCC exam
MCC	200+ hours	2500 hrs	10 hrs	2 recorded sessions	PCC/MCC exam

Note: Each level can be earned through the **Level 1, 2, 3, or Portfolio paths**, depending on the type of coach education you've completed. Always check with your school and read your paperwork and certificate of completion.

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Your Toolkit Begins with You...

The foundation of coaching isn't a specific model of coaching, or a specific "coaching tool," or even the latest framework. It's you. *You are the tool.* Who you are, how you show up, and how much you're willing to be in partnership, using what you know to inform your curiosity.

Trust begins in three directions:

- **Trust in the thinker.** Believe that they are whole, resourceful, capable, and creative. They don't need you to fix them; they need you to hold space for them to discover their own answers.
- **Trust in yourself.** You're learning, which means you'll get things "wrong" sometimes. A clumsy question, a missed moment, it all becomes material for growth if you're willing to reflect and keep going.
- **Trust in the process.** Awareness leads to choice, and choice leads to change. Coaching works because insight belongs to the thinker, and this ownership makes it sustainable.

In 2018, I had just gotten my MCC and I already scheduled to give a live coaching "Fishbowl" demonstration. Only now was I coming into the Fishbowl Event as an MCC, not a PCC. I was a little nervous—okay, a lot nervous. They asked for names, then drew my coaching partner's name. We met, then sat down in front of more than 150 eyeballs.

It was the hardest experience of my life. Here I was, a newly minted MCC, and the coaching conversation sounded a lot like it was going in circles:

I asked, "What would you like to coach on today?"

Client, "I don't know, what do you think we should talk about?"

I said, "I don't know, it's your coaching, what would be important for you?"

Client, "I don't know, what do you think?"

It just went on like this for fifteen minutes; my face was hot, and

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I had a stinky sweat going. It felt like a lifetime with all those eyeballs staring at me.

Someone even asked, “Is this even coaching?”

“No, no, it was not,” was my instant thought as my face turned red.

The feedback was fine; this was an example of a coach working really hard to give the client autonomy, blah, blah, blah. That was about all I remembered of the feedback.

When I was preparing to leave at the end of the event, I was chatting with one of the MCC assessors, Fran Fisher, who had given me feedback. I mentioned how hard that experience had been.

Fran said, “It’s okay, Lyssa, everybody bombs sometimes...”

“Wait, *What?* I **bombed?**”

I sat with this for days, okay, probably weeks. But it has proven to be one of my best learning moments. I would handle that sort of situation completely differently today:

New me, “What would you like to coach on today?”

Client, “I don’t know, what do you think we should talk about?”

New me, “I don’t know, it’s your coaching, what would be important for you?”

Client, “I don’t know, what do you think?”

New me, “Well, there seems to be a pattern of my asking you to name for yourself the focus, and you’re asking me what it should be, and I wonder if that pattern shows up anywhere else, and if that might be important to talk about?”

That’s how I would handle that situation today. But I wouldn’t have gotten there without walking through the fire of that bomb.



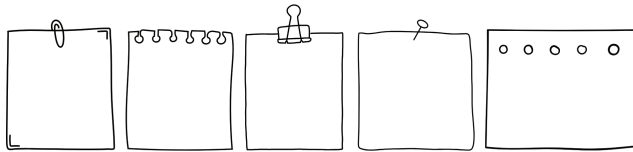
CHAPTER THREE

WHY I DON'T TEACH TO ACC



Coaching is unlocking people's potential to maximize their own growth.

—Sir John Whitmore



Many programs are designed to get coaches just far enough to pass the ACC credential. A safe baseline. A starting point. But I don't teach that way, and here's why.

ACC-level coaching is valuable, and it's where most of us begin to learn the craft. But it's also the entry point, or the first mile marker. If our learning stops there, we are only scratching the surface of what coaching can be: a life-changing experience leading to new and, hopefully, important places of discovery.

You didn't pick up this book just to check the boxes. You are reading this because you want to partner in a real way. You want that dopamine hit when the person in front of you lights up on a new insight or profound awareness that matters in how they will move forward in their life. You want to support changes that stick, helping leaders and people thrive in the overwhelming and complex world we find ourselves in. And you want to be an agent for positive change, I can feel it... Okay, that was a lot of projection on my part, but that is what I am deeply hoping is important to you. So, sit with all that, and see if it resonates.

Coaching is Developmental

Learning to become a coach is about so much more than just asking questions. On a personal level, it's about becoming, growing as both

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a person and a professional. It's often said that we cannot hold the space for things we haven't worked on in ourselves. Our stuff will inevitably show up with our thinkers. If I am uncomfortable with messy emotions, trust me, those messy emotions are going to show up regardless.

If I am strongly opinionated and walk through the world with a lot of certainty about what I believe, I am definitely going to find that other people in the world think in many different ways. And part of our growth and development is in learning to expand ourselves and our comfort with discomfort.

This is why I teach beyond the ACC level. Yes, you'll build a strong foundation there, but then we'll keep going. Past any formulas, past the safety of the "right" questions, jumping into the deeper waters where coaching transforms into partnership and real change. A place where your Thinkers feel seen, heard, and empowered—not managed, directed, or rescued.

Mile Markers, Not Destinations

Credentials are milestones, not finish lines. I sometimes think of myself as an old Toyota truck. I want to be the kind of coach who has 250,000 miles, maybe even 300,000 miles, on me before I'm done. And here's the thing: even at the MCC level, we're only talking about 2,500 hours of coaching and 200 hours of coach training. If you were a car, you wouldn't even get a discount at 2,500 miles; that's basically brand new. So even at MCC, I believe we are still beginners. I have chosen to adopt a beginner's mindset; every day is a school day. And I hope that the idea of a beginner's mindset stays with you for the rest of your life as well.

This is why I believe that your capacity to coach grows with your personal development. You begin to trust yourself. You no longer need to overanalyze every question or chase the "perfect" question. Instead, you shift your focus, keeping your eyes on the partnership.

Coaching isn't about getting to a single mile marker and then parking the car; it's about keeping yourself on the road, mile after mile, growing into the kind of coach who never stops growing and learning. Coaching is a skillset; being a good coach takes dedication to honing your craft.

Why I Don't Teach to ACC

You're Not Here to Stay Small

You're probably here because you feel the call to make a real impact. I know that for myself, when I was a waitress, I wanted to ask a more important question than, "How would you like that cooked?" That restlessness pushed me toward social work. I wanted to have conversations that mattered, conversations that could change lives. I wanted to be part of the solution and not a part of the problem. I also wanted to do the work that would help me become a better person. One who could leave the people I worked with stronger, braver, and connected to their own wisdom and ultimately more empowered.

That is a growth-level goal. That is the path I hope you feel invited to explore.

While credentials can be valuable, they are not the sole indicator of a coach's growth and capability. It doesn't matter to me if you have an MCC or an ACC. The letters are just markers of time and work. I have seen beautiful coaching at every level of training; I have also seen the opposite. So, the credential isn't the thing I am focused on; your journey and the development of your understanding about how people work, and how to support them—this is what is important.

What you learn and what you know will show up in your capacity to be a thoughtful partner, in your ability to create space where the work is meaningful, and where the outcomes are sticky, so people can live stronger, better lives.

Activity: Your Road Beyond the First Mile Marker

Take a few minutes and capture the following:

1. Picture yourself five years from now as a coach. Don't focus on titles or credentials; focus on how *you show up*.
 - How do you want to be with people?
 - What do you want people to say after being with you?
 - What strength do you have that you can continue to develop?

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2. Write down three “mile markers” you hope to pass on that journey. These aren’t about hours or certificates. What qualities do you want to embody—patience, courage, presence, curiosity, or something else that matters to you?
3. Finally, choose one of those mile markers. Below, write one small step you could begin practicing *this week* that moves you in that direction.