How can I self-coach myself?

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The International Coach Federation defines coaching as a partnership with the client in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires to maximize personal and professional potential. That really does sound awesome, but is it possible to apply this to myself by myself? There exist moments where it’s just me, myself, and I, enveloped in my own mind and thinking. How can I optimize these moments, no matter how small, so that I am intentionally in service to myself to think, do, and be my best?

Principles to observe in coaching

The key coaching principles that support coaching:

1. I can stand outside of my own story
   a. I can observe my own behaviours and mindset
   b. I can be objective

2. I can identify my loss and gain frames
   a. A loss frame is where concerns, negativity, risks, or half empty scenarios are present. They sound like “I cannot, I don’t have, but this.. but that…”
   b. A gain frame is where hopes, desires, possibility, positivity, or half full scenarios are present. They sound like “I wish, I hope, I need, I can, I will, I would like, what if…?”

3. I can focus on what is possible and positive

4. There is new learning for myself and I can action on it

How to apply these principles to yourself

To try this, find a medium in which you can see your own thoughts, behaviours, words, or mindset. The usual medium is a coach, so we are looking for a substitute such as journaling, email to yourself, mind map, drawing, painting, word art, or anything that allows you to see your own thinking, in the moment. This is what we call first loop learning: Allow yourself to see your own thoughts and words and analyse it objectively into learning for yourself.

You can begin to categorize your own thinking or words and be intentional in how to spend your energy.

- What are details of my story? (marked in gray)
  - This you can set aside. It’s you narrating your story.

- What frames are available? Loss or gain frames (marked in green)
  - Acknowledge and respect them, but don’t flame them by putting a magnify glass to it or giving it any attention.
• Is this really true? Beliefs or assumptions that may exist (marked in orange)
  o Question this, ask yourself, challenge yourself, understand yourself

• What is positive and possible? Needs, desires, wishes, hopes (marked in red)
  o Focus on these and ask yourself:
    ▪ What makes it important for you to achieve this?
    ▪ What positive difference will you get by spending energy on it?
    ▪ What are you learning so far?
    ▪ And with this learning, what will you do with it?

Example of a journal reflection and how to analyse it:

I'm so frustrated. Nothing is working as it should. I feel totally overwhelmed right now. Talk about when things break down, it all breaks down together!

I have a pile of to-do's for my projects waiting and all the meanwhile, getting bombarded by email requests by my boss who says everything is urgent. On top of that, my eldest has slept the day away, holed up her in a room with her eyes glued to her device. None of the house chores are done. And then, I need to pull myself together to deliver a coaching practice later tonight, which I am not feeling up for. I can’t control what’s happening. Why now? Why me?

I know I’m totally feeling sorry for myself now and wallowing in self pity an all that stuff, but I can’t help it. I’m so tired. I’m overworked. I am stressed. I think I need to just burn this off somehow.

The tipping point question to yourself

There does exist a tipping point when it comes to readiness to self-coach.

Is this the only way I can think?

If your answer is yes, come back to the self-coaching activity later. The self is just not ready to accept possibilities at this time, which is OK. If your answer is no, then allow yourself to express your thinking through a medium and step back away from it to analyse it and pick up those thoughts that are positive and possible. The more you do this as an exercise, the stronger this muscle becomes and you may find you can do it real-time, in the moment, in your own head.

As a coach practitioner, I’ve managed to do this during long endurance runs or rides and even in the shower. Some relate this to mindfulness. You create an environment where you are mindful of your thoughts and mindset, then mindfully and intentionally steer yourself towards your own potential.

It starts with knowing what to look for and how to set up an environment where you are able to step out of your own bottle to observe yourself. By seeing your own thoughts, you can then analyse them objectively and choose which ones are good investments of your time, energy, and resources. At the same time, growth and transformation come from learning about yourself through the process.

How are you different now from when you first started?

What are you noticing about how you’re thinking differently now?