

Christian Coaching Touches the Heart of Postmodernism

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Coaching has been growing rapidly in popularity over past few years which is expressed through tremendous demand for coaches, coaching books, articles and the emergence of various coach training institutions not only in the United States, but has emerged equally in numerous other nations around the world. Coaching has emerged as "the hottest thing in management today" as stated by Fortune magazine; it has made huge progress in realms such as nutrition, finances, public speaking, entertainment, executive business realms and industry training , but what about Christian coaching for Christian leadership? Gary Collins went as far as to say "Coaching is hot everywhere except in the church." It appears that coaching in a church context has been somewhat lagging, whether it be due to financial constraints or simply a deficiency in understanding the powerful Christian dynamics that are expressed through coaching. Jesus himself could be described as the greatest coach of them all!

Transformational Leadership Coaching (TLC), which is from this author's understanding the vanguard of International Christian Coach Training institutions based in the United States, will be used to lay a foundation of why I believe Christian coaching is touching such a strong cord in the hearts and minds of this generation. We will compare and contrast some of the coaching values of Transformational Leadership Coaching with what leading Christian authors have to say about Post-modernity.

Post-modernity will be used generally to define the general perception of the world in which we presently find ourselves as it relates to what and how people are viewing life today, which is in many ways opposing to the way life was viewed during the "modern" era. Basically speaking, a great majority of the US population today can be put into the general bracket of "postmodern thinkers."

TLC has what they call thirteen "Values Catch Phrases" which they base the entire coach training program off of. For the purpose and brevity of this article I will choose just three of the thirteen values and define what coaching has to say about these and what post-modernism has to say regarding these same values.

1. Transformation Happens Experientially

The things that really shape us happen experientially, not by accumulating information.

Coaching and coach training is all about experience rather than what we call a "knowledge dump," which is what many of us experienced during high school, college, graduate school and other various training institutions. The majority of classrooms and conference centers today are packed with sessions that are purely knowledge based rather than experiential and transformational.

Postmodernism says: Postmodern thinking expresses a desire to experience life rather than simply be given formulas and theories on how to live life. There is a longing in this generation to get out and adventure into life, to get "high on life," simply for the sensation of the experience. Brian McLaren states "For post moderns, it's better simply to experience experience than to turn it into another theory or universalize it and proclaim it as Truth." Leonard Sweet goes so far as to state that post moderns are "positively ravenous for primary experience."

Coaching says: Most Coaches see themselves not as experts in the field of their clients, but rather someone objective who is trained as a change expert. The TLC coach training paradigm is built almost completely around experience. With more than 85% of the curriculum being experiential, we hear over and over again that our courses are the most transformational training that they have ever experienced.

Coaching is ringing true to this generation because it is a process of walking with someone through a season of their present life whereby there is a time of heartfelt dialogue. Then the coach steps back to a place of accountability and encouragement as the client takes "action steps" on what was discovered or decided in the dialogue. Laura Whitworth

states "Coaching works for many reasons that overlap and intertwine, but one of the strongest threads is this weave is in action. In fact, it's the cycle of action and learning, over time, that leads to sustained and effective change." The Modern world paradigm saw knowledge as supreme and the men in the white coats as experts who do no wrong. That entire paradigm has been shattered and progressively people are longing for someone to just walk with them objectively in an authentic relationship rather than sitting with them as an expert telling them how to fix themselves, or what decision they need to make.

You may ask, "How is a coaching dialogue experiential?" When TLC does workshops and coach training, they are literally hands on experiential, but when it comes to actual coaching, this author believes that a conversation can be experiential and transformational. The author of masterful coaching states "Give people the experience of a collaborative conversation they will never forget." True in-depth, experiential dialogue is both reflective and challenging and is able to allow people to have an experience that brings a level of growth and change into their lives through that extraordinary conversation. Compare that concept of dialogue to what one experiences in a common conference or average church service. There the congregation sits and listens to the expert when all along both the "listener" and the "expert" recognize that when it is all said and done, as little as 3-5% of the information given will be retained by the hearer. A tremendous book written in the mid sixties, *The Miracle of Dialogue*, states: "Dialogue is that address and response between persons in which there is a flow of meaning between them in spite of all the obstacles that normally would block the relationship. It is that interaction between persons in which one of them seeks to give himself as he is to the other, and seeks also to know the other as the other is." This, my friend, is what leads to a "transformational conversation" that our postmodern world is longing for.

2. Authentic Relationships & a Learning Community

Open and honest relationships are what make the body of Christ an experienced reality.

Growth and change are maximized within an accountable learning community of authentic relationships.

Encompassing two key TLC values, Coaching and coach training begins out of developing a meaningful and authentic relationship. Teacher-student gaps and untouchable experts are becoming less and less desirable to this postmodern generation. There is a national and international longing for true authentic relationship. Shallow, unfulfilling relationships are losing their appeal as many have found themselves disillusioned by the masks that so many wear under the guise of expert or spiritual leader. Coaching and quality coach training embraces the authentic relational aspect of humanity, and has discovered the changing power of genuineness. In no way am I speaking against experts or spiritual leaders, for they are vitally important, but even the experts and leaders must poise as learners with a curious mind, willing to accept people where they are and see the potential of God's dream for their lives.

Postmodernism says: Take a minute and consider the popular TV sitcom "Friends." This show, ranking at the highest levels of viewer ratings, and bringing in millions of dollars per show spoke to our postmodern thinkers for many reasons. Think about the relational aspect of this group of friends who shared life together in an accepting community. They experienced success, failure, embarrassment and a whole range of other human relational components that connected at a significant level with this generation. Many times they would sit together and tell stories, share life experiences as they laugh together and encouraged each other in times of struggle. Yes, I recognize the range of unbiblical values expressed through their lives, but the reality and truth of these other components remains just as accurate. This postmodern world cried out listen to me, relate to me, share your life stories, and I will share mine. Yes, the real ones including the failures in a non judgmental atmosphere.' Rick Gosnell states "Story is a primary language of experience. Telling and listening to a story has the same structure as our experience."

Brian McLaren states in relation to touching our postmodern society that "We must reassert the value of community and rekindle the experience of it." Consider Jesus himself who not only spoke of an affirmed community, but demonstrated it through His life as he demonstrated what a living community could look like as well as the tremendous results that it would produce in the lives of those involved. The pendulum had swung to "extreme individualism, isolation, and

loneliness" which has left post moderns starving for community. The Church and its coaches, I believe, are called to help restore this aspect of Christianity back into our local congregations.

Coaching says: Authentic Relationship is the core of a transformational coaching relationship. One leading expert, Gary Collins, states that: "One significant lesson I've learned in this life journey is that people change when they're in relationship." This is one of the primary reasons this author believes coaching is taking off worldwide, and is beginning to take off in the churches. Coaching offers what few other fields and venues, including consulting, management, and even local churches, have been able to produce for people. As Tracey Weiss stated, "When you are coaching, you have formed an explicit relationship with someone else to support him in personal and professional effectiveness. You are giving the person the gift of your presence to listen for understanding and to probe for empathy."

Coaching is certainly a gift to this generation of postmodern thinkers. The rapid growth of the worldwide coaching movement which has just begun to penetrate the Body of Christ attests to its ability to transform and excite people. In this brief article we have only begun by exploring three of the thirteen value catch phrases that help make Transformational Leadership Coaching what it is. Some of the other Value Catch Phrases include Learning from Life; Ministry Flows out of Being; Each Person is Unique; Own-life Stewardship; Redefining Success; Replication; Do First, Then Teach; Gift-Based Ministry; and Leaders Take Responsibility for Their Own Growth which I believe are all just as vital to the postmodern mind. Our paradigms as they relate to equipping emerging leadership in a postmodern world must shift as our culture and society changes. I believe that the TLC model is clearly touching the heart of this postmodern society and as a result has experienced tremendous growth and expansion.

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