



# From Coach to Teacher:

## IS THIS YOUR MOVE?

BY CHARLES BRASSARD, PCC

**Have you ever wondered if you could be a good teacher?** For me, this question immediately brings to mind how much I loved my high school geography teacher and value the impact he had on my life by awakening my curiosity for how the world works. He was obviously knowledgeable and skilled, but most of all, he was doing something he loved. His sense of wonder for understanding the relationships between humans and their environments was contagious. As a coach and teacher, I am grateful that he touched my soul in such a palpable way, even though it took many years and detours for me to recognize that this was also my calling.

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I bring this up because teaching arises for me in the context of what we are most captivated by, what we love doing, and what it means to be of service, rather than simply being a natural extension of our coaching work. While the practices of coaching and teaching can be mutually reinforcing, a number of special qualities and skills are required to navigate both worlds successfully. This is what I want to explore in this article, particularly as it relates to teaching others how to incorporate coaching into their work or how to become professional coaches.

## Being Real

Being real means bringing our whole self to the work, without pretense or posturing. It requires that we remain grounded in the middle of our life. When our teaching is an extension of who we are, we also make it possible for people to show up as who they really are, thereby creating a rich field of exploration, openness and compassionate holding. A class is not an event to attend or a stage to perform upon. In this container called the class, our expertise and our humanity form a seamless whole. This allows the relationship with students to be real.

## Doing Our Inner Work

Inspiring a commitment to learning and growing comes from living into that commitment ourselves. Doing our inner work means that we first hold the mirror to ourselves and constantly seek ways to better understand the kind of person we are. Can we be with all of our experience without turning away from what we don't like?

How present are we to our reactions?

Which self-image do we protect the most? Living authentically with these kinds of questions infuses our humanity and creates the opening needed for others to step into their own work with courage and dedication. As long as we do not believe we have "arrived" or figured things out, there is room to wonder and to grow. Some call this having a beginner's mind. It means holding what we know with soft hands.

## Cultivating Presence

Being fully present to our clients or students is one of the greatest gifts we can offer. In a state

of presence, we are fully attuned to our own sensations, feelings and thoughts while being in direct contact with and impressed by those we are meeting. While in action, we can self-observe, notice our reactions and distractions, and bring our attention back to what is occurring, to why we are here in this moment. Cultivating presence requires steady practice. When we keep up our practices, whether it be through meditation, yoga or any other mindful activity, we develop important capacities such as concentration, sensitivity, alignment, wholeheartedness, stillness, and detachment, to name a few. Our quality of presence directly impacts our ability to meet students where they are, to hold the room so that learning and development can take place through all trials and tribulations.

## Practicing What We Preach

Self-consistency is another quality we bring to our work with clients and students. How can we be taken seriously when all we do is point "the way" without being able to challenge what we know or make any changes of our own? Our dedication to continuously growing and expanding as a human being is a necessary condition to leading others in the same quest. This means that when we support students in taking on a difficult change or practice, we have a sense of how this will test their resolve because we have firsthand experience of the resistance that comes with shaking up what is familiar and developing new habits.

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## Being a Good Translator

Being a reflective practitioner able to make sense of one's life as a coach in all of its dimensions can provide a key foundation to teaching. However, we also have to be good translators, able to articulate the art and science of coaching in clear and tangible terms. In this context, we use our practice to inform theory, bringing real-life experiences to the classroom and building a repertoire of distinctions, examples and scenarios. We also use theory to deepen our practice, uncovering new ideas, models and interpretations in order to frame the learning and the practice of coaching

in rigorous ways. Being translators isn't enough, however, if we cannot grasp and integrate the principles and practices of adult learning in the design and delivery of our work.

## Building a Safe Container

A healthy coaching relationship requires a foundation of mutual trust, mutual respect and freedom of expression. This is what allows clients to be honest and vulnerable and to take risks in experimenting with new actions. The classroom must provide this same container, where both the teacher and students can be free to explore what arises, challenge what they know, and collaborate in realizing the outcomes they signed up for. Ultimately, delivering the learning agenda with sound pedagogy while being flexible in dealing with emerging issues, concerns and new openings for learning is a tough balancing act the teacher must achieve. This means living in a world of relativity, not absolutes, and recognizing that the classroom is a living system.

## Reading the Room

It takes a great deal of empathy to read a room and sense not only what is going on for individuals in the class and for the class as a collective, but also what is going on inside of us—sensing our intuition, managing our interpretations, and recognizing judgments from our inner critic. Attending to the “field” requires teachers to have a good sense of timing and the ability to adapt the contents of the course according to how receptive, confused or ready the students might be at any given time. Without being attuned in this way, the quality of our teaching can be greatly affected, especially when we are intent on following “the plan.”

## Telling the Truth

When we come from a place of authenticity and love of the truth, the last thing we want to do is either impress our students with our brilliance or simply provide content to fill their minds. Rather, we see our role as challenging conventional wisdom and truly connecting with what new understanding is needed to support students' development, as uncomfortable as this might be. How can we be truthful with someone if our main concern is to please them or if we can't tolerate others' pain or discomfort? Mixing the right amount of support and

challenge and knowing when to push and how hard are important facets of the teaching role and can be achieved by offering feedback, revealing blind spots and making powerful distinctions which set the table for true learning to unfold. This also involves being open to learning from the students and knowing when to tap into their collective wisdom.

## Shifting Your Focus

While many of the skills and qualities that support competent coaching are relevant to teaching, it is quite a game change to move from one to the other. The complexity of shifting from a one-on-one relationship to one-on-many cannot be underestimated. As teachers we are also leaders, and as such, we are called upon to use our power with great care and reverence. My geography teacher and the other teachers in my life are constant sources of inspiration in this regard. So, if you want to make this move, consider the following:

- Teach something you love. It will feed your passion to learn.
- Observe and learn from people you admire as teachers.
- Be disciplined about learning the fundamentals of your field. Create a learning plan that draws from all the sources of inspiration for these teachings and immerse yourself in the material gradually.
- Experience doesn't come in books. Create your own practice field and keep practicing.
- Use people you know to practice and test your skills.
- Make an offer to join someone as an apprentice.
- Keep up your coaching practice. One needs substantial and ongoing coaching experience to teach coaching to others and to keep it relevant.
- Be compassionate with yourself, even when faced with difficult-to-hear feedback.
- Always be a student.



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