

Buddha's Life Coaching in the Pāli Canon

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the coaching methods of the Buddha that appear in the Pāli canon, specifically how the Buddha used the tool of coaching to help people awaken, which contributes massively to the overall well-being of the coachee in daily life. Coaching is a partnership with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. For life coaching, the study found that it is a process in which the coach seeks to move the client from where they are to where they want to be. The life coach uses the power of engagement to enable clients to achieve positive and measurable results in all areas of their lives. There are a variety of coaching techniques such as listening, questioning, clarifying, and providing feedback to help a willing client identify and achieve their goals or the outcomes they hope to achieve from coaching. In addition, the study examines the Buddha's coaching in the Pāli canon and finds that the Buddha uses various coaching techniques to help people awaken, such as listening, questioning, and feedback techniques. However, if we compare the goal of life coaching in modern theory with the Buddha's coaching, we find a slight difference. The modern theory of life coaching seeks to help people maximize their personal potential, solve problems in their daily lives, and achieve their desired goal. In addition to these goals, the coaching of the Buddha seeks to help people eliminate the root of suffering and achieve liberation (nibbana) by encouraging the coachee to observe the moral precepts and do mindfulness exercises that lead to the attainment of wisdom.

Keywords: Coaching; Mindfulness; Moral Precept; Potential; Wisdom.

1. Introduction to Coaching

Coaching has traditionally been associated with sports such as soccer, track and field, boxing, basketball, etc. In recent years, coaching has become applicable in every field, in business and in every aspect of life as well as in sport [1, p. 7].

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Nowadays, it is quite common for someone to seek out a coach to help them achieve their goals in life and at work. Coaching is a partnership between coach and client [2, p. 176]. The coach helps the client achieve their personal best and get the results they want in their personal and professional life [3, p. 56]. Coaching ensures that the client is doing their best and learning and developing the way they want to [4, p. 3]. According to Passmore, the International Coaching Federation (ICF, 2020e) defines coaching as, "Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential" [5, p. 7]. The ICF is the world's largest professional association of coaches, and its definition encompasses a universally accepted understanding of coaching. According to Dunbar, ICF (2008) offers this broader definition: "Coaching is a partnership with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. Coaching is an ongoing relationship that focuses on the client taking action to realize their vision, goals, or desires. Coaching uses a process of inquiry and personal discovery to increase the client's awareness and accountability and provide structure, support and feedback. The coaching process helps the client define and achieve their professional and personal goals more quickly and easily than would otherwise be possible "[6, p. 4].

Based on the ICF definition, coaching can be analyzed in four key components: First, it is about the way coaches and clients interact, namely in a partnership where responsibilities are shared as much as possible and power dynamics are minimized. There is an attempt to create equality and collaboration. Second, the definition describes the process of coaching as thought-provoking and creative. Third, the effect of this process is described as intentionally inspiring. Coaches seek to breathe new life into their clients' thinking and perspectives so that they find sufficient energy and motivation to move forward. Fourth, the definition asserts that the process of coaching is designed to achieve optimal results, maximize potential, and empower clients to achieve their aspirations and goals.

The general benefits of coaching include improved personal and organizational performance, better work-life balance, increased motivation, better self-reflection, optimized decision making, and better management of change. There are a variety of coaching techniques such as listening, questioning, clarifying, and providing feedback. However, listening, questioning and clarifying are essential for every coach [7, p. 22].

2. Life coaching theory

Life coaching was developed in the 1980s by Thomas Leonard. He is an American financial planner. In the early 1990s, he founded the first formal coach training program. He was also instrumental in founding the International Coach Federation (ICF), which continues to play an important role in the history of life coaching today.^a According to Leonard, life coaching takes the client from where they are to where they want to be. Coaches generally do not evaluate a situation or suggest solutions unless specifically asked or given permission to make a suggestion. A well-trained life coach simply uses careful questions and feedback to help a willing client identify and achieve their goals or the results they want from coaching.

^a [8, p. 11]

Life coaching is a long-term, effective relationship that enables the client to maximize their potential.^b The life coach uses the power of engagement to enable clients to achieve positive and measurable results in all areas of their lives. Life coaching is a holistic process that has the power to balance and harmonize lives.^c The essence of life coaching as a method of helping a person figure out where they want to be by talking about all the factors of their life and then working out a route plan to help them reach that goal. The focus is always on moving toward a goal that the client is striving for, although a large part of a coach's job is often to help the client define that goal in the first place.

Coaching, then, is about helping someone achieve the personal goals they have set for themselves. This help can take many forms and always involves some kind of communication: either a face-to-face or telephone conversation, or sometimes in written form as an exercise. The process of coaching is about helping the coachee find solutions that they have not thought of before. Most coaches do not try to provide the answers for the coachee - that would be more the service of a consulting firm. In this way, coaches provide the transportation, they do not make the journey for the client. In coaching, the coachee has to take responsibility for moving forward, for example, by having the motivation to change and committing to taking the agreed-upon actions.

The main task of the life coach is to empower and strengthen the client. This is accomplished through the power of engagement as leverage. Once the client agrees to an activity, he or she commits to doing it. This commitment is closely tied to the client's identity. The life coach taps into this power. The power of commitment is based on the social reinforcement of people sticking to who they say they are. He taps into the power of honesty. Clients become dishonest when they do not fulfill their commitment to the coach. People are conditioned to believe that people who do not keep their commitments cannot be trusted. They are seen as shifty, untrustworthy, deceitful, liars and cheats. Clients do not want their life coach to think they are one of them. Therefore, they will do everything they can to achieve the agreed upon actions, goals and objectives.

Guilt is another factor in the power of engagement. When clients do not achieve the goal, they punish themselves with guilt. This self-flagellation causes them far more pain than anything the coach can inflict. People usually have a driving need for pleasure and a driving need to avoid pain. The continuum of pain and pleasure can be used as a powerful tool to ensure that clients get results. It is a simple process, but one that is very effective in helping the client achieve breakthroughs.

Life coaching helps clients in every aspect of their lives. Unlike sports coaching or business consulting, it is holistic and takes into account every dimension of a client's life. This includes business, career, health, social relationships, wealth and the value of one's contribution. If life coaching focuses on and develops only one area, the client's life can become unbalanced. If clients outperform at work but underperform in their personal relationships, the negative impact of their personal relationships can negatively affect their performance at work. Life coaching should bring balance and success to the lives of its clients, which also pays dividends for the life coach. By helping clients define goals in each area of their lives and then helping them achieve results, it also brings an awareness of the importance of balance and harmony to the coach's life.

^b [9, p. 5]

^c [10, p. 2]

Life coaching is a relationship between coach and client that is one of mutual dependence. It is a relationship based on honesty, respect, and the life coach's unwavering belief in the client's unlimited potential.

3. Buddha's life coaching

Buddhism was founded in the late 6th century B.C.E. by Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha). His most famous teachings were the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, which describe the nature of human suffering and provide a way to free oneself from the existential pains of life and achieve nirvana. After Gautama Buddha's Panibibbana, his teachings were first transmitted orally and then written down, called the Tipitaka or Pāli Canon.^d

The Buddha's teaching, founded in the Pāli canon, focuses mainly on helping people avoid all evil, cultivate goodness, and purify one's mind. To abstain from evil means to avoid irritation in deed, word, and thought and to exercise self-control over body, speech, and mind. To cultivate goodness means to perform a good deed, such as keeping the five precepts or living a moral life. Purifying the mind means practicing mindfulness, which brings the mind to awakening. In some cases, giving up unskillful mental qualities can be achieved simply by focusing on developing skillful qualities, such as mindfulness. The same principle can work in reverse: In the skillful elimination of unskillful qualities, the skillfulness of the elimination is in and of itself the development of mindful discernment.

The coaching techniques used by the Buddha and found in the Pāli canon are the same as those used by the coach in coaching life today. For example, he used careful questions and feedback to help a willing student identify and achieve their goals. Often he did not give them the answers. They had to find out the truth for themselves. He also urged people to go to the source and grasp the facts for themselves, as his teaching in the Pāli word "ehipassiko," meaning "come and see for yourself"-to test them in the fire of their own experience. To those who take up this challenge, he promises a path to greater happiness and freedom. There were many instances in the Pāli canon where the Buddha used the same methods that are used in life coaching today. However, this study cannot present all cases, but will take up a few examples of how the Buddha coached life. The first case is Kisā Gotamī. She was born in a very poor family. She was married into a rich family in Srāvastī. Later she had a son, but her child did not survive long. When the child was two or three years old, he died. His death was unbearable for Kisā Gotamī. She became extremely unhappy. She began to wail and held the child to her heart. When people were ready to take the child to be cremated, she asked to get a good doctor who could bring her dead child back to life with a medicine. But is there even a medicine that can bring a dead person back to life? The people did not know how to comfort her. Then a kind person suggested that she go to the Buddha, who was very compassionate and also a great doctor.

Kisā Gotamī went to the Buddha at the Jetavana monastery. She laid the dead child at the Lord's feet and began to pray that he might bring it back to life. The Buddha saw her plight and asked her to go to town and get a pinch of mustard seed from a family where no one had died. Kisā Gotamī, feeling fortunate, went to the city to fetch mustard seeds from such a family. But she could not find a single family in which no one had died. After

^d [11, p. 10]

checking all the houses in the town, she felt tired and realized that it is the law of nature that every being dies. To teach this law, the Buddha had sent her on this journey. After realizing this truth, she surrendered her son's dead body for the last rites and returned to seek refuge with the Buddha.^e

The Buddha did not give her an answer or teach her the truth. Instead, he asked her to get a pinch of mustard seeds from a family where no one had died yet. Eventually, she finds out the truth for herself, that dying is a law of nature that no one can escape. As a result, she attains liberation (Arahant).

The second case is Sona (SN 22.49), who does not understand the truth. He approached the Buddha and asked him questions. The Buddha did not answer him, but instead asked:

"Soṇa, if any ascetics and brahmins, on the basis of form, on the basis of feeling-which is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change-regard themselves thus: 'I am superior,' or 'I am equal,' or 'I am inferior,' what is the reason for this, apart from the fact that they do not see things as they really are?..."

"What do you think, Soṇa, is the form permanent or impermanent? Is feeling permanent or impermanent?"-"Impermanent, venerable sir."-"Is that which is impermanent suffering or happiness?"-"Suffering, venerable sir."-"Is that which is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this is I, this is my self?'"-"No, venerable sir."

"Therefore, Soṇa, every kind of form, every kind of feeling, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, distant or near, every form should be seen with correct wisdom as it really is: 'This is not mine, this is not I, this is not my Self.'

"Seeing thus, Soṇa, the instructed noble disciple experiences abhorrence of form, abhorrence of feeling, abhorrence of perception, abhorrence of will formations, abhorrence of consciousness. By experiencing disgust, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, his mind becomes liberated. When he is liberated, the knowledge comes, 'He is liberated.' He understands: 'Birth has been destroyed, the holy life has been lived.'^f

According to Sona, the Buddha used the technique of asking questions to realize the truth. Questions are the powerful tool to stimulate the coachee to think. Throughout the Pāli canon, the Buddha frequently uses questions and feedback.

However, the minor difference between the Buddha's coaching and modern theory is the goal of coaching. Modern theory aims to help the coachee achieve the personal goals they have set for themselves. This may be to solve a problem at work or a problem in his daily life, but the coaching of the Buddha aims to help the coachee eliminate the root of suffering. The ultimate goal of Buddha coaching, then, is to help the coachee free his mind from the bondage of samsara, which has always reborn him and caused suffering. The coachee will be able to awaken himself through the cultivation of morality, concentration and wisdom.

^e Thi Ap 22, SN 5.3.

^f SN 22.49, SN 22.50, UD 5.6, AN 6.55.

4. Conclusion

Life coaching is coaching that focuses on improving people's personal lives and work lives. The main focus of life coaching is on the lives of normal people of all ages. Life coaching can include helping a person learn a skill for the first time, helping them maintain and improve existing skills, and helping them mitigate and, if possible, end unwanted weaknesses. Life coaching can also focus on higher-level functions or address different aspects of life. The Buddha's life coaching is somewhat different. Buddhist coaching seeks to help a person get rid of unskillful actions and cultivate skillful actions. Buddhist coaching also helps a person get rid of the root of suffering, defilements. The variety of coaching methods Buddha used depended on the person and situation. However, questioning and feedback are inevitable. It is a powerful tool to make the coachee think and find the solution to the problem in his life.

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