

MY UNIQUE LIFE

By: D. Ashworth

Class: Self-Discovery Through Co-Active Coaching

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Who am I and what makes me unique? Certainly, my personality type plays a large part in how I approach the world and how the world sees me, but I knew that there was more to me than just my personality. As human beings, we have the ability to make choices and the ability to change our lives in both positive and negative ways. There had been a number of events in the past few years that affected me profoundly, all of which required me to respond and make choices: the death of both of my cherished and adored grandparents, divorce after nine years of marriage, being laid off from work and the resulting 11 months of unemployment, and returning to school after 20 years. I realized that how I responded to each one of these situations and the choices that resulted from those responses affected my life deeply, sometimes in ways I am only now discovering.

I also recognized that I was not always responding in ways that honored my path in life, so I decided to seek out help to deal with these issues and learn how to acknowledge my own strengths and weaknesses, thus enabling me to take responsibility for my life. I originally tried counseling, but discovered that it was not particularly helpful. Although talking was valuable, it was not helping me to move out of the “stuck” feeling that was so pervasive in my life. I knew there had to be another way, a way that focused on exchanging what was not working for what would work.

At the same time I was searching for what this “other way” might be, I was also investigating Myers-Briggs personality types, thinking if I could understand my personality better that might lead me to discover a more holistic, healthy, balanced, and “unstuck” life. Sometimes one click of the mouse can change your whole life! I discovered Vicky Jo Varner’s Type Insights website on which she offered something called “Self-Discovery Process[®] Packages.” The title of the packages said it all for me and I contacted Vicky Jo

regarding this self-discovery processes. I did not know, at that time, what life coaching was, or how it was going to change my life, I only knew that it was something I needed to do.

The initial starting point of the coaching was to discover my personality type through a triangulation method of determining my Temperament, Interaction Style, and how the Jungian archetypes fit into my personality. I had some familiarity with the Myers-Briggs personality types and believed I knew what type I was, INFJ, but I wanted to go deeper and this seemed to be the perfect solution to my dilemma. Imagine my surprise when this method of personality typing revealed most clearly that my preferences were not INFJ, but rather INFP. My first response was less than stellar, but the sense of recognition and acceptance I felt around this discovery opened more doors than I ever dreamed possible. As amazing as this process of helping me to understand what my core needs are and how I operate in the world to meet those core needs was, I quickly realized that it was only the tip of the iceberg. Using this information as a jumping-off point, we moved into a weekly coaching relationship.

It was in the context of this coaching relationship that I began to comprehend that I was beginning the process of becoming unstuck! What an incredible and freeing feeling to recognize I was being given the tools not only to begin growing and changing again, but also to achieve a balanced and whole life, the focus of co-active coaching.

Coaches use many different types of models. Some emphasize development in management and organizational areas. Some are “built on the premise that the coach is the expert who provides advice as well as support and motivation. These expert-coach models put a strong emphasis on the coach’s background and expertise” (Whitworth et al., p. xii). There are also “content coaches [who specialized in such areas as] sales coach, speech coach, ... [and] coaches to help you organize your files and office ...” (p. xii).

The style of coaching used by Vicky Jo, co-active coaching, is called “*co-active coaching*” because it involves the active and collaborative participation of both the coach and the client” (p. xii). The “relationship is an alliance between two equals for the purpose of meeting the client’s needs” (p. 3) rather than being between an expert and a client or having a specific, short-term purpose. It has a unique underpinning, as described by Whitworth et al. in their explanation of the co-active coaching model:

There are four cornerstones that form the foundation of co-active coaching:

1. The client is naturally creative, resourceful, and whole.
2. Co-active coaching addresses the client’s whole life.
3. The agenda comes from the client.
4. The relationship is designed as an alliance. (p. 3).

The most exceptional aspect of co-active coaching to me is that “the primary building block for all co-active coaching is ... Clients have the answers or they can find the answers. From the co-active coach’s point of view, nothing is wrong or broken, there is no need to fix the client. The coach does not have the answers; the coach has questions” (pp. 3-4). This is the type of help I had been searching for from the beginning.

So, what has life coaching actually done for me? To begin with, I was able to recognize that I had been living life as if I were someone else. I had been making decisions based on what other people thought was best for me or felt I should be doing, believing that they knew me better than I knew myself. It was this life of shoulds and ought tos that was at the root of my “stuck” feeling. Vicky Jo started asking questions, not only about what I wanted and how I wanted my world to look and be, but also who I am--all based on the agenda I brought to each call.

Sometimes the agenda was to deal with a specific issue, other times it was part of a larger picture that I am only just beginning to see. The pattern of my life is emerging, more complex and wonderful than I ever imagined! Over time, I have learned that while other people can offer information, insight, and the right questions, the only person who has answers to my life is me.

Some of the questions that I discovered I have the answers to relate to values, problem solving, what is right for me, what kind of life I want to be living, and the best way for me to make choices and decisions. Because I was living a life of shoulds and ought tos, I was living out of integrity with my values and the kind of life that I want to have, which was causing me great distress. We spent a great deal of time defining my values and figuring out not only what they are and the proper sequence of them, but also how they play out in my life and what changes I need to make to live with integrity and authenticity.

That same life of shoulds and ought tos also carried with it a way of making decisions that was completely contrary to my beliefs and values. Because I was not making decisions from a position of strength, the decisions I was making were not right for me, thus perpetuating that “stuck” feeling. I have learned that I need to give myself the time I need to process information, explore possibilities, and sit with something before making a decision. This is the way that works for me, regardless of what works for someone else, and seeing the value and rightness in that for me has helped me to value myself.

Having someone help me define and refine what works for me, “someone [who] listen[s] not only to [my] words, but also to what’s behind them—who even listens to the spaces between the words” (p. xviii) has been both amazing and faith-building, building faith in myself and in my ability to be a whole and balanced person in my own right. Vicky Jo

helps me clarify what is going on, celebrates with me, encourages me to reach for stars, recognizes how I sabotage myself, holds me accountable to myself, points out my strengths, challenges me to find my own answers, and helps me find my own power, while at the same time holding my agenda and my dreams for myself always uppermost in mind in our work together. Although loving myself may not necessarily be the purpose of coaching, I am indeed learning to do just that.

In learning to love myself I see more clearly than ever before that my life is important, that I am as valuable a person as any other person out there, and that taking care of myself and taking time for my life is not the selfish pursuit I once thought it was. If I do not take care of myself, then I will have nothing to give to anyone else. And having something to give to others is part of what makes me uniquely me!

This class has been but one step in the process of my life, albeit a very giant step indeed. I will continue coaching with Vicky Jo beyond the end of this class, because there are still very large portions of my life left to discover, not only places where I sell out on myself or where I live out of integrity, but also places where I am strong and am able to give of myself to others. There will come a day in the not-too-distant future, when I will take the next step in this journey of my life, a step that places me on the other side of the co-active coaching relationship. Until that day, I will continue to work discover who I am and to achieve the whole and balanced life that is my own unique life.

Reference List

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