



Hello and a warm welcome to you in this month of March!

In this issue, I thought I would use a practical example to answer a common question I am often asked: Can coaching really help with long-standing behaviours or habits? The truth is people often hire coaches (especially [NLP-trained coaches](#)) for some tendency they would like to get rid of – I myself started my own coaching journey because I needed to deal with such a challenge. Procrastination, indecisiveness, smoking, overeating, stage fright can all be examples of such “unwanted” behaviours. It is as though they were parts of us with lives of their own, uncontrollable parts which we often seek to eradicate in order to achieve some more desirable goal. For instance, one of my clients described to me an uncontrollable pull he often felt for going out and partying, and explained how he wished he could stop. His outings deeply upset his wife who felt abandoned as a result, but each time he found himself succumbing to sirens who seemed to irresistibly call his name at night. I was deeply touched and moved by his example, as I could see the distress it was causing in his life and how powerless he felt.

So how could coaching help with those parts of us that we don't seem to be able to control? What if coaching could assist us in finding out what the deeper and more meaningful message of a behaviour might be beyond its surface manifestation? And above all, what if coaching could help us meet those parts in ways that truly supported us?

[Stephen Gilligan](#), an heir to the [Ericksonian](#) tradition, postulates that any symptom one might experience as negative is actually a manifestation of something deeper going on in our psyche. In his words, “what keeps happening over and over again [i.e., the problematic symptom] is the attempt of the psyche to heal”. It follows that the so-called problem is the “attempted solution by our unconscious mind to solve the problem”. This is why, according to Gilligan (as well as many others), it is always useful to approach any behaviour, even the most inexplicable, as making sense somehow. In other words, as one of the NLP presuppositions suggests, “every behaviour [seems to have] a positive intention”.

Although Gilligan's approach pertains to therapy and not strictly to coaching, one can easily see everyday applications of his theory. Going back to my client, as I enquired more about what was going on for him in those moments when he was irresistibly drawn to going out despite the havoc he knew it would cause in his relationship, we found out that a part of him wanted to “break free” from all constraints and responsibilities; there was a part of him that sought to help him reclaim the freedom he felt he had lost in his attempt to be a good husband and father. As he became aware of that part's positive intention, he started being able to genuinely connect to it and to welcome it in his life. He no longer denied his strong need for freedom and adventure which had resulted in a strong push-and-pull feeling from which he desperately tried to dissociate. Instead, he started giving that part a new expression that supported both his spirit and his wife's: he engaged in motorcycling, skiing and other adventure-filled activities he had stopped practising in his attempt to match his idea of a good family man.



This example illustrates how a coaching conversation can help us shift our perception of a situation, a perception that might actually keep us stuck with it. As is often the case, the solution my client had put in place (denying room to freedom in his life in order to satisfy the perceived demands of his new role) had perpetuated the problem (being irresistibly called to go out). This stems from the fact we all have parts of us that seem to conflict with whom we *think we are* or *should be*. We tend to box ourselves in roles filled with expectations, forgetting in the process who we truly are. While we do have responsibilities to face, it is also essential to acknowledge in the process our deeper needs and values; otherwise, chances are they will come and haunt us in ways that can be overwhelming at times. If that happens, however, it is important to show up, to meet with curiosity and "human presence" those challenging parts within us – because, as Gilligan puts it, "anything that happens repeatedly is trying to express something about our identity". Only then can we transform our relationship to a situation and naturally move on to the next stage in our lives. And coaching can, and will, assist us in that process as an awareness tool and a practical solution-focused approach.

Do you find yourself challenged by some habit or behaviour? If so, remember to ask yourself as a starting point what the underlying positive intention might be and come up with alternative supportive ways that could satisfy that intention.

If you find you could benefit from the support of a professional coach with an extensive NLP and Ericksonian background, book an introductory session via email at sophie@essentialcoaching.com or phone 604 985 4499.



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