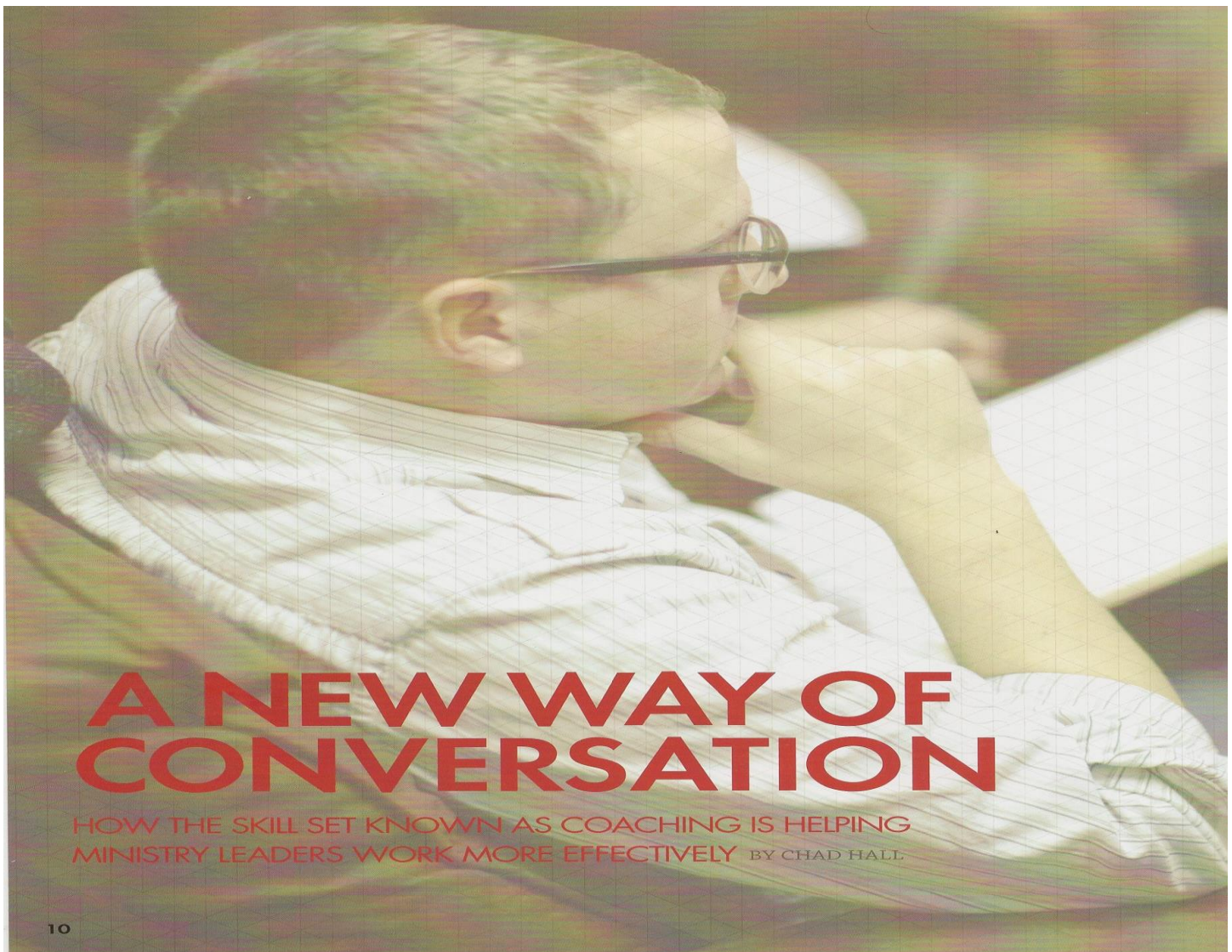


Leadership Development – 4.3 – Coaching as Conversation

I have been very fortunate to have attended and graduated from Western Seminary. I often think how daunting a task it seemed when I started my Master's in Ministry program, and how wonderful the process of Spiritual growth and personal development truly was. Most of my web site articles are dedicated to forwarding much of what I learned and was exposed to in my seminary experience. I have taken six coaching classes in my master's program, and have found them to be an extremely helpful means of engaging others in general, and in encouraging personal growth in those I advise, teach, train, and mentor. You don't necessarily need to be a seminary student to take coaching classes, and most coaching classes are available to the public through Western Seminary. You may go to the following web site to get more information on this wonderful method of purposeful interaction with others - <http://www.westernseminary.edu/coaching/discover/>

What follows below is an article that was printed in Western Seminary's Fall Magazine 2013. It is available on Western Seminary's website. This article is a short introduction to the concept and principles of faith coaching:



As the Apostle Paul said, the gospel is “the power of God to bring salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16). Ministry leaders serve as God’s laborers in proclaiming and unleashing the gospel message—the good news that God’s kingdom is made real through the person and work of Jesus and that everyone (anyone!) who believes can experience a new and transformative life.

Ministry leaders employ a number of skills and approaches in our efforts. We talk to people, we preach, we listen, we show care and compassion, we witness to the power of God to bring salvation in our own lives and in the lives of those around us.

For over a decade I have trained ministry leaders to employ a set of skills that can often improve their effectiveness. That set of skills is collectively known as coaching. In fact, I have come to believe that coaching can be an important skill set for today’s ministry leaders.

WHAT IS COACHING?

Coaching is a way of conversing that leads to new awareness, which in turn leads to new action for the person who is being coached. In a coaching conversation, one person (the coach) focuses only on supporting the other person (the coachee) in concentrating on a particular topic of the coachee’s choosing. The coach helps shape the conversation so that the coachee is better able to move through three phases: 1) narrowing their focus to the most important aspect of the topic, including his or her preferred outcome for the topic; 2) expanding his or her thinking to include new options and fresh possibilities for creating the preferred outcome; 3) narrowing the options to select one or two new actions to take in order to contribute to the preferred outcome. The coach helps the conversation move along by asking powerful questions, practicing active listening, and employing a handful of other complementary skills.

To coach effectively requires the exercise of certain skills, but it also requires the coach to have a peculiar mindset. A coaching mindset starts with the assumption that the person being coached is more of an expert on his or her own life than is the coach. By resting on this assumption, the coach can engage the coachee in a conversation that

the coachee “owns,” if you will. Rather than the coach taking control and pushing the coach’s agenda on the coachee, the coach supports the coachee in exploring and pursuing the coachee’s agenda.

A coaching conversation can be applied to practically any topic that a motivated coachee wishes to discuss. Coaching can be employed formally or informally. Some coaches are paid to work with clients such as executives or people experiencing a career transition. Others use coaching skills to improve their family relationships or to support team members. My favorite application of coaching is for evangelism and discipleship—supporting people as they experience the power of God to bring salvation.

COACHING FOR EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP

Coaching is such a wonderful fit for evangelism and discipleship conversations because the approach makes ample room for the Spirit of God to be active and effective in the life of the coach and the person being coached.

When we apply coaching in conversations with non-believers, we support the non-believer in discerning where they are in life, what’s working well and what’s not working so well, what hopes are present and unfulfilled, and what’s next for them. As we ask and listen, the coachee becomes more open for discovery, and space is created in which God’s Spirit can operate. The coach supports the coachee in considering what is crucial for both the long-term and short-term, in expanding awareness for how to deal with what is crucial, and in committing to key actions that will support the coachee’s

A coaching mindset starts with the assumption that the person being coached is more of the expert in his or her own life than is the coach.

progress. Sometimes a coaching conversation will result in a direct evangelistic moment in which the coachee experiences and responds to the transformative power of the gospel. Typically this involves both the coachee’s openness and the coach’s discernment about what to share and when to share it, both partnering with God to usher the coachee into belief and salvation. Other times, a coaching conversation is a seed-planting witnessing event during which the coachee experiences a

conversation partner who truly cares about the coachee as a person. This kind of conversation plants seeds by challenging the coachee to examine, with honesty, his or her life and to conduct a sort of inventory of what is working and not working. Such an examination, if

This kind of conversation plants seeds by challenging the coachee to examine, with honesty, his or her life and to conduct a sort of inventory of what is working and not working.

conducted honestly, must result in an admission that something is off, that hindrances are blocking the person from living a fulfilled life, and that change is needed. The coach partners with the other person to discern what level of change the coachee is ready to experience and what the coachee needs to do in response.

Coaching conversations stand in contrast to conversations in which one person pushes an agenda on the other person in an attempt to convince, cajole, or sell. Typically in those kinds of conversations, the other person grows increasingly resistant and closed, squeezing out any space for exploration in an effort to protect themselves.

Coaching is also an appropriate approach for discipleship conversations. Coaches support the work of the Spirit in sanctification by partnering with the coachee to examine his or her life, discern where there is room for progress, and determine what sins, habits, beliefs, and characteristics are preventing the coachee from fully following Christ.

WHEN (NOT) TO COACH

Coaching is not always the appropriate approach to take. We must be discerning about when to engage a person in the supportive role of a coach and when to take the more directive approach of telling or teaching. Being directive is most appropriate when a person is open to learning and eager to hear what the teller/teacher has to share.

Coaching is also inappropriate when dealing with people who have suffered trauma, been wounded, or are suffering from addiction. In such cases, the healing approach of a counselor or therapist is more fitting.

It's important to note that learning to coach others does not replace the power of God in salvation. We cannot technique people into experiencing the gospel in a transformative way, whether our technique is preaching, teaching, serving, counseling, coaching, or anything else.

These are some of the ways we join God in what He is doing in the lives of those around us, and we are wise to employ these competencies as methods of cooperation, not as methods of manipulating others or of replacing the power of God for salvation. ■

DON'T MISS THIS!

Coaching for Christian Leaders: A Practical Guide
by Linda Miller and Chad Hall
(Chalice Press, 2007)

A great introduction to how the practice of coaching (especially active listening, the framing of key questions, and identifying next steps) can be useful in Christian ministry. Both Miller and Hall teach in Western's coaching program, which Hall also directs.



Chad Hall is the Director of Coaching at Western Seminary. He is a Master Certified Coach (MCC) and holds degrees in theology from Duke University and Princeton Seminary. Chad lives in North Carolina with his wife and three children.

BE A BETTER HELPER

TOP TEN THINGS NOT TO DO WHEN TRYING TO HELP

Jon Holmes, L.M.F.T. and Director of the Marital and Family Therapy program at Western Seminary Sacramento Campus, shares some insight to help you be a better helper.

- 1 Don't jump into fix-mode without important facts... **Listening before launching** allows you to gain clarity for helpful action.
- 2 Don't don "hero" attire... An attitude of humility keeps the focus off of the helper and on the one needing assistance.
- 3 Don't focus only on solving the problem at hand... Being a friend first provides the **stability of companionship** that will help a person in need weather the storm of the crisis.
- 4 Don't get caught in the surge of urgency... Moving at a different pace as a friend and helper can allow **objectivity** and **wisdom** to percolate.
- 5 Don't inherit the anxiety of the situation... Realize that just as anxiety is emotionally contagious, so is peace. Sow shalom into difficult moments and situations!
- 6 Don't drop into a "You Blew It!" mindset if the crisis is due to personal failure... **Grace before criticism** helps a person move beyond shame into a more helpful state of personal ownership, reflection and evaluation.
- 7 Don't own other's problems... Focus on **developing a helping partnership** where the person discovers resources and resilience in the midst of their difficulties.
- 8 Don't fly solo... Helping someone in need is truly a community endeavor and is most impactful when multiple supporters are involved.
- 9 Don't avoid emotions... Emotions are part of the economy of healing and a wide range of powerful emotions may be experienced as part of the helping and healing process.
- 10 Most importantly, **don't follow the "friends of Job support system"** approach. A lot of healing can occur by sitting down, being present, and sharing in the person's suffering. Keep advice to a minimum and only offer direction as invited and appropriate.