

# CONVERSATIONS...

## IN SEARCH OF THE INNER SELF

**ICF** Bengaluru  
Charter Chapter

EDITION 7 | MAY 2023

Looking back to Design the Future.



# From the Editorial Desk

## Looking back to Design the Future.

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Albert Einstein said, “I never think of the future. It comes soon enough”. However, looking ahead is helpful, to see what is staring at our face, unless you are a theoretical physicist like Einstein. American author and motivational speaker Zig Ziglar has something closer to what we coaches can identify with. He says, “You are a success when you have made friends with your past, are focused on the present and are optimistic about the future”.

Our theme for this edition is extrapolated from this idea. Our wonderful writers have helped us infer this theme, with a look at the past through case study, look at the future through what is new in coaching, while staying firmly with the precept of making our present good for ourselves and for others.

For coaches a lot of words that start with “pre” are significant: Prepared, prejudiced, Pre-conceived etc. And the Present is also synonymous with a gift. Being in the present moment, coaching presence are meaningful things. Having stated that, the past has a lot of wisdom too. That is why we have case studies, anthologies, research, histories, and other forms of looking back. These are of consequence so we may learn from them, and not repeat those mistakes. For this edition, We have a mix of past authors and brand new ones, including a prolific poet.

We hope you enjoy reading this edition. Do share your thoughts, dissent and musings, either way with us.

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### **Amita Bharath**

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## From The President's Desk

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It is with great pleasure that I share that the Chapter has been very active this year with various activities. This is entirely due to the brilliant work done by our energetic members and the MC team. Special congratulations to Gayatri & Amita who have been successful in getting seven authors for this edition & publisher Vidhi Vala who has published the edition in a timely and attractive way. The following are the people who took the time out to write for this edition and I would like to thank them from the bottom of my heart.

- (1) Sushma Banthia for sharing a case study on the topic of “ To Coach or not to coach”.
- (2) Vijayalakshmi from the Chennai chapter for elaborating with her usual passion in the second part of her interview “Coaching & growth for all - A systemic journey.”
- (3) A heartfelt poem by Sunil Sathyendra -“A tree by the river”
- (4) Our seasoned coach Sridhar Laxman has elaborated on “Coaching presence”.
- (5) John Serrao, one of our Communities of Practice leader has dealt at length with “Contracting in Coaching session”.
- (6) Varundeeep has shared his “Voyage of an enriching experience of creating social impact”.
- (7) Sreenivas from the Mumbai Chapter shared on “What Coaches can learn from Alexa in the area of effective communication”.

John Serrao, Gowri Ramani, Jaya Bhateja, Dharmesh Mistry and Rachel Gojer have successfully implemented our new initiative of “Communities of Practice”. We urge all members to participate in these initiatives. Kudos to Shanti, our MC member who continues to conduct our Learning sessions meticulously. She organised a 2.5 hour session with our own MCC coaches as well as significant members from the corporate sector during the International Coaching Week.

Varundeeep Sachi, our MC member, has been passionately pursuing our chapter's social impact. He organised a very successful face-to-face review of the Client Contact with Agastya International Foundation. The Foundation's vision is to support 100 Million underprivileged school children in the remote parts of Karnataka, Telangana and Tamil Nadu. The Coaches supported the leaders to grasp the skills needed to achieve this vision.

We have introduced our ICF CEO to the President of the Africa Asia Scholars Group to work closely with the United Nations to promote Coaching. This will help ICF and the Bengaluru chapter take coaching to some underserved sectors and geographies.

We hope to meet, interact and learn more from each other in the rest of 2023.  
With warm regards,



**Dr Winston Jacob, President**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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SERVING THE PERSON: TO COACH OR NOT TO COACH <i>By Sushma Banthia</i>	06
COACHING & GROWTH FOR ALL – A SYSTEMIC JOURNEY <i>Interview with Vijayalakshmi S (Part 2)</i> <i>By Gayatri Krishnamurthy and Amita Bharath</i>	09
DEVELOP A COACHING PRESENCE TO INSPIRE AND UPLIFT YOUR CLIENTS <i>By Sridhar Laxman</i>	13
A TREE BY THE RIVER <i>Poem by “Pungidasa” Sathyendra Sunil</i>	17
NAIL DOWN THE CONTRACTING AGREEMENT IN SESSIONS <i>By John Serrao</i>	18
AN ENRICHING VOYAGE FOR SOCIAL IMPACT <i>ICF Bengaluru Partners with Agastya Foundation</i>	22
EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: WHAT CAN COACHES CAN LEARN FROM ALEXA ? <i>by Sreenivas Nagappa</i>	25



# ***Serving the Person: To Coach or Not to Coach***

***By Sushma Banthia***

The excitement was high and there was relief too. I had formally stepped into the world of Coaching. After months of rigorous training, I was now a certified coach, looking forward to having sessions with clients and making a difference. As is usually the case once we are in the field then the questions and doubts arise. My situation was no different. Most clients were easy to coach. Then there were some instances where I started asking myself - “Should I be coaching this person? Is it ethical? Is this a case for therapy / counselling?” How do I solve this dilemma? On the one hand is my eagerness to support the person in front of me and then there is the ICF competencies and Ethics.

There were numerous such instances that I have faced. Here is one instance where

Sushma Banthia shares a case study which unpacks the dilemma –To Coach or not to Coach. Serve the person, be what they need is the wisdom she comes upon.

I faced this dilemma and the insights that emerged.

It was almost ten years ago, but seems like just yesterday, when I got a call from a participant of a Leadership workshop that I had conducted. His request was “May I and my wife come to meet you?”

They arrived at 8.00 pm as I had agreed to their request. I had no clue as to the real reason for this visit. It was only after we

finished with the normal niceties, that his wife Rama (name changed), spoke up. Ashok (name Changed) had lost his job, been asked to leave. The Reason stated was - performance way below expectations. Rama and Ashok were keen that I guide Ashok as this was not the first such instance. On enquiring as to what specifically they wanted from me and how I could help, I was told that they had come because for the first time Ashok had been punctual, this was for my Leadership Workshop. Rama had seen a change in Ashok during those 3 days and felt that I was the person to help him.

After the initial discussions, we agreed to have sessions for at least 6 months. The Goal was to help Ashok develop his skills to manage the task as well as relationships for better performance. Rama also mentioned a few pointers: Ashok's listening skills needed to be improved--he would be physically present but his mind would be elsewhere. The Second major area was relationship building. She felt that he was a good hearted human being, who was, however, very self-centered. During this entire conversation, Ashok had been silent and in agreement.

This was the presenting agenda. Ashok was very willing and receptive. The journey of exploring and getting to the deeper agenda and belief systems started. By the third session, what emerged was completely unexpected. Not paying attention, not achieving the targets, etc. was the least of the problems.

Ashok was asked to leave because of behavioural issues. He would often sit in his cabin and talk or curse aloud. . When things didn't go his way, he would be seen walking on the road and talking loudly to himself. Ashok would use the women's restrooms as he was afraid to go to the men's

room or he would relieve himself in public. All this caught me completely by surprise. I was happy that the behavioural issues emerged. However I was uncertain of what my next steps should be.

My dilemma was To Coach or not to Coach. Clearly, this was a case outside of coaching expertise.

ICF's first core competency "Demonstrates Ethical Practice" has two components. The first one is "Demonstrates personal integrity and honesty in interactions with clients, sponsors and relevant stakeholders". The second one states, "Maintains the distinction between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy and other support professions."

In short, as per the ICF guidelines, Coaching and therapy are different interventions. This clearly seemed to me prima facie a case for therapy. Following the ethics, I suggested to Ashok and Rama that they should consult a therapist. They had been to one and did not feel comfortable. Rama pleaded with me, "Ma'am, he trusts you. He listens to what you tell him. I have never seen this in him before. Please help us. I am observing a change after he has been coming for the sessions."

After much deliberation, I decided to continue the sessions. There were 2 reasons for this choice. Some training I had taken during and after my coach training in shadow/ parts work by Guthrie Sayen. I also had a strong belief that one must 'Coach the person, not the problem'. Ashok and Rama had come to me as a guide and not as a COACH. I decided to put away my 'coaching hat' and give it a shot.

Within two months, both Ashok and Rama reported that Ashok was not scared to go to the men's restrooms and the episodes of him talking loudly to himself had reduced

considerably. Six months later, all the behavioural issues had disappeared. Then we started focusing on the other issues of the presenting agenda.

Ashok got a job in a prestigious company. And the sessions continued for another 3 months.

I have shared this case study purely for learning and discussion purposes. I have often been part of conversations where fellow coaches have raised these situations. It surely is a dilemma – To Coach or Not to Coach. While on the one hand we have the ICF guidelines and Ethics, there is a PERSON at the other end. Marcia Reynolds's popular book is aptly titled 'Coach the Person, not the Problem'. How does one apply it in real life situations?

## My reflections and insights

**The PERSON is more important.** It is ok to take off the Coach hat and be a guide, friend, mentor, etc. whatever is in the best interest and in service of the client.

**The Value of Creating psychological safety and earning trust:** I believe that the change in Ashok was largely due to the trust that he had in me. This was also an important factor that made me continue the sessions.

**Importance of the chemistry sessions:** I have found that at times, some coaches are very clinical and take a checklist approach. While the checklist is important and needed, can we coaches adapt to the need of the hour. Gauge the need, be Present and Flexible.



### Sushma Banthia (ICF-PCC)

*Sushma Banthia is an ICF-PCC Leadership Coach and Facilitator. She has been in the area of people development for over 20 years.*

*Sushma is passionate about helping leaders improve their teams' performance. She believes that coaching has to have a holistic approach and hence she coaches the person not the problem.*

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## EMBODYING & CELEBRATING COACHING

# Coaching & Growth for All – A Systemic Journey

*Interview with Vijayalakshmi S, MCC MP (Part 2)*

The acronym VUCA was used to describe the post-cold war state of strategic opacity. Volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity described the global state in 2021, the year of the deadly Delta variant of the SARS Covid-19 pandemic. It was at such a time that the ICF Chennai Charter Chapter collaborated with five other India Chapters to host the ICF India Conclave 2021 themed Coaching For Growth – Individuals, Teams, Organizations, Systems (CFG ITOS).

Master Coach and Mentor Vijayalakshmi S responded to some questions about this seamlessly executed landmark event which she helmed as Conclave chair & President of ICF Chennai.

By Gayatri Krishnamurthy  
and Amita Bharath

*You have said the Conclave was an embodiment of coaching; Please share some parallels between coaching and the way the event shaped up.*

At the core of Coaching lies potential, partnership and possibilities i.e., maximising potential, through partnerships while navigating the power of possibilities. CFG-ITOS 2021 embodied this. It allowed the Coaching community to maximise our own potential by hosting a fully virtual, truly global Conclave. It was envisioned to include the entire Coaching ecosystem – not just coaches, but individual clients, sponsors, stakeholders, coaching enthusiasts, teams and organizations. It was brought to life at the height of the second wave of the pandemic.

The Conclave, like Coaching, was co-created on the power of partnerships - ICF Chennai in collaboration with other India Chapters and ICF Global. Our partners were organizers and

volunteers from different parts of the country and the world, including non-coaches, and other organizations. It was reimagined not as a mere one-time event but as a systemic intervention for ongoing learning and growth for all. We chose to run it pro bono thereby ensuring access for all.

Our vision was to Create coaching awareness, Demystify coaching and position Coaching as a vehicle for sustainable growth. **“Coaching is for All – Like Growth is!”** was the philosophy. The Conclave went beyond offering connections for the Coaching community; It offered a real opportunity for the Entire Coaching ecosystem to come together to learn and GROW!

Diversity and Creativity were two other Coaching elements that we witnessed in the Conclave. Our speakers were global thought-leaders in their own fields (Coaching and beyond); the diverse learning formats were a mix of experiential masterclasses, debates, dialogues, coaching roundtables and experience-coaching marketplace.

We innovated our ticket offerings: There was a full-price ticket, a minimally priced USD 5 ticket and a completely sponsored zero cost ticket. Participants were free to choose any of these with no questions asked, respecting “client choice” like we do in Coaching. We had two novel add-on tickets that were welcomed by all: a “Contribute to coaching” add-on (a donation towards Coaching awareness creation) and a “Gift of Coaching” add-on (sponsoring a ticket for someone who may not be able to afford one). Many participants generously contributed to both.

We planted 1200 trees to recognise all our speakers and volunteers, and created a “Coaching For Growth” forest in Tamil Nādu. The intention was to nurture the spirit of Coaching and Growth, while making a difference to the livelihoods of farmers.

***What did you learn about leadership while helming the conclave? Provide a personal example of growth as an individual.***

The Conclave was a lived experience of leadership and personal-growth. I learnt that great teamwork happens beyond and above conventional paradigms and constraints. This was one of the most unique leadership roles I had undertaken: Leading a collective coming together as a team in a boundaryless way, with no formal lines of work connecting us, for the larger vision & purpose of an event to create awareness about the power and potential of coaching. This team was dispersed geographically: we had never met before; And yet it was magical - this coming together and manifestation of the power of intent.

Leadership is about understanding the innate spirit of teamwork and to be an enabler of greatness. Every member of the team had something great about them and as a leader how could I enable them to shine and grow? Leadership is also about truly valuing diverse strengths and being inclusive. I learnt that ***leaders like coaches are enablers or growth & greatness.***

I understood about being detached from outcomes, such as the revenues that typically conclave organizers would pursue. I focused instead on the journey-- did we do the right things keeping intact our coaching ethos, did the team have fun, did each of us and every stakeholder grow through this Conclave?

I learnt the real meaning of resilient leadership through adversity—the two waves of Covid, shifting the Conclave dates twice being guided by humaneness and humanity. Resilience is also about staying true to your values and ethics, uncompromised in the face of challenges.

Finally, I experienced what being and doing

“systemically” was all about: Trusting the system, trusting the Universe and believing that “I am because we are”. A Leader is who they are, and do what they do, only because of the Collective that walks with them and has their back.

All of these learnings came from a journey that was neither easy nor simple; Yet it offered me tremendous personal growth as a coach, leader and a human being, that I am grateful for.

***How was the intention of Inclusion, community spirit and growing the coaching ecosystem given wings to fly?.***

Intention is given wings when we walk the talk! It manifested in three ways:

First, anyone who wanted to contribute was welcomed with open arms irrespective of who they were, where they came from or how much they could give. While the Conclave Secretariat began its journey eight months earlier, we had volunteers joining even in the final week. There was a systemic ethos, that every part of the system makes a difference; the contribution of each of the 55+ volunteers matters.

Second, making this a 100% virtual conclave, without any prior experience of organizing such a format - was a game-changer. It truly enabled inclusion and participation from different corners of the world, something that would never have been possible in a physical conclave, hosted in one location. Keeping the price point very affordable allowed participation from all sections of society, especially under-represented audiences. It was awe-inspiring to realise that while our goal was 1000 registrations, we had reached 1300+ participants live, and 5000+ via the full-conference recording shared freely on our channel.

Third, we sought and welcomed non-commercial partnerships, in addition to the

generous support of our sponsors and event-implementation partners. We were able to achieve our desired participant profile of 50:50 coach:non-coach, thanks to partnerships & community participation.

Our greatest collective learning was - ***for Coaching to GROW, the Communities of which we are a part, must experience growth, and Coaching as a concept needs to grow!***

***How did the All Things Coaching platform emerge out of the post conclave phase? How is it faring now? How has the community engaged with it?***

Our post-Conclave working motto was “The Conclave may have concluded but the Learning Continues”. The invaluable content that our 100+ speakers had generously shared. needed to reach many more people worldwide. Thus, we enthusiastically committed to releasing all 45 session recordings on our YouTube channel. Though it was quite challenging owing to volunteer-fatigue, we achieved this by releasing one video at a time, finally uploading them all.

This accomplishment led us to wonder – ***How can we nurture and grow the Coaching ecosystem and continue to drive Coaching awareness and visibility, beyond the Conclave? What was the systemic solution to this? This was the idea that gave birth to All Things Coaching (ATC)*** in February 2022. ATC - All you wanted to know about Coaching but didn't know where to ask, was positioned as a virtual, open-space for inquiry, discussion & dialogue; to share and learn about anything related to Coaching. A platform to engage and bring together the Coaching ecosystem.

ATC has completed more than a year since its launch, and has generated a lot of interest. Themes such as life coaching, leadership coaching, challenges in coaching, becoming

a coach, finding & seeking a coach are some that have been explored on ATC. There are a good number of coaches, clients, potential clients and organization leaders who support it regularly with their participation. ATC has steadily grown into a credible forum to clarify questions on coaching. I believe ATC, like the Conclave itself, validates the power of pure and positive intent.

**NOTE:**

To experience the Conclave for yourself, do check out the Conclave website [www.coachingforgrowth2021.com](http://www.coachingforgrowth2021.com) and the Conclave video recordings playlist - <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLagkujDJE1WnYr1y0jO1tgoZbGk5y5F>



**Vijayalakshmi S (MCC MP)**

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*Viji served as President ICF Chennai (2020 -22), Chair ICF India Conclave (2021), first recipient of ICF India Coaching Excellence Guru Award (2022); and awarded special recognition as 'highly commended' in EMCC Global Coaching Awards (2021).*

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# ***Develop a Coaching Presence to Inspire and Uplift your Clients.***

*By Sridhar Laxman*

Technological changes are sweeping the world, disrupting one aspect after the other of our lives. While there are many benefits, there are downsides too - Device addiction, and always being accessible to endless notifications that shatter attention spans, the anxiety of FOMO and other micro stressors are all too evident.

## ***Impact on our Clients***

Our clients face more of this disruption, given their roles, deadlines and shifting dynamics. Some of these challenges are:

What is the role of Coaching Presence in effective coaching? Sridhar Laxman urges coaches to develop a strong coaching presence to support clients who are caught midstream while technology and uncertainty disrupts global business practices.

- An 'always on' working style blurs the lines between work and personal life, making it difficult to unplug, and recharge. This affects their well-being.
- A Never-ending stream of emails, news, text notifications, and updates make filtering information harder. This leads to decision fatigue and burnout.
- The intense pressure to keep up with the latest trends, learn new skills, and drive organizational transformation is difficult to sustain. It adds to stress and anxiety.
- While remote work offers flexibility, it also challenges maintaining work-life balance. Nurturing social connections is made harder as is managing feelings of isolation. Research now tells us that loneliness can be as harmful as smoking!

- Fragile economies, a war that doesn't seem to end anytime soon, rapid automation, supply chain challenges and muted consumer demand are forcing organizations to rethink their cost structures and workforce needs. As a result,, Clients face higher levels of insecurity about their jobs.

### *The Role of Coaching Presence*

Coaching presence is how a coach shows up, engages, and interacts with Clients before, during and after coaching sessions. Think of it as a combination of your personality, energy, communication style, levels of emotional intelligence, and ability to create a trusting and supportive environment.

A strong coaching presence matters for several reasons:

**To build trust and rapport:** A coach with a calming, pleasing, yet objective presence can create a safe and supportive space for clients.

**Effective communication:** Active listening, asking powerful questions, and engaging in empathic and genuine conversations enable the Client to become self-aware, go deeper and find richer, valuable insights.

**Client empowerment:** A coach with an empowering presence can better support clients to take ownership of their growth and development.

**Emotional intelligence:** A self-aware coach, managing their emotions effectively, well-tuned into the Client's feelings can help build a nurturing relationship.

**Authenticity and credibility:** Being authentic, credible, and confident in their ability to support the Client is essential for a

powerful coaching process. It also helps the Client be more committed and accountable to the coaching program.

### *And last but not the least:*

**Stillness:** Learn to be with the Client with minimal effort; Be present, attentive, and receptive in an objective yet soft manner; You are tuned into their needs, thoughts, and emotions. By staying still while they are in a state of confusion, you continue to extend that stillness even when they grapple with strong feelings, you gently invite the client to shift their energies into the space of stillness.

This gentle and fluid state encourages Clients to introspect on their goals, values, and priorities. In addition, it builds a deeper understanding and empathy between the Coach and the Client.

Cultivating stillness requires you to minimize the noise and distractions in your day-to-day life. It asks you to spend more time quietly, reflecting, sensing, intuiting, and getting comfortable with whatever unfolds in the moment. It might mean less time spent consuming social media, unhooking oneself from the news, disabling text notifications or whatever else interrupts your stillness.

### *Valuable Insights from Books*

Here are some invaluable lessons from four books on coaching and presence:

The books are Executive Presence: *The Missing Link Between Merit and Success* by Sylvia Ann Hewlett (2014), *Conversational Intelligence: How Great Leaders Build Trust and Get Extraordinary Results* by Judith Glaser (2013), *Co - Active Coaching* by Karen Kimsey - House, Henry Kimsey-House, Phillip Sandahl and Laura

Whitworth (2018), and *The Extraordinary Coach: How the Best Leaders Help Others Grow* by John Zenger and Kathleen Stinnett (2018).

**Develop Gravitas:** Sylvia Ann Hewitt emphasises the need for gravitas: Be clear on 'who you are', i.e. a combination of every aspect of the "you" coming together harmoniously to build a strong coaching presence.

Gravitas conveys confidence, poise, and comfort. Develop it by getting clear on your values and principles, deepening your subject matter expertise, learning to stay calm under pressure, and being decisive. This will reassure your clients. They will feel confident in your abilities and enable them to make meaningful progress.

**Cultivate Authenticity:** Hewitt writes about authenticity, "Be true to yourself, embrace your unique strengths and values and be genuine in client interactions. When authentic, you create a trusting environment." This encourages clients to be open about their challenges and aspirations.

**Master Conversational Intelligence:** Judith Glaser's writing teaches us the importance of understanding and shaping our client conversations. As a coach, focus on asking powerful questions that foster trust, provoke new thinking, and create new insights. When you engage in open and empathetic conversations, you support your clients in expanding their wisdom.

**Create Psychological Safety:** Glaser affirms the importance of psychological safety in conversations. By establishing a coaching relationship where clients feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and fears, you create a space for them to explore new ideas and learn from their experiences.

**Encourage Self-Reflection and Accountability:** Glaser encourages developing a culture of reflection by asking thought-provoking questions. These support clients to evaluate their actions and motivations. As they take ownership of their growth, they hold themselves accountable. Client Engagement and commitment increases when they hold themselves accountable.

**Foster a Growth Mindset:** Zenger & Stinnett write about creating a positive and supportive environment that encourages learning and experimentation. When you inspire your clients to adopt a growth mindset, they'll be more open to taking risks, embracing challenges, and pursuing newer horizons.

**Provide Feedback that Inspires:** They emphasize the power of feedback in coaching relationships. Provide constructive feedback to inspire and motivate your clients to focus on their strengths and identify potential growth areas.

**Celebrate Success:** Zenger & Stinnett also encourage celebrating successes. As a Jo coach, take the time to acknowledge and celebrate your clients' accomplishments. Doing so reinforces their growth and development and motivates them to continue pushing forward.

**Embrace Co-Active Coaching Principles:** Kimsey-House and co- authors emphasize the importance of collaboration between Coach and Client. Viewing clients as naturally creative, resourceful, and whole is essential as a coach. By doing so, you empower them to find their solutions and tap into their inner resources.

**Establish Clear Goals and Actions:** Kimsey-House and others remind us that goal setting and action planning are critical

to successful coaching outcomes: work with your clients to set clear, specific, and achievable goals with action plans to reach them. In this way, they have a sense of direction and purpose to drive their progress.

### ***Watch out for these Five Challenges***

Some obstacles can hinder a coach's effort to develop a vital and empowering coaching presence.

**Lack of Self-awareness:** This can hinder connecting authentically with clients, demonstrating empathy, or adapting their coaching approach to meet clients' needs.

**Ineffective communication skills:** Communication is a cornerstone of coaching presence. However, coaches who have not practiced active listening, asking powerful questions, or clearly expressing themselves may find it challenging to support their clients toward breakthroughs.

**Fear of vulnerability:** Being authentic often requires Coaches to be open and vulnerable with Clients. Fear of openness is likely to detract from the spacious energy needed to support the Client. Learning to identify, work with, and work through your fears is crucial for you to hold space in an

empowering manner for your clients.

**Rigid coaching approach:** Another aspect of coaching presence is flexibility and adaptability to each Client's unique needs. You may be overly attached to a particular coaching methodology without realizing it. This may lead to a struggle to connect with clients on a deeper level.

**Lack of ongoing professional development:** Continuous learning, self-reflection, and growth are essential for a Coach to move from where they are to where they wish to be. Please do not neglect your professional development or resist feedback; otherwise, you may find it challenging to improve your coaching presence, thus limiting your effectiveness with clients.

### ***In closing***

Developing an empowering coaching presence is an ongoing journey. Embracing these insights can better equip you to support clients in reaching their potential. Remember, as a Coach, your presence can inspire, uplift, and transform your Client's lives. It's a gift. Use it wisely.



### ***Sridhar Laxman (ICF-PCC)***

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*Sridhar's interests include fitness, meditation, poetry, blues, jazz music, and books on the mind-body connection. Educating underprivileged children and making the planet greener are other causes dear to his heart.*

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# Tree by the River

By "Pungidasa" Sathyendra Sunil

I feel like I am a tree,  
Overlooking the waters.  
Listening, observing quietly,  
without storing them in my own compartments.

I feel like I am a tree,  
Watching the river rise,  
fall and sometimes pause and look within.

For the river knows where it needs to go,  
I feel like I am a leaf,  
Floating in the river, neither instructing, nor wishing,  
Unperturbed by the destination it takes.

When the river has flown,  
I am still the tree; distinctly me.  
all that it whispered,  
is let go without holding on.

I bear no advice, bear no directions,  
Each river is its own boss.  
I am a tree, not sharing my lens of view.

I stand strong to values my own, ethics, my roots  
and coaching my being!

Even after all that the rivers have shared,  
I am still a tree.  
My own being.

A coach I am, like the tree that stays by the river bank.



## Sunil Sathyendra

*Sunil Sathyendra is famous in writing circles as Pungidasa and in coaching circles as NimmaCoach, (Your Coach) in Kannada.*

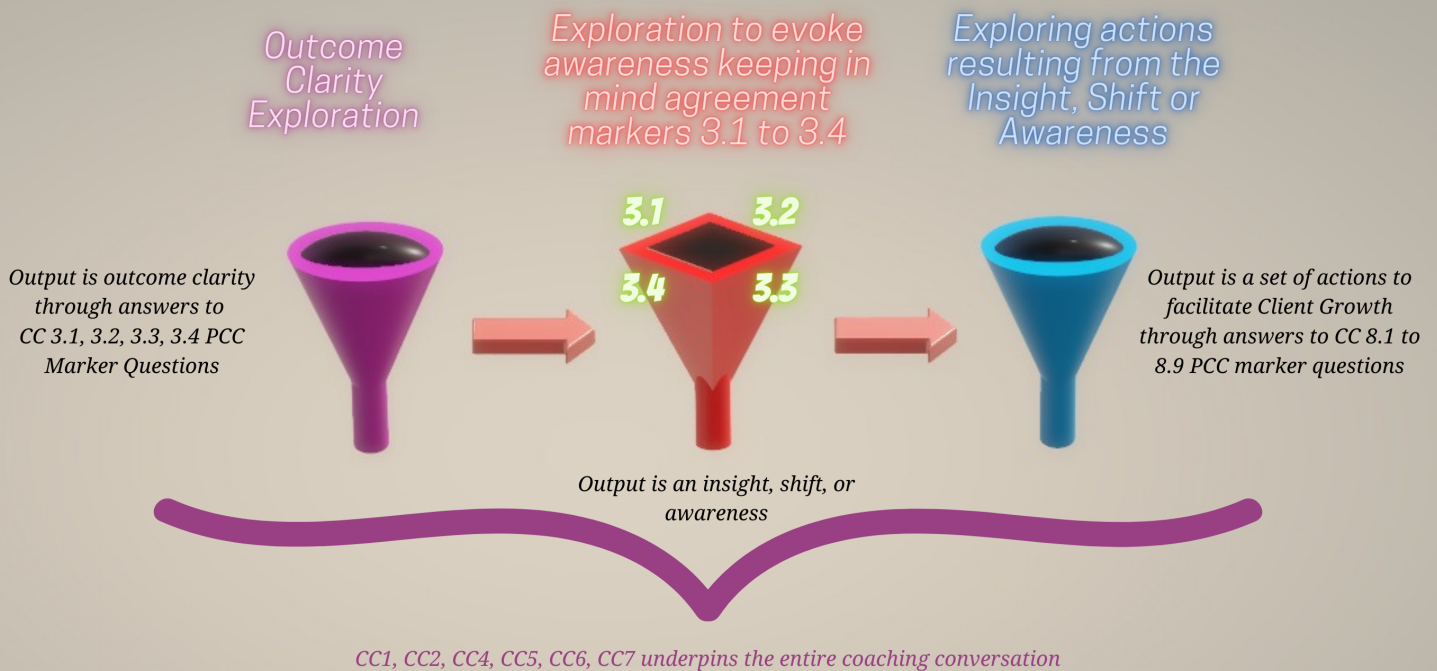
*Sunil's passions include writing, podcasting, philately, photography and more. He has been into writing for more than 12 years and has penned more than 5000 poems and 150 short stories in English.*

*Connecting with people through words, emotions and stories is one of his favourite pastimes. He is also interested in volunteering, fundraising and currently raises funds for rural scholarships via his annual poetry subscription.*

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# Coaching Conversations



## Nail down the Contracting agreement in Coaching sessions

By John Serrao

Contracting is a big topic, and ironically one that seems deceptively simple. That said, it defies all logic and can prove to be the downfall of many coaches, including many seasoned ones.

Before we start, I want to reiterate that this article is about Contracting in the Coaching session. Contracting before the sessions is not in the scope of this article.

What exactly is Contracting, or as the International Coach Federation (ICF)

John Serrao sifts through the structure of the in-session contracting agreement. An effective in-session contract is as effective as a GPS on a journey, he writes.

describes as “Establishes and Maintains Agreement”. It is all about clearly identifying first and foremost what the Client wants to achieve in the session. The goal or objective for the session if not set with clarity can lead to a conversation that might go all over the place. It’s about establishing the North Star for the conversation or if one takes the GPS metaphor, then the destination. Once this is in place, the coaching conversation will be able to go on track, sans minor distractions.

We can think of this as “Where” does the client want to go or “What” the client wants to achieve in the session? This answers the PCC marker 3.1: “Coach partners with the client to identify or reconfirm what the client wants to accomplish in this session.”

The second aspect is the “Why” of the objective. A “Why” question might potentially

make the client defensive. Once you have established a high degree of trust then a “Why” question asked with the appropriate respect will not elicit such defensiveness. Until then we can try rephrasing with a “What” question. A good way to tee up this question would simply be “What makes this goal important for you to achieve?” This question, albeit seemingly simple, has the capacity to make the client ponder profoundly.

I often have coaches ask me this question, “Isn’t it anyways important to the client or else why would they state that as an outcome to achieve? Why do I still need to ask them?”.

The first reason is that clients are talking nineteen to the dozen in a coaching conversation. Their mind is a huge cavern and they, when they find a delightful coach who listens to them patiently and intently, love to explore every nook and cranny of that cavern. When we ask them the Objective for the session, they need to step out of that safe space where they were examining the cavern to pick out what really bothers them the most. When you ask them what makes it important to address this issue, they must prioritize if indeed this is so or if there is another topic that potentially might be more important for them. Given that coaching time is finite just like everything else in life, clients must pick the topic that will give them the biggest bang for the proverbial buck.

The second reason could be that you may have sensed the importance as they were leading up to the objective in question. For e.g. somebody may have come to you and sought help with a topic on health. As you listened to them you could sense their pain, suffering and angst. You might even offer up to your client the importance you noticed and explore it with the client. The client may either add to, modify, or offer an entirely

different explanation of what makes it important to them. It allows for the client to understand the Objective for the session in the context of the Importance, thus setting up the stage for them to be more resolute when they come to planning and executing on actions to achieve their stated objective.

The third reason could be that as you ask them this question, the real niggling doubt that has been there all along slowly surfaces. They realize, albeit belatedly, that if they can fix this issue, a lot of peripheral issues get sorted or resolved. Sometimes an “aha moment” surfaces right there.

We can think of this as “What” makes it important for the client to achieve the stated outcome in the session? This answers the PCC marker 3.3: “Coach inquires about or explores what is important or meaningful to the client about what they want to accomplish in this session.”

Given that a coaching conversation can sometimes feel nebulous, it is important for clients to articulate the measures that a coach can summon up to check the client’s goal achievement at a later stage. This might prevent a client from feeling short changed. More often than not, this is a big struggle for clients. Sometimes they might even proffer a “I will know when I have achieved my stated objective”. As a coach, it makes sense to explore what that “know” represents to them so that the ambiguity can be stripped away and there is something definite to benchmark the conversation to determine success.

We can think of this as “How” will the Client know they have arrived at their destination or achieved the Outcome they sought to, in the session. This answers the PCC Marker 3.2: “Coach partners with the client to define or reconfirm measure(s) of success for what the client wants to accomplish in this session.”

And the final contracting question is around where do we need to begin to worm our way to the outcome? What is the real issue (or issues) that needs to be explored that's potentially getting in the way of achieving the outcome— from the myriad issues, mindsets, beliefs, values, assumptions, world views, roadblocks, barriers or challenges that might be besetting the client.

We can think of this as “What” are the potential issues we need to work our way through to reach our Destination or achieve the desired Outcome, in the session. This answers the PCC Marker 3.4: “Coach partners with the client to define what the client believes they need to address to achieve what they want to accomplish in this session.”

To summarize the contracting questions and markers, think of it as follows using a GPS analogy :

1. Where would you like to go? (PCC marker 3.1)
2. How will you know you have arrived at your destination (PCC marker 3.2)
3. Why do you want to go to this destination? (PCC marker 3.3)
4. What roadblocks might you potentially need to work through to get to your destination? (PCC marker 3.4)

Getting the answers to these questions sets up the agreement nicely between the coach and the client in the session. Time spent here is time well- spent. A lot of cobwebs are dusted off in the client's mind as answers to these questions are teased out by the coach conversationally, while leveraging their presence. Staying present will allow you to look at the entirety of the agreement from the time the coaching commenced and red thread the conversation, or notice inconsistencies that can be offered for the client's consideration and exploration.

Now when should we begin contracting with the client? Right at the very beginning or when the clients have had a chance to clear the cobwebs in their head. My mentor coach used to say, “When a client first starts taking the tentative steps to articulate what's in their head, it's akin to opening the water taps in homes in Brooklyn, New York, where the muddy water flows first, after which clear water starts to flow.” You will get a sense of when that is in a conversation when a settling in happens and then you can begin the contracting questions. Remember to ask these questions conversationally as a master jazz improviser improvises a composition right there in the moment as they feel led.

The questions generally keep emerging, having taken cognisance of both the muddy water and the clear one and the context that has so emerged. ICF is very clear that if the outcome question is not nailed (ICF PCC marker 3.1) the subsequent contracting questions become null and void. So, spending time here is a good way to get that buy-in from the client.

Here's another way to think about a contract. As I reflect through the lens of my background in finance, accounting and legal, points of difference, apart from the points of alignment, need to be ironed out before they get into the contract. All of this presumes mutual dialogue before the final contract. You can imagine the chaos that would ensue otherwise.

Let me paint a picture here of how a coaching conversation might unfold. Imagine 3 funnels. The first funnel is the Contracting funnel. The second is the Exploration funnel and the third is the Action funnel. The discussions in the first funnel right from the muddy water, to the clear water and then the exploration will result in the answers to the agreement or contract getting funnelled out. The output is

the answer to 4 PCC markers in Core Competency 3.

Once you have a good understanding of what needs to be addressed, then that along with the Objective, Success Measures and Importance become the input into the second funnel. That's why the second funnel is a funnel with four sides which is nothing but the four contracting markers that define the agreement with your client. There is a reason why ICF calls it "Establishes and Maintains Agreement." We need to maintain the agreement with our client right through the session. You explore with your client, keeping the agreement in mind, to get them to shift to a new way of being, thinking and doing. The output will be an insight, shift or awareness. Once you confirm or reconfirm that clients have got their Objective for the session is

when you work with the third and last funnel to facilitate Client Growth. Now these 3 funnels are depicted as distinct, discrete pieces only to aid understanding. In a normal coaching conversation these lines will blur as the coaching conversation becomes fluid.

If as coaches we can keep this structure at the back of our minds and ensure all the contracting markers are landed clearly, we leave little room for any doubt in our client's mind. This paves the way for both a meaningful and effective coaching conversation.

Note: Note: CC 3.1 and so on refers to the Core Competency (CC)Markers used by ICF assessors to evaluate coaches at a Professionally Certified Coach (PCC) level and provide a standard for the demonstration of the ICF coaching competencies.



### **John Serrao MCC**

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ICF Bengaluru Charter Chapter Coaches and Agastya International Foundation Coachees at the Kuppam Campus.

# ***An enriching Voyage for Social impact: ICF Bengaluru Partners with Agastya Foundation***

*By Varundeeep Sachi*

The ICF Bangalore Chapter joined hands with Agastya International Foundation to support them with the power of coaching to help accomplish their vision. The programme was launched on November 26, 2022. Twenty-three volunteer coaches were assigned to coach one person each over a period of six months.

It gives me immense pleasure and gratitude to pen down my thoughts as one of the coaches with the ICF Bengaluru Charter Chapter to collaborate with the Agastya Foundation leaders. I feel honoured and proud to get an opportunity to use my training to support these leaders, who are an impressive cohort of coachees. Coaching them allowed me to contribute value to this impactful organization.

The Coaching engagement was a phenomenal experience. The foundation's mission is to create a widespread grassroots movement to spark curiosity, nurture creativity and instill confidence among underserved and underprivileged children as well as government school teachers across India. This is done through experiential hands-on science-art education, project-based learning and peer-to-peer learning.

It was an exchange of inspirational thoughts and insights from the Coaches and coachees. This engagement was remarkable and enriching. We, the coaches, got to experience the hospitality of the foundation at their Kuppam campus. The foundation curated activities that kept us all engaged throughout the programme.

The Science Campus Creativity Lab & Centre of innovation at the campus speaks volumes about the efforts put into making learning accessible to economically underprivileged children and training government - school teachers. To date, Agastya has directly impacted, face-to-face, 6 million children and 200,000 teachers through their continued efforts. They target to expand the number of constituents served to 100 million in the next few years. The Social Connect programme at the ICF Bengaluru Charter Chapter are excited to be part of this journey.

The work done by the foundation is exemplary and impactful in the field of education. I have come away enriched and inspired. I look forward to being associated with the foundation for coaching projects in the future.

I thank my remarkable coach colleagues. Professor Winston Jacob MBE, Piyush Pushkal, Ashok Narain, Bhavani Jois, Nikhil

Benegal ,Raju Bhatnagar, Ravi Panicker, Vinit Kumar Singh, Kunal Gupta, Veena Murthy, Sunil Kumar Vaya, Prakash Thalya, Pankaj Dixit, T. R. Narayana Murthy, D. V. V. Prasad, Narayan Kamath, Dr Ruupa Rao, Sindhu S Rajbhushan, Jalaja Hariprasad, Namita Parikh, Nandini Vijaisimha, and Mandar Chitale were the coaches who undertook this brilliant journey with the Agastya Foundation. The journey was a collaboration of learning on both sides of the coaching equation. I would like to extend my thanks to Aralaguppe Nagesh & Sai Chandrashekar from the Agastya Leadership Team.

The leadership team coaches appreciated the coaching imparted to them. It has created a widespread awareness of coaching, specifically its potential for unleashing their individual professional and personal capabilities.

Please find below 2 emails appreciating the impact of the coaching imparted.

Dear Varundeep and Dr.Winston,

At the outset, please accept my deep sense of gratitude on behalf of Agastya Foundation & the Coachees who have benefited immensely from this program.

23 upcoming Managers have been part of this program that kicked-off in the last week of Nov-22. ICF- Bangalore Chapter has been very generous & service oriented that was abundantly evident throughout your engagement with an NPO like us. Based on our end course review & the kind of feedback received from the coachees, I would like to believe that the purpose of this engagement has been achieved in providing a platform for our future Leaders to think positively & to explore the potential within. I have been observing subtle changes in many of my Managers in aligning their priorities to the Organizational needs. We have a big vision to reachout to 100 million underprivileged school children in the next 9 years & this coaching engagement is expected to serve substantially in orienting the mindsets of our Managers. All your coaches are very keen & supportive in imparting the necessary skills during the engagement & are willing to support in future too. My gratitude to all of them.

My special thanks goes to both of you for making this happen in a structured & meaningful way. Look forward to working with you.

Regards,  
A.R.Nagesh,  
Agastya International Foundation,

Dear Winston & Varundeep,

I echo Nagesh's comments. It has been a very fruitful relationship with ICF over the years. While the pandemic set us back, it was the generosity & foresight of Winston whose call to me changed the turn of events and then Varundeep took charge and made a big difference.

Our heartfelt thanks to both of you and all the coaches who have given their time. We are also grateful that many of you could come over to our campus and interact with the coachees and also share your journey with us.

Looking forward to building further on this strong foundation.

With Gratitude

...

Sai Chandrasekhar

## ***Social Connect at the ICF Bengaluru Charter Chapter***

ICF Bangalore Chapter is committed to supporting social causes and looks forward for more projects to support social causes.

Our next project is with the Association of the Physically Disabled (APD), India. This is a Bengaluru- based NGO, with branches across districts of Karnataka. It has been transforming lives of the underprivileged people with disability since 1959. It also includes adults with a range of disabilities, ranging from Locomotor, Spinal Cord Injury (SCI), Speech & Hearing, Cerebral palsy &

to some extent mental health challenges. They run their extensive ongoing programs such as Early Intervention, Inclusive Education, Training Children & Adults for Livelihood & Strategic Partnership for Resource Support etc. to enable, equip and empower the differently abled.

We will be coaching the APD leadership team to help them scale their operation with the right skill sets.

Please stay connected with the ICF Bengaluru Chapter Social Impact programmes or connect with me, Varundeep Sachi (see contact details below) to be a part of supporting social causes and upcoming CSR projects.



### ***Varundeep Sachi (ICF-PCC)***

*Varundeep Sachi wears many hats. He works in the HR department of Infosys BPO. He is a Managing Committee member of the ICF Bengaluru Charter chapter. He leads the Social Connect initiative at the Chapter. He is passionate about evangelising wellness . He is a published author, having written a work of fiction.*

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# **Effective Communication: What can Coaches Learn from Alexa?**

*By Sreenivas Nagappa*

By now Alexa, Siri, Cortana, Google Assistant et.al have become pretty much household names and probably many of us encounter them every day at different levels of usage. Talking to Alexa yesterday (and it was a very frustrating conversation because “she just didn’t get it”), I could draw a parallel with a conversation I had earlier in the day with an intelligent human being. And many of the thoughts & emotions I experienced were just the same, i.e.:

- Why don’t they get it
- It is so simple
- Maybe it would have been easier if I just did it myself
- Are they playing games with me?

And it made me think.

If the concerns with communicating with Alexa & my human counterpart are the same,

Sreenivas Nagappa highlights the communication lessons coaches can master by communicating effectively with digital voice assistants in this reflective and amusing write-up.

maybe some of the same ground rules apply to both. And these might be:

***Alexa responds to her name. And so do people.***

Try saying to Alexa – “Play Andre Bocelli’s greatest hits” and you will get zero response. But say- “Alexa, play ...” And the chances are you will get what you want.

Similarly, when we call out someone by name (not in an accusing manner obviously), we acknowledge their presence,

we are according respect, we are calling for their attention because they might be immersed in something else.

Ask yourself, how often have you walked by a co-worker or family member and said something like “You do know that 5 pm is the deadline, right?” And who was this communication aimed at? You knew, but was the intended recipient clear? Were they even paying attention to you if they were deep into doing something else? And then we grumble that no one listens to us, or everyone needs to be reminded multiple times.

Similarly, ‘Thank you John’ is far more impactful than ‘Thank you’. **As Coaches, we all know that Communication starts with the other person feeling good, respected & valued and being present.**

The use of the coachee’s name is a very powerful tool especially when we are getting to a stage in the conversation wherein the Coachee is going to commit themselves to a course of action.. And, to mirror that we also need to get them to speak in the first person i.e. “I will ... .”

*Alexa understands when we speak slowly and clearly. So do people.*

How often have you had to repeat yourself to Alexa especially in the early days? A lot, is usually the answer. And why? Because we were speaking too fast or mumbling or not emphasizing the right words.

And later why did Alexa start understanding us better? In part, because the AI tool recognised our speech patterns as it is trained to do. But in large part because we made that special effort when speaking to Alexa. We spoke slower, used shorter sentences and enunciated clearly.

**And if we can do that with an AI tool, why**

**not make the same effort with the human beings we communicate with? Almost a no-brainer ....**

Coaches experience this at two levels. One - with themselves – their own communication needs to be at a pitch, tone and cadence that resonates with the Coachee. Second, with Coachees, whose communication needs to improve. I ask them to repeat / re-state themselves, while avoiding appearing schoolmarmish. We have all noticed that the less clear we are, the more we mumble.

*Alexa responds to precise communication. And so do people.*

Much of our frustration with Conversational AI tools like Alexa or Siri comes from the outcome being different to what we expected. And with Alexa we iterate and practice and refine our ask. Maybe a request to “Play peppy music” gets refined after unsatisfactory results to “Play English dance numbers” refined further to “Play Sha-La-La from Venga Boys.” (Beware – your choice of music gives away your age in a way that even Advanced Lab Tests cannot !)

So perhaps we should learn to be precise in our communication. Maybe for me, “Keep it ready tomorrow” means ready by 9 a.m. But for you maybe it means 5 p.m. We are both right. And we both believe the other is wrong. And we are both hassled by the outcome.

**Perhaps being precise is something that we need to build into both how we think and how we say it.**

How do we help our Coachees get precise? This is both easy and difficult to do: easy because they probably practice this in their ask of others, difficult because this seldom applies to themselves. So, others are

expected to “have weekly team meetings starting this week,” but I “will try to have weekly team meetings soon.” In this case, the lack of specificity also belies an underlying commitment to fulfill an intention.

***Alexa can be creative. Even more so, so can people.***

How often have we been surprised by Alexa giving an answer that was not quite what we expected but was a great alternative. And if an AI tool can do it, we humans can do it better.

Think of communication & conversations not just as tools to deliver a message or agree upon a way forward or bring people up to speed etc. but also as an instrument for discovery. Everyone we interact with has the power to amaze us with their abilities. When we converse with them, are we allowing that to happen? Or is the ‘hierarchy,’ or ‘lack of time’ or ‘don’t tell me – I am the expert here’ or ‘don’t care’ or whatever, coming in the way of discovering new solutions and new ways to think.

**Explore peoples’ capabilities. They are capable of far more than we give them credit for.**

Do we, as Coaches, grasp at the first feeble, tentative shift our Coachees make, or do we invest in building that out further? Do we push and probe and nudge to keep improving how the future will look or are we so pleased that the needle has moved that V1 is the final version? Which is why the simple question “And what more,” is such a powerful one.

So, is it time now to learn from conversational tools? Why not?

In the first place, the AI tool learnt from us humans. Secondly, they hold up a mirror to how we approach communication. So rather than coming across as a tech-challenged person who says “I just cannot get Alexa to understand anything,” I make the extra effort with Alexa. So why not make that effort with all the people with whom our communication could improve (and that, to borrow a legal phrase, includes but is not limited to Coachees). Maybe some of the pointers in this article could be good starting points.



**Sreenivas Nagappa (ICF-PCC)**

*Sreenivas is a CEO turned Coach. He brings the experience of having worked with large corporations like Unilever & Office Depot as well as with family-owned companies to help Leaders be successful. He is passionate about Thriving in an era of Disruption, Conflict Management and Running.*

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