“Life coaching,” or “co-active coaching,” can serve as either an adjunct or an alternative to traditional modes of psychotherapy for people living with HIV. Coaching, like psychotherapy, is a professional client-centered relationship that relies on the transformative possibilities of the relationship to move clients toward change in their lives. The focus is on the present and future and on concrete action, making it a particularly useful approach for providers helping people with HIV deal with the practical issues they face as health improves.

As medical advances have changed the lives of so many people with HIV, corresponding mental health needs have also changed. Prior to the advent of combination treatments, clients were most likely to come to therapy with concerns about failing health, loss of identity, dependency, and death and dying. Clients presenting for mental health treatment today are more likely to raise issues related to quality of life, returning to work, re-establishing relationships, shifting out of an identity as a “patient,” and planning for a future beyond disability and dying. Within the context of these shifts, this article discusses some of the basic concepts of coaching and examines the pros and cons of coaching in comparison with mental health treatment.

The Coaching Process

Traditional mental health treatment—particularly psychodynamic psychotherapy—seeks to understand current dilemmas through insights into past experiences. The client’s relationship with the therapist, as well as explorations of his or her past and present relationships with others, provides the basis for understanding current actions and thoughts. Immediate, concrete action may or may not be a goal of psychotherapy. The emphasis is on insight, on making the unconscious process into a conscious one, in this way increasing choices and improving a sense of well-being.

Co-active coaching can be defined as “a powerful alliance designed to forward and enhance the lifelong process of human learning, effectiveness, and fulfillment.” It provides an avenue for action for those who are grappling with how and where to move in their lives and for those who want to focus more on the present than on the past. Coaches are trained to assist people in “optimizing their performance and deepening their satisfaction in life.”

In a coaching relationship, the coach acts as a peer whose job it is to help move the client forward. The client is expected to be aware of what he or she needs and to be able to ask for that from the coach. Structured exercises and interventions, combined with active listening and questioning, provide the basis for the work between client and coach. The coach and client design their relationship intentionally and cooperatively, agreeing on everything, including the length and time of sessions, the most effective ways to interact, concrete goals, tasks the client will accomplish, and the method the client will use to report back to the coach. In this context, client accountability is an essential tool.

Coaching relies heavily on basic counseling techniques, most notably, active listening, which offers the healing potential of being listened to in a focused way. Coaches are trained to listen to content as well as process and are encouraged to comment on both. Interventions consist of “powerful questions” and “inquiries,” questions or observations designed to
Editorial: Forward Action

Robert Marks, Editor

Psychotherapy as a formal approach is barely more than 100 years old, so it should be a surprise to no one that it keeps evolving and branching out, backtracking and leaping forward, rethinking and rejecting accepted tenets. In the last 50 years or so, psychotherapy has grown from hidden (and shameful) to commonplace.

Sprouting like an aspen forest from the mother tree, other “talking cures” have grown from the root stock of traditional psychotherapy. While our culture has not rejected the ideal of the silent, self-sufficient hero, it no longer recoils from the character who shares his or her pain, and such sharing happens everywhere.

Out of the crowded forest canopy has peeked a relatively new approach: co-active or life coaching. In this issue of FOCUS, Miriam Garfinkel and Eileen Blumenthal describe the principles and strategies of coaching and discuss how this approach can be applied in the context of HIV. Garfinkel focuses on individual clients and makes a clear distinction between coaching and psychodynamic psychotherapy, explaining the context and strengths of each. Blumenthal suggests an application for coaching in terms of organizational development and the challenges facing AIDS service organizations.

Therapy Lite?

Coaching—like brief or time-limited psychotherapy and philosophical counseling—may be seen by some as “therapy lite.” It consciously emphasizes an exploration of the present over the past, de-emphasizes the role of transference, and focuses on “forwarding action” toward specified goals. It does not ignore psychological barriers, but seeks practical solutions to them. In this way, it seems well-suited for some of the tasks facing people with HIV as the epidemic shifts and as health improves: making decisions about treatment and making plans for the future.

Unfortunately, “lite” alternatives to traditional psychotherapy have been tainted by an association with managed care and the financial limits of treatment. Since managed care can cripple traditional psychotherapy by restricting the type and length of treatment, it has forced providers to employ less intensive and less sufficient approaches to more serious psychological distress ranging from depression to trauma. But there are appropriate applications for these approaches, and for some people facing some problems, more practical strategies may be less threatening, more consistent with their outlook, and more effective.

HIV-related care has always been associated with flexibility and evolution. It is useful to remember that in the grand scheme of things, psychotherapy is also youthful enough to bend and grow, to benefit from being eclectic.

Fulfillment coaching involves helping clients discover what is truly important to them, to understand which areas of their lives they need to enhance, and to move them in that direction of change. The genesis of the values is not particularly important. Values clarification exercises may include prioritizing aspects of life that are important to a person or doing guided visualizations of the future.

Balance refers to the dynamic process of continuously making choices that allow a person to maintain a sense of equilibrium. Balance coaching examines the aspects of life in which clients want to make changes, but about which they feel powerless to do so. Exercises for balance coaching may include designing a “wheel of life,” a circle that inventories the various aspects of a person’s life by dividing the pie into components such as relationships, family, fun, spirituality, and work, and assigning a ranking to each slice according to level of satisfaction. Powerful questions, a term used to connote queries from the coach that provoke thought, affect, and understanding, can then be used to help clients develop plans to recalibrate the parts of their lives that are out of balance. Unlike psychotherapy, explorations of the reasons for the feelings of powerlessness have little importance. Insights into the origins of the imbalances are important only in so far as they forward the action toward resolving them.

Process coaching is the closest of the coaching approaches to traditional counseling. Process coaching refers to focusing...
on emotions that arise for clients during coaching. The exploration of these emotions is important as long as it forwards the action. A coach’s willingness to allow a client to experience these feelings is essential, but, again, the origin of the feelings is less important than their expression and the movement through them toward change. In this area, in particular, coaches are trained to understand the limits of their scope of practice and to refer clients to formal mental health treatment when intrapsychic factors surface and impede forward movement.

An important difference between coaching and psychotherapy is the de-emphasis of transference. According to coaching theory, the emphasis on the client and the client’s agenda precludes the usefulness of transference in the coach-client relationship. The coach’s role is to serve the client by supporting the client’s agenda; the client’s role is to design that agenda. While it can be argued from a mental health perspective that transference is an unavoidable byproduct of the counseling process, coaching theory holds that transference need not become a focus. A successful coaching relationship is therefore dependent on a client’s ability to separate the development and pursuit of goals from the inevitable transferential experience. This is also consistent with the coaching focus on the present versus the past and on the main goal of action and forward movement. The hypothetical case of “Robert” and his coach “Tom Rosen” illustrates the coaching process, its distinction from psychotherapy, and its application to HIV.

The Case of Robert: Embracing the Future

Robert, a 50-year-old gay man of European American descent, has been living with HIV for 15 years. He has worked in the design department of a major retail store for the past 25 years. Robert, the middle child of three siblings, grew up in a working-class home with an alcoholic father and co-dependent mother. He lives with his current partner of eight years, who is also HIV-positive and in poor health. Robert lost his prior partner of 10 years to AIDS.

Robert describes himself as a “simple guy” who loves to work with his hands. He had figured out many years ago that the financial security, health insurance, and disability benefits afforded him by his job would be important when he became ill. Robert began taking combination antiviral treatment about five years ago. His health has improved, and his doctors have told him that he could remain healthy for a long time. Robert comes to coaching because he realizes that he does not like his job, and has not for a long time, and that he cannot count on leaving, as he realizes he once did, due to failing health.

After helping Robert define his goals for coaching, his coach, Tom Rosen, negotiates frequency of contact, methods of contact (telephone versus in-person), and locations of visits, and asks Robert about the types of intervention that have helped him in the past. Rosen then uses active listening and powerful questions as well as positive reinforcement and “championing”—encouraging Robert and expressing faith in him—to help Robert explore and re-evaluate who he is and who he wants to be. For example, Rosen asks Robert to ask himself powerful questions such as: “What does it mean to decide to live?” “Who am I becoming as I grow older?” “How have I withheld my-self from life?” “What do I like or not like about being a ‘simple guy’?”

As Robert begins to think about himself in a broader way, Rosen suggests looking at the question of balance in Robert’s life. He asks Robert to complete a wheel of life, helping Robert define those aspects of his life on which he would most like to focus. Work remains the central focus, but friends and fun surface as other areas Robert has not previously made a priority. Rosen leads Robert in a guided visualization, having Robert imagine himself and his values 25 years in the future. He asks Robert to think back to a time when he felt excited and fulfilled: “What were you

A successful coaching relationship is dependent on a client’s ability to separate the development and pursuit of goals from the inevitable transferential experience.
During each session, Rosen encourages Robert to develop action steps related to his chosen goals, priming Robert to think about how his goals relate to what is important to him and his values, as well as how he can maintain a sense of balance. Their sessions frequently end with Rosen and Robert agreeing to action steps that Robert will take between sessions and to methods of accountability. For example, Robert realizes that a sense of autonomy is important to him, that he no longer wants to work in retail, and that maintaining benefits is essential. He has some ideas about other types of jobs, specifically, cabinetmaking. Rosen asks Robert if he will agree to call three people who might be able to help Robert make this decision and to e-mail Rosen every time he makes a call, an intervention that will help Robert fulfill his commitment. If Robert says “no,” Rosen may ask him what would work instead. If Robert cannot keep his commitment, the pair will talk about what did not work for Robert and use that information to formulate a new commitment.

In addition, Rosen helps Robert name his gremlins, the parts of him that doubt his abilities or potential. One of Robert’s gremlins generally appears as Robert becomes excited about the possibility of going into business for himself: Robert begins to list all the obstacles. While discussing the ways in which Robert holds himself back and what it would mean for him to accept the excitement, the process uncovers gremlins from Robert’s family history: the voices that say he should be older and remembers the friends and lovers he has lost to HIV. Rosen listens and asks powerful questions: “What is it like to lean into this fear?” “What does abundance mean to you?” or “What would your friends or lovers want for you as an old man?” In each of these cases, Rosen sustains the focus on Robert’s agenda and actions that will achieve the agenda.

Rosen is vigilant about the apparent symptoms of major depression, and considers referring Robert for a mental health evaluation, particularly if Robert becomes unable to take concrete actions, is paralyzed by fear or grief, or is unable to use his emotional expression as a tool to forward action. Rosen is also aware of the potential for Robert’s transferential experiences with Rosen—either positive or negative—to complicate the coaching relationship and require referral to a psychotherapist.

**Conclusion**

An HIV diagnosis can cause some people to question lifelong assumptions, to re-evaluate aspects of their lives, and to decide to move forward with intention and choice. For such individuals, coaching can be a helpful tool. It may be an optimal choice for those people with an orientation towards movement and action and little interest in the process and premise of psychodynamic psychotherapy. Psychotherapy may be more appropriate for those who wish to explore longstanding family or relational issues, people who have historically had difficulty with moving forward or who are struggling with depression or anxiety.

**Clearinghouse: Coaching**

**Resources**

Coaches training program and coach referral service.

The International Coach Federation, 1444 “I” Street NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005; 888-423-3131; 888-329-2423 (fax); http://www.coachfederation.org (web site). The largest professional group; accredits coaches and training programs.

Mentor Coach, 4400 East West Highway, Suite 1104, Bethesda, MD 20814; 301-986-5688; 301-913-9447 (fax); http://www.mentorcoach.com

**Authors**

Miriam Garfinkel, MA, LMFT, has worked with people with HIV for the past 12 years in a variety of direct care and management positions. She currently works part-time as a Senior Trainer with the UCSF AIDS Health Project, developing curricula and training for HIV providers throughout California. Ms. Garfinkel maintains a psychotherapy practice in San Francisco and has completed extensive coursework at the Coaches Training Institute in San Rafael.

Robert to both acknowledge them and set them aside.

Throughout the coaching process, Rosen devotes time and attention to feelings that come up for Robert. Robert cries as he talks about his family’s financial struggles when he was growing up and the impact of his father’s alcoholism. He speaks of his terror in thinking about leaving his job. Robert is surprised to find himself crying as he talks about becoming older and remembers the friends and lovers he has lost to HIV. Rosen listens and asks powerful questions: “What is it like to lean into this fear?” “What does abundance mean to you?” or “What would your friends or lovers want for you as an old man?” In each of these cases, Rosen sustains the focus on Robert’s agenda and actions that will achieve the agenda.

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Since change in the HIV epidemic has always been a hallmark, AIDS service organizations face the considerable challenge of remaining relevant and effective. The success of recent advancements in the treatment of HIV disease has yet again altered the landscape of the epidemic, and as a result, many organizations are struggling to adjust. Essentially a tool for generating action that is consistent with personal and organizational goals, coaching offers new resources for organizations to remain fluid and dynamic in the context of these extraordinary times.

Coaching can help organizations clarify values, create a shared vision, and provide a pathway for realizing that vision. It can help develop managers who challenge, champion, and inspire action. It can create an organizational climate in which accountability is expected and rewarded, staff are highly motivated, and clients have the resources and capacity to make informed decisions. In the face of constant change, coaching can restore an organization’s focus, help it to thrive, and most importantly, help it help people affected by HIV manage change.

The Coaching Model
Consider an AIDS service organization in a city at the HIV epicenter. Infection rates are increasing. Federal funding is diminishing. Antiviral treatment protocols are complex and confusing. Staff turnover is on the rise as people who have worked with HIV move on and others are wooed away by increasing opportunities in the private sector. The agency’s board of directors, confused about its role, has little knowledge about emerging HIV-related trends and limited facility in articulating organizational vision. Managers, while experts in their fields, lack the expertise or the will to improve the performance and satisfaction of staff they supervise. The question of how to thrive devolves into the crisis of how to survive.

Traditionally, a non-profit agency might turn to an organizational development expert or other consultants to respond to this situation. A consultant would help the agency assess the problem, design a response, and manage the implementation and, perhaps, the evaluation of the response. The agency would rely on the consultant’s experience and expertise in the field. By contrast, a coach’s role would be to help individuals or a group articulate and achieve very specific goals in a value-based, sustainable context. This coaching relationship is confidential, and the coach primarily asks provocative questions, provides a structure for focus, and holds individuals accountable for taking action and achieving results. In this model, the coach is not an expert imparting knowledge or managing a project, but rather, a resource who works with individuals to develop an agenda, commitment, effectiveness, and personal fulfillment.

In his book, *Masterful Coaching*, Robert Hargrove writes, “Transformational coaching within organizations involves unleashing the human spirit and expanding people’s capacity to achieve ‘stretch goals’ and to bring about real change.” An organization grounded in a coaching model is characterized by: clarity regarding the values that drive the organization; a shared vision rooted in organizational values; a strong connection between values, vision, and action; a deep and palpable commitment to unearthing people’s passion; a culture of high performance and high accountability with continuous learning; and a management approach designed to elicit commitment, expand capacity, inspire action, and champion effort.

Applications of Coaching
One of the most important applications of coaching is conceptualizing the roles of the key players in an organization. This includes everyone from the board of directors to front-line staff and can extend to collaborating agencies.
Boards of Directors. Rather than getting entrenched in an organization’s daily activities, ideally a board of directors focuses on the larger perspective, identifying emerging trends and setting overall strategy. Coaching can help a board manage itself by defining its role, helping it remain within these bounds, evaluating its own performance, and holding staff, particularly the executive director, accountable for achieving the organization’s goals.

Executive Directors. Coaching can help executive directors become deliberate about building relationships and inspiring commitment. Executive directors make connections between the concerns of the organization and the staff. Coaching encourages executive directors to cultivate a climate that values continuous learning and “purposeful action,” and to infuse staff with a sense of possibility. It helps them model and awaken “breakthrough thinking,” and fashion a workplace that fosters a commitment to great work and a comfort in disagreeing, questioning, and raising concerns.

Managers. Coaching can help managers evolve from problem solvers to catalysts for helping staff solve their own problems. Coaching encourages managers to use questions to evoke clarity, action, discovery, insight, and commitment. This enables managers to work with staff to set meaningful, achievable, and inspired goals. In doing so, managers help staff articulate direction while actively monitoring staff progress, rather than directing or manipulating staff. By challenging and championing staff—and holding them highly accountable—managers seek to develop staff members who do their jobs better than the manager could.

Front-Line Staff. Front-line staff can use coaching to facilitate relationships with clients rather than managing them as part of a caseload. As coaches, staff help clients define their own agenda. In their book Co-Active Coaching, Laura Whitworth, Henry Kimsey-House, and Phil Sandahl suggest that the coach “let go of his or her own opinions, judgments, and answers in support of the client’s fulfillment, balance and process.” They suggest that the coach become “invisible” and follow the client’s lead. Implicit in this approach is that the staff member, as coach, engages in powerful questioning that helps clients clarify their agendas, intervenes when clients are stuck, and constantly reframes so clients gain new perspectives. In this way, staff can help clients create practical ways to achieve goals, can acknowledge and champion their clients, can challenge clients to reach beyond assumptions and limits, and can help clients act in ways consistent with their well-being.

Strategic Planning and Collaboration.
Coaching designs the ideal circumstances for strategic planning, through which initiatives emerge from within a group of organizational stakeholders—including staff, clients, volunteers, and representatives of collaborating organizations—rather than being driven from agency leadership. It begins by creating trust and designing alliances among the people involved in the process, ultimately building shared understandings. This ideal of alliance is also relevant to collaborations between agencies—an act of expanding capacity in the pursuit of a clear and common goal.

Conclusion
The coaching model anticipates and helps prepare for change. While it may not change the course of the HIV epidemic, coaching has the potential to help an agency become more dynamic, innovative, and successful in fulfilling its mission in the midst of change. In the process, coaching can help individuals within organizations revive personal commitment and passion for their work, and can be a tool for expanding their effectiveness and fulfillment.

References

Authors
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Comments and Submissions
We invite readers to send letters responding to articles published in FOCUS or dealing with current AIDS research and counseling issues. We also encourage readers to submit article proposals, including a summary of the idea and a detailed outline of the article. Send correspondence to:
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San Francisco, CA 94143-0884
Recent Reports

There is little written about coaching in the context of HIV or as an adjunct to psychotherapy. Below are excerpts from two coaching “texts,” providing more information on coaching goals, the coach-client relationship, and coaching in organizations.

Co-Active Coaching Basics


The term co-active refers to the fundamental nature of a coaching relationship in which the coach and client are active collaborators. In co-active coaching, this relationship is an alliance between two equals for the purpose of meeting the client’s needs.

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 a designed alliance.

The primary building block for all co-active coaching is this: 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. Sometimes, clients don’t think they have the answers; sometimes, they’d rather believe someone else—an expert—has the answers for them. In some cases people have a powerful sabotaging voice that tells them, they don’t have the answers. But co-active coaching stands on the certainty that clients really do know. When they look inside, with the help of a coach, they’ll find they do know themselves, their strengths, and their limitations. They’ll also discover what they want, what they fear, what motivates them and what holds them back, their purpose and their vision, and where they sell out.

In co-active coaching, power is granted to the coaching relationship—not the coach. The client and the coach work together to design an alliance that meets the client’s needs. In fact, clients play an important role in declaring how they want to be coached. In co-active coaching, clients don’t buy a prepackaged program. They are involved in creating a powerful relationship that fits their working and learning styles. The relationship is custom tailored to the communication approach that works best for them. The process of designing the alliance is a model of the mutual responsibility of client and coach. Clients learn that they are in control of the relationship and ultimately of the changes they make in their lives.

Coaching works for many reasons that overlap and intertwine, but one of the strongest threads in this weave is action. It’s the cycle of action and learning, over time, that leads to sustained and effective change.

Coaching works for many reasons, but one of the strongest threads is action. It's the cycle of action and learning, over time, that leads to sustained and effective change.
their communities, and their world. It involves impacting people's visions and values as well as helping them reshape their way of being, thinking and actions. It involves challenging and supporting people in achieving higher levels of performance while allowing them to bring out the best in themselves and those around them. It means going through a deep learning process that results in embodying new skills and capabilities. In the simplest, day-in, day-out terms, masterful coaching involves expanding people's capacity to take effective action. It often comes down to making it possible for people to succeed in areas where they are most stuck or ineffective.

A masterful coach is one who can transform the situation by encouraging people's noblest aspirations and teaching them new skills while at the same time launching breakthrough projects that demonstrate the power of collaborative action. This starts with transforming the underlying structure of conversation from trying to persuade and convince others in order to win to building shared understanding or a sense of community across differences. On a very human level, it requires authentic communication.

One of the most important compass points of masterful coaching is helping people to take effective action. In many organizations, the effective person is rare. People work at jobs where there is a mismatch between their personal qualities of excellence and the slot they fill. In most groups, people set goals that do not stretch their minds or skills or inspire extraordinary levels of commitment. The level of thinking and communication at team meetings seldom leads to the ability to take coherent action. There are not many people who can create something that never existed before or produce results in difficult or impossible situations. Learning is a separate activity, an abstract training program, not something that happens in the context of doing the job.

Coaching people to be more effective starts with what Peter Drucker, in his book The Effective Executive, calls "making strengths productive." There is something that each of us was born to do and, if we can find the arena that fits our value system and a job where we can do it, our level of effectiveness will be greatly enhanced. According to Erich Weber, a masterful life/career planning coach and founder of Job Design in Switzerland, "The key is asking people about what it is they really want to do. What is their personal calling? What kind of work do they find fascinating? Until they can answer these questions, finding the right job is like looking for a button in a box. Even if they come across it, they would not necessarily recognize it."

The next area that comes into play in coaching people to be more effective, as well as making sure that people are coachable, is setting challenging stretch goals that people are excited about and have something at stake in. It is amazing how much more effective people will be in situations that look difficult or impossible when they really do care and when they really do have something at stake. It is then that they discover the source of their own creativity and effectiveness and come up with new ideas, fresh approaches, and innovative solutions.

Coaching people to take successful action not only involves setting goals but also observing people on a daily basis, honestly acknowledging breakdowns, and intervening in some way with the idea of helping people to learn and improve. There are two ways to do this. The first involves a repackaging (more, better, or different) of what they are already doing. The second involves helping people learn to do something that is fundamentally different. A masterful coach is always asking penetrating questions: "What unintended results are you getting? How are you contributing to them? Where are you stuck in an old pattern? How could you look at the problem or solution in a different way? What's missing that could make a difference?"

Next Month

Next month, FOCUS publishes its annual book review issue, including discussions of several books published recently.

Among these books are: Putting Risk in Perspective: Black Teenage Lives in the Era of AIDS, reviewed by Fred Allen Vanhoose, PhD; Dying to Care? Work, Stress, and Burnout in HIV/AIDS, reviewed by Michelle Cataldo, LCSW; Working with Families in the Era of HIV/AIDS, reviewed by Susan W. Haikalis, LCSW; Mortal Men: Living with Asymptomatic HIV, reviewed by George Harrison, MD; Families and Communities Responding to AIDS, reviewed by Marshall Feldman, LCSW; and Psychosocial and Public Health Impacts of New HIV Therapies, reviewed by Dan Karasic, MD.
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