

Coaching Cultural Awareness

Appreciating differences and valuing diversity

By Lloyd Thomas, PhD and Patrick Williams, EdD, MCC

P sychology has much to offer the field of coaching when it comes to the subject of diversity. The current estimated U.S. population is 271 million – 196 million whites, 33 million blacks, two million American Indians, 10 million Asians, and 30 million Hispanics. People of color currently comprise about 28 percent of the total U.S. population. (from www.apa.org/monitor/dec98/pubint.html)

Coaching is an international profession, but one which worldwide needs to attract more diversity in its membership of coaches and the clientele coaching can serve.

The following lessons and applications for coaching may help to increase your diversity IQ.

Framework for Coaching Your Clients

With the complete mapping of the human genome, we now know that genetically speaking, human beings are 99.97 per cent the same. Genetically, human differences are minuscule

compared to human similarities. On the genetic level, we are alike. Yet on the social and cultural level, we are not. If we were, human evolution would stop, and our interpersonal relationships would be boring at best and constricted at worst. Shared individual differences are essential for expanding our “humanness.” Without diverse individuals in relationship to one another, human life would be little more than biological stagnation.

Any human culture, whether it’s familial, organizational, societal, national or planetary, consists of “webs” of people bound to one another through trust, mutual need and compatible aspirations. Culture is based upon shared individual differences in knowledge, experience, skills, history, talents and dreams. Culture develops and grows when membership within it benefits *everyone* who lives or works within it, inevitably dissolves when those involved no longer benefit from being part of it, and crumbles when even a few powerful members no longer value human differences or appreciate diversity.

As a life coach, you need to value and

Coaching Questions to Ask Yourself and Your Clients

“What person who I don’t really know will I contact within this next week? Why?”

“What ethnic cultural activity (such as Hanukkah, Swedish Dance of Lights, Kwanza, Cinco de Mayo) will I engage in within the next month?”

“Will I read a book about the history of a foreign country?”

“Where might I travel to learn firsthand about another culture?”

“What are the culturally unique qualities, strengths and skills of the individuals with whom I work?”

appreciate the human differences in your clients. Develop a coaching culture in your social networks, and the results will be synergistic. We have often said, “As life coaches, we learn more from our clients than we ever do from books or even our formal education.” Imagine how boring coaching would be if all your clients were the same. Imagine how predictable your life would be if all your friends and colleagues were exactly like you. Imagine how restricted your knowledge would be, if everyone else knew only what you

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Diversity Checklist

Share this checklist with clients who want to enrich their lives by learning about and integrating the uniqueness of others into their own lives.

- I have an attitude of genuine curiosity about how others differ from me.
- Without fear or anxiety, I interact with people who are different from me.
- I make a point to meet with acquaintances from other cultures and ethnic backgrounds.
- I encourage my friends and acquaintances to share their different opinions, thoughts, feelings, and judgments about any project or endeavor.
- I ask for assistance or counsel from people whom I know hold mind-sets different from my own.
- I establish a good working relationship with at least one or two key members of the varied cultures to which I belong (such as family, clubs, organizations, social networks, my workplace, special interest groups).
- I identify relationships outside my own perceptual paradigms that expand my awareness and aid in my achievement of goals and desires for my life.
- I seek out people who can give me useful information, unique perspectives, identify resources, and offer support or critiques.
- I participate in cultural traditions and events different from those within which I grew up.
- I attend professional, international conferences and make contacts with key people living in other countries.
- I am open to, approach, and invite others to share their unique ideas, even if they have little relevance to my life.
- I champion diversity efforts in my workplace, in my social network and within the organizations to which I belong (such as ecumenical activities in my church, synagogue or mosque).
- I learn a different language when many of my contacts speak it.
- I view every person as a source of new knowledge. I can learn something from everyone I meet.

knew. Now imagine how rich your life experience would become if you were affected and influenced by the unique personalities of many people from divergent backgrounds. Imagine how satisfying your coaching practice might be if your clients called you from different countries, spoke different languages, and shared with you all of their unique differences.

This valuable life lesson, which we call Life Lesson #50, contains the following messages:

1. Genetically, all human beings are essentially the same.
2. Socially and culturally, all human

beings are different.

3. Human differences are to be highlighted and incorporated to enhance your life.

4. When integrated, human diversity results in broadening and deepening individual success and happiness.

The bottom line: Appreciating differences and valuing diversity broaden your humanity and enrich your relationships and your life. ●

Lloyd Thomas is a certified life coach and a licensed psychologist. Patrick Williams is Chief Energizing Officer of the Institute for Life Coach Training.

Adapted from *Total Life Coaching: 50+ Life Lessons, Skills, and Techniques to Enhance your Practice and your Life*, by Lloyd Thomas and Patrick Williams, Norton Publishers, 2005