



Is 'god' a cloud, and how is that relevant to coaches?

Don't ask, don't tell?

How can it be that a child without any education sits at the piano and plays like Mozart, or that a woman wakes up one day speaking a language she has never learned or previously spoken? What makes anomalies like this so interesting is that they might be the clue to something much more interesting than an 'unexplainable event', they might be telling us that human beings are not quite what we thought they were. Carl Jung knew something was going on and Albert Einstein came up with theories to back up his ideas, yet, after all this time beliefs that have become religions continue to cause conflict in the world. Could it be even remotely possible that coaches could play a part in making a positive difference in the world that goes way beyond helping individuals reach their goals, and if so, what should we be doing about it?

The story goes that the young boy was so curious about how the juicy ripe tomato in his salad could come from the tiny seed in his hand, he took a scalpel and a magnifying glass, cut into the seed, and looked hard for where those tomatoes were hidden. No matter how hard he looked, the tomatoes weren't there. His curiosity and confusion raised questions that are as relevant to us today as they were to him then.

Beliefs about where feelings and actions come play a huge role for coaches in every circumstance or context; the Executive and Business Coach knows that their clients respond

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to emotions driven by beliefs about the world of commerce, the Career Coach recognises that beliefs about confidence and personal potential may be either a barrier or doorway to their success, and the Life Coach knows that beliefs about possibility are determining their clients' life experiences. No coach worthy of the title underestimates the power of belief, but there are some beliefs that even the most experienced coach steers well clear of. Where we come from, what we are here for, and what it all means are belief questions that aren't part of a coaches remit even if they really are relevant. I've been coaching full time for almost two decades now and I admit to drawing a very clear line; there are some things that are never on the agenda, beliefs about where we come from, beliefs about where we are going, and beliefs about what 'it's' all for. Now, I'm not suggesting for a moment that it should be something a coach explores but I am wondering, I am curious and I am interested in what might happen if it was. Just for arguments sake, what might happen if a coach held insights that could unlock unlimited mental potential in their clients? Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying it is, but I am interested. I'm just curious, that's all.

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You see, just like the tomato seed, everyone is 'naturally' something. The reductive nature of a scientific approach means that we look for the tomatoes within the tomato plant seed even when we know they're not really there; it's already proposed that memory is somehow encoded within DNA, that neural-networks within the brain determine development, and that chemistry is at the heart of being smart. Yet, what if it's not? What if actually all that chemistry, networking and DNA is the biological equivalent of software, and this body we live in is the human equivalent of a lap-top? Carl Jung was curious and wasn't afraid to ask difficult questions, but he might well turn in his grave at the propensity of pomposity of all those 'personality' or 'trait' tests that business HR managers are so fond of, because his point was not that we 'are' this way or that. Instead, he merely observed that myths and symbols are strikingly similar in cultures around the world and across the centuries, and he speculated that this might be the result of species-wide shared knowledge and experience. He postulated that this shared experience forms a collective unconscious in the form of organising archetypes that manifest as the way each person makes sense of their world. At around the same time, in a different field of scientific enquiry, Albert Einstein was developing theories in physics that opened the door to the possibility that all we see is not all there is. Even now, theories about multiple dimensions are difficult to comprehend; how can there be more in front of our eyes than we can see, hidden realities just beyond our senses, or folds in space and time that require a brain as open as Einstein's to make sense of?

In the early 20th century clouds were just things that floated in the sky. The idea that one day people would refer to the storage of vast amounts of knowledge and huge varieties of computer programmes as being in the 'cloud' would have been as alien as a flying saucer crashing at Roswell; neither he, nor his contemporaries could have imagined it, even though his research of ancient cultures might have pointed in that direction. The idea that the collective unconsciousness might be outside the physical body rather than within it would have seemed absurd. Today it does not. We may know that the cloud isn't really a cloud, but is just a convenient metaphor for remotely stored information, connected at speeds faster than any human brain could process. Yet, if we didn't know precisely where those storage places were housed, it would be easy to imagine how someone could fall into the misunderstanding that it was somehow all a bit 'supernatural'. It's only by dint of the fact

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we know there are data storage facilities all over the world, hidden and protected better than most banks, that we can laugh and say how silly any supernatural suggestion might be. However, just pretend for one moment that you didn't know, and had no idea about those physical locations. Or, even worse, that you could see them but did not know what they were; if they had no way of connecting the dots, no way of linking all that information with metal boxes and wires, no concept of it at all - how would that feel? Might it be a short step to inventing a 'better' explanation, something that people 'can' believe and maybe even be in awe of?

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Next time you set out to grow tomatoes, take a moment to look at the seeds; ask yourself where the plant really comes from, why it is 'knows' what to do to grow, and why some grow stronger than others. You may be able to investigate after-the-event and determine what went wrong, but you can't tell why it happened. You are left only with the explanation that it is 'nature', and that it is natural that the plants grow in the way that they do. No one really knows what that means, but it sounds convincing because we assume that 'nature' is a 'thing'. You see, reductive explanations pretend to know the answers, but they don't have any real explanation for the secret to life; we may be able to power up our human lap-tops but without the 'spark of life' we just have a brain-dead corpse, so we know it takes something else, something just out of the reach of understanding that brings people to life. Perhaps Jung was right. Perhaps there is a collective unconscious with patterns embedded within it, and perhaps I might be on to something when I suggest those patterns aren't caused by our physiology, but that it merely allows us to receive and interpret them? If so, perhaps Einstein was right too, and that there are other dimensions that could be the home to some version of a 'cloud'? Would that change the questions we coaches ask? Might it alter everyone's view of possibility and potential, not just for themselves but for the world itself? All I can say is that simply by entertaining the possibility that everything a person needs might not be within them but may be within their reach may subtly be changing my own beliefs. I may not ever ask, and I certainly won't ever tell; but I recognise that the shift in my belief about what might be possible even if I can't prove it, don't have any evidence, and I may be completely wrong, but does it matter? If instead of it being weird that a person can wake up speaking a new language or an untrained child can play like Mozart, it was merely the tip of an untapped iceberg, then maybe, just maybe, asking better questions about things we coaches have been trained to ignore is a good thing.

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