

The Heart of a Coach

by Tony Stoltzfus

Coaching is more than asking a good question or listening more intently. It's more than holding someone accountable or helping a person set action steps. Skills are important, but the bedrock of great coaching is what's in your heart as a coach. I often say to new coaches, "If you have the right heart, you can make all kinds of technique mistakes and the client will still be transformed; but technique without heart is manipulation."

Great coaching comes from a conscious imitation of the posture Jesus takes as our advocate. Think for a moment about how God works with you on the change issues in your life. If you go back to the beginning, before you ever became a Christian, God had already decided he wanted to work with you. In fact, Ephesians 4 states that while you were still God's enemy, he loved you—enough to choose you to become part of the bride for his son. We hadn't done any changing yet, we were an infinite distance from what we needed to be in order to marry into God's family, and yet God believed in what we could become.

But God didn't stop with just seeing our potential—he did something concrete to make it a reality. It was obvious that we couldn't make the changes we needed to make to fit into God's family on our own. (The whole Old Testament is a demonstration that human efforts can never meet God's standards.) So God did something very interesting: through Jesus' sacrifice *he set up a relationship with us, and through that relationship we received the power to change in ways we never could on our own.*

In effect, God said, "You don't have to change before you can part of the family. If you choose Jesus, I'll accept you into the family right now, and you'll end up changing *because* you are part of the family." God can accept us because Jesus is sitting right next to him vouching for us: "Father, this is the gal I want to marry. I see who you made her to be and who she really is, and I know that through me that's what she will become."

Jesus sees us with an unconditional love and an unconditional belief in our destiny. The freedom of that unconditional relationship empowers us to change from the inside out, because we want to, instead of trying to adjust how we look on the outside so that we'll be accepted.

This is the key to the power of coaching. As coaches, we imitate Jesus and give our clients an unconditional love, an unconditional support and an unconditional belief in who they were made to be. *We give the free gift of an unconditional relationship to our clients, and that empowers them to change in ways they never could on their own.*

If the client is doing something I don't understand, I believe in her by reserving judgment and believing there is a good reason for what she is doing. If the client has a problem or growth issue, I believe that he is capable of stewarding the life God has given him and solving it. If I think my client is making a mistake, I still act out my belief in his capacity to steward his life by not trying to make the decision for him. In every situation, my first responsibility as a coach is to be the same kind of advocate Jesus is. The relationship comes first, unconditionally, and it's the relationship that enables the change.