

## A Definition of Coaching for Driving

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It is necessary here to define both the term and the methodology of coaching as used throughout this paper, because the process is fundamentally different from the familiar sports application of the word coaching. The vast majority of sports coaches use a predominantly *instructional* method based upon Behavioural Psychology, however 'new' coaching is based upon the more recent principles of Humanistic or Positive psychology, sometimes described as person centred or learner centred. There are a number of varieties of 'new' coaching but the most effective are all based on the principles described here.

The goal of the coach is to raise the learner's level of *awareness* (feel, input, information, self-feedback) from its normal resting state to a far more acute receptivity which can more than double the quality and quantity of sensory and visual information received, 'information' that it is often instantly, automatically and sub-consciously acted upon. For example, if a driver now sees a cyclist that he did not notice before because he was distracted, he will instantly take avoiding action. The reception of information through the learner driver's own senses rather than being told by the instructor leads to a faster, more accurate and safer response. Coaching does not, however, preclude the coach giving a command or taking control in an emergency, should the learner not be reacting appropriately to the stimuli. It does train the learner to naturally operate at a higher level of awareness at all times. Telling and instructing actually undermines this process by creating dependence, and this must be taken into account by the coach in deciding if and when to revert to telling.

The second goal of a coach follows from awareness; it is building a sense of *self-responsibility* in the learner driver at all times when he is in the driving seat. Once more it must be understood that telling or instruction takes the responsibility away from the driver and undermines or works counter to the responsibility objective. The method of coaching invites the learner driver to make his own choices about his actions in the car to the greatest degree possible. This will begin on the first day with simple choices about the seat position, the sequence of discovering what and where the car controls are while stationary and later the time spent driving or the type of road and journey selected, before moving on to safety choices. By this process the learner driver comes to accept and absorb into his consciousness that *he is responsible whenever he is in the driving seat*. As this takes place and the driving lessons progress, he will be encouraged to make more, and more consequential choices until self-responsibility is in-built.

By teaching driving in this way the learner driver will spend his 30-40 hours learning about car control, traffic etc as normal, but *integrated with that* it will be 30-40 hours of learning and practicing high awareness and high responsibility, and thereby he will be far better equipped to manage his driving when he goes solo. Any driving instructor would be very happy to have a pupil that had become, and was now continuously, highly aware and highly responsible. The coaching process is designed to do precisely that, *but telling and instructing*, while providing information and causing action, *actually lowers both awareness and responsibility* thereby working against learning objectives and therefore against safety.

There is one more crucial benefit of coaching that is at the core of safe driving, and is especially applicable to young men who have a disproportionately high accident rate throughout Europe and the world. While traditional driving instruction is focussed almost entirely on the lower two levels of the GDE matrix (and the left and middle column), most people now understand that dealing better and more fully with levels three and four (plus column three – self evaluation) is

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crucial to address the accident and injury rate referred to above. The coaching process described here covers not only the awareness and responsibility for the car and its path, but also, hugely importantly and continuously, the self-awareness and self-responsibility of the learner driver for his own immediate emotional state and social attitudes at every moment he is in the driving seat of the car. In learning to drive a car, over-confidence is one such issue with young male drivers, with young women it is more likely to be a lack of confidence. Coaching addresses all four GDE levels and all three columns continuously throughout the learning process.

Either way, it is only through this continuous A and R process and practice (awareness & responsibility) that the learner driver can fully develop the ability to self-manage, both internally and externally under all circumstances on the road. Normal instruction or even intellectual discussion about appropriate attitudes and emotions, have comparably little effect. The side benefit of the coaching process is that the capacity for self-management is a good feeling, and once acquired in one field, young people naturally and automatically tend to deploy it elsewhere, such as around alcohol, drugs, sexual activity and other risk-taking.

Finally, coaching, in particular the principles laid out above should not be regarded as simply an additional tool or conversely as obligatory, but as being the core of best learning practice, for driving and most other similar activities. Coaching does not preclude the use of other interventions such as a command in an emergency, or an exposé of how a car or traffic works, **when they are appropriate under the circumstances**, provided that the teacher reverts to the coaching process shortly thereafter so as not to undermine the awareness/responsibility continuum.

End of Definition

#### **Additional Methods:**

In addition to building the field of awareness and responsibility to be ever present when the learner is alone in the car, there are many specific coaching exercises that address the emotional issues which can be used with drivers, in a one to one or in group sessions. Since it is difficult to replicate the potentially risky circumstances that young or inexperienced drivers face, many of these exercises use the imagination. Here is a sample for illustrative purpose:

The coach may begin by asking the driver what he imagines the dangers will be when he is alone in the car. The coach would then ask more questions about which one seems to be the most likely to occur or the most significant to the driver. How have you reacted in other similar circumstances in the past? Did that calm the situation or make it worse? If you were there again what would you have done differently? What effect would that have had? The coach must refrain from the temptation to tell the driver what he should have done in the past or what he should do in future in such a situation. The driver has to become confident in his own ability to figure it out himself, and telling him denies that opportunity.

The coach can also tell a story of a typical incident on the road and ask the driver how he would expect to react both emotionally and behaviourally if that happened, and then ask him what other options he might take. Which would be the best of those and what effect would that have? The coach can ask about incidents the driver has seen, heard about or been involved in on the road, what the driver did and what the result was. Most inexperienced drivers will know someone who had had an accident, the coach can ask him what he thinks happened, and why; not the physical facts as much as the mental and emotional difficulties and errors the people involved made, and then to ask what they could have done differently.

There are a number of deeper (eyes closed) imagery exercises in which the coach asks the driver to imagine in detail a type of incident or a risky situation as it was happening in real time and to say how they are reacting to the events as they happen, and later to say what might have

been better. This might be a near miss on the road or a temptation to show off with passengers after a party, or with a new high performance car. Again it is the emotional reactions and the management thereof that needs to be explored with the very minimum of telling. The drivers own opinions must be respected.

**Additional comments:**

This new coaching process runs counter to, in fact in many ways is the opposite to what all driving instructors have been trained to do in the past; a teaching method that was based on now outdated behavioural psychological principles. It is therefore very difficult for them to make a complete switch, however going only half way does not work well for the reasons I have explained above (in short: it lowers their A & R, while making them dependent of the teacher/instructor and because transfer into their own system asks for extra energy).

Coaching simply enhances the natural way we learn. We learned to walk, to run, to throw, to catch, to skateboard and such with no instructions and to do so we were obliged naturally to deploy a degree of awareness and responsibility. Whilst it is ubiquitous and therefore very hard indeed to unseat, instruction is an unnatural way to learn. Look at the methods of any of the great teachers of old, from Socrates and onwards, they were not instructors, they made us think for ourselves.

In line with the coaching principles, the detailed method of applying them in driver education will need to be devised by driving teachers themselves and they will vary from culture to culture, from country to country, from driving school to driving school and from driving coach to driving coach. That is entirely appropriate but the underlying learning principles of enhancing awareness and responsibility are inviolable. There are multiple secondary principles that skilled coaches will all agree on but they may vary according to circumstances, however I have stayed here just with the central theme.

This method of “new” coaching is being used in many different sport and workplace activities. Its practice is universal in workplace coaching which has become a sizeable profession in the past decade, and is applied in education, in healthcare, in government, in the military and also very widely by companies of all sizes in the private sector throughout Europe, the United States and Asia.

When the coaching method is applied to dangerous sporting activities, ones that best simulate driving, there are clear indications with concrete examples that it is both a faster way to teach/learn than instruction and it dramatically reduces the accident rate. How would it be possible to justify not using it for the teaching/learning of driving?

*(This draft document is published on my site with John's approval. I have learned John Whitmore from our collegial work as coaching experts in the HERMES-project – new ways of driver education – as well as members of an expert group for DG TREN working on a consultation paper on driver education throughout Europe by DG TREN. John is an international acknowledged expert on coaching (in both sports, business as driver education) and very recently he was appointed as Doctor Honoris Causa by the University of East London for the quality of his long lasting work on coaching.*

*See John Whitmore, COACHING FOR PERFORMANCE Nicholas Brealy Publishing, 3<sup>rd</sup> Revised Edition London/Boston (2002-2006) In Dutch: SUCCESVOL COACHEN Uitgeverij Nelissen (8<sup>e</sup> druk 2006)*