

SECTION 2: AI and OTHER COACHING APPROACHES

Similarities, Impact on Practice, Innovations and Two-Way Enhancement

Five-Principle Coaching

Bob Tschannen-Moran

Coach@LifeTrekCoaching.com

In this article, Bob Tschannen-Moran explores the meaning of the five principles of Appreciative Inquiry and their usefulness in coaching. Along with the popular “how-to” approach of the 5-D cycle, conscious and specific application of how the five AI principles relate to and work with each other promotes the dynamic shifts and new possibilities sought for by coaches and clients alike. By appreciating the syntax of the five AI principles, coaches know what to listen for and how to coach people for transformational change.

The five principles of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Positive, Constructionist, Simultaneity, Anticipatory and Poetic) are often described in rather esoteric terms as the philosophical foundation for strengths-based change strategies. In contrast, the 5-D cycle (Define, Discover, Dream, Design and Destiny) represents a popular how-to application of these principles for both organizational and personal development. Without seeking to diminish the value and impact of the 5-D cycle, this article describes and lifts up the five principles as practical guides for transformational coaching.

To use the five principles in this way, they need to be understood developmentally. The principles don't coexist in random order; they have an internal logic and a progressive unfolding that coaches can use as both listening tools and coaching frameworks.

Five-Principle Syntax

As a tool for stimulating and supporting transformational change, the image of a pyramid can be used to illustrate how the five principles of AI are related to each other and work together. “How do we get that?” is the operative question as we move from the top to the bottom of the pyramid. This syntax can be understood as follows:

1. The Positive Principle. Most people want to take positive actions and to enjoy positive outcomes in life and work. How do we get that? The Positive Principle asserts that positive actions and outcomes stem from the unbalanced force generated by positive energy and emotion. Newton's first law of motion states that objects at rest tend to stay at rest while objects in motion tend to stay in motion unless acted upon by an unbalanced force. Applying

this law to human systems, the Positive Principle holds that the negative energy and emotion associated with identifying, analyzing and correcting weaknesses lacks sufficient force to transform systems and to get them moving in new directions. At best, such root-cause analyses will correct the problems. At worst, they will cause the problems to spiral downward.

Positive energy and emotion, on the other hand, disrupt downward spirals and build the inherent aspirations of people into a dynamic force for transformational change. By identifying, appreciating and amplifying strengths, people go beyond problem solving to bold shifts forward. Demonstrating “why it’s good to feel good,” their actions and outcomes become positively charged and profoundly evocative (Frederickson, 2003). Positive energy and emotion broaden thinking, expand awareness, increase abilities, build resiliency, offset negatives and create an upward spiral of learning and growth. They generate new possibilities and identities for both individuals and organizations alike.

2. The Constructionist Principle. If positive energy and emotion hold so much potential for good, how do we get that? The Constructionist Principle asserts that positive energy and emotion are constructed through positive conversations and interactions with other people. Inner work and self-talk alone are not sufficient. The Constructionist Principle takes a holistic view of how people elevate both energy and emotion. This is no “bootstrap,” self-help philosophy. This is a socially constructed view of all things human, including energy and emotion. Through our conversations and interactions with other people we don’t just interpret and understand the world of experience, we create the reality in which we live. “Words create worlds” is the motto of AI in general and the Constructionist Principle in particular. It explains why positive conversations and interactions generate the positive energy and emotion that lead to positive actions and outcomes.

More than any of the other five principles, the Constructionist Principle makes clear the importance of the social context and other environments in creating the present moment and in changing future moments. Different environments generate different truths and different possibilities. They even generate different dimensions of individual experience, because individuality exists only in relationship to others. Words do not create worlds unless they are shared with others. As Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander (2000) summarize the Constructionist Principle: “It’s all invented! So we might as well invent a story or framework of meaning that enhances our quality of life and the life of those around us.” We invent those stories and frameworks together, in conversation with others.

3. The Simultaneity Principle. If positive conversations and interactions are able to create positive worlds, how do we get that? The Simultaneity Principle makes the following astonishing claim: conversations and interactions become positive the instant we ask a positive question, tell a positive story or share a positive reflection. Positive questions and reflections change everything. They are themselves the change we seek to make. They don’t just begin a process that leads to a positive future; they simultaneously create a positive present by shifting our conversations and interactions in a positive direction. They are not just a prelude to change; they are change. They create the conversations that create the worlds in which we live and work.

Our questions and reflections are fateful. “There are no ‘neutral’ questions,” writes Jacqueline Bascobert Kelm (2005, p. 54). “Every inquiry takes us somewhere, even if it is back

to what we originally believed. Inhabiting this spirit of wonder can transform our lives, and the unconditional positive question is one of the greatest tools we have to this end.” Such questions blend continuity and novelty in order to evoke transformational change at the speed of imagination.

4. The Anticipatory Principle. If positive questions and reflections are of such critical importance to the tenor and substance of our conversations, how do we get that? The Anticipatory Principle asserts that our questions and reflections flow from the outlook we hold. In the absence of hope, it’s hard to seek out, much less to celebrate the positive. When we anticipate a positive future, however, everything tilts in that direction. Equipped with a glimpse of what things look like at their very best, we become more creative, resourceful and resilient in looking for ways to make it so. Positive anticipation of the future is a proleptic force that perfects the present.

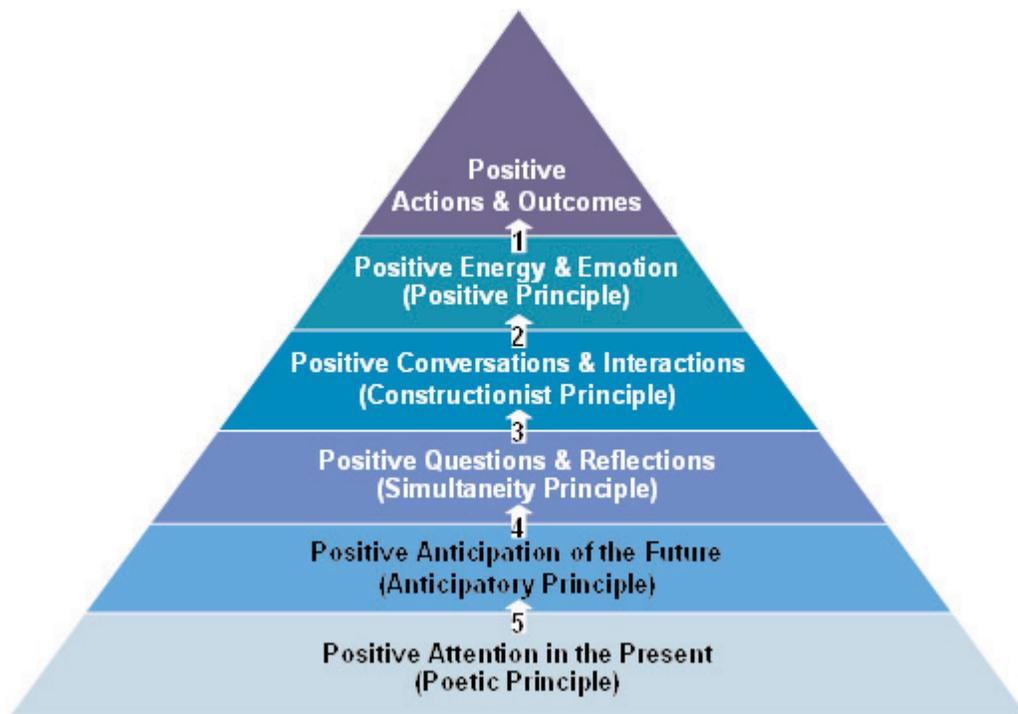
The word *prolepsis* literally means a forward look, and that’s how the Anticipatory Principle works. It takes more than just a vague confidence that everything will be alright; it takes a specific, positive image of the future in order to impact the dynamics of the present. The more concrete and real the image, the more yearning and movement it creates. “Vision,” to quote Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, “is a target that beckons” (1985, p. 89). Margaret Wheatley describes vision as a field (1999, pp. 53ff). As such, it is “a power, not a place, an influence, not a destination.” It is best served, then, by imbuing the present with “visionary messages matched by visionary behaviors.” Anticipation becomes the hallmark and herald of change.

5. The Poetic Principle. If positive anticipation of the future sets the stage for positive questions and reflections, how do we get that? Forming the base of the pyramid, upon which all the other principles are built, the Poetic Principle connects hope with mindfulness, intention with attention. The more we attend to the positive dimensions of the present moment, the more positive will be our intentions for future moments. Becoming mindful of what adds richness, texture, depth, beauty, significance and energy to life awakens us to life’s magnificent potential. It’s as though life becomes a work of great poetry, filled with hopeful meter, movement and meaning.

By seeing and attending to life’s poetry, we become inspired. It’s not that problems disappear, but other things become more important. That’s because we get more of what we focus on. When we focus on problems, we get more problems. When we focus on possibilities, we get more possibilities. Life’s poetry resolves into a spiral of positive imagination. David Whyte captures the heart of this Principle, and of all the AI Principles, in his poem, “Loaves and Fishes” (1997, p. 88):

This is not the age of information.
 This is *not* the age of information.
 Forget the news and the radio and the blurred screen.
 This is the time of loaves and fishes.
 People are hungry, and one good word is bread for a thousand.

The following illustration depicts how the five principles of AI build on each other to generate positive actions and outcomes:



Five-Principle Coaching

By appreciating the syntax of the five AI principles, Five-Principle Coaching (5-PC) knows what to listen for and how to coach people for transformational change. How do clients show up for coaching? If they show up concerned about their actions and outcomes, 5-PC knows to work with their energy and emotion. If they show up with little or no positive energy and emotion, 5-PC knows to animate the conversation with new possibilities. If the conversation drags or goes nowhere, 5-PC knows to ask different questions and to make different reflections. If the questions run aground on the shoals of discouragement and despair, 5-PC knows to bolster clients' self-efficacy and courage. If clients' intentions are weak or distracted, 5-PC knows to redirect their attentions in the present moment.

Working with energy and emotion is not the sole purview of therapists and counselors. Coaches work with these vital human dynamics as well, primarily as they relate to future actions and outcomes. Moving into new territory creates anxiety and uncertainty, even when the territory is both desired and desirable. 5-PC understands this and works with it through a combination of empathy and certainty. By sharing the feelings and needs of clients as they face the prospect of change and by trusting the ability of clients to successfully move through the process of change, coaches enable clients to take better actions and achieve better outcomes. That is, after all, why people retain coaches in the first place. 5-PC assists coaches to make it so.

When empathy and certainty do not generate the requisite forward momentum, 5-PC knows that it's time to change the conversation. There may be skills clients need to learn, frameworks clients need to get, or environments clients need to engineer (to mention only three possibilities). By changing the conversation, 5-PC changes the way clients perceive and relate to the world. They hopefully catch wind of wholly new possibilities that build the positive energy and emotion for change.

That's the spiral dynamic of great coaching conversations: they crescendo into ever more provocative propositions. Clients agree to take on ever greater challenges, en route to the realization of their dreams, as their skills, capacities and efficacy increase. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes this evolutionary dynamic as "flow" (1990, 1997, 2003). 5-PC increases both the likelihood and the intensity of flow by asking positive questions and making positive reflections. It's an intuitive dance, as coaches and clients work together to jumpstart the process of meaningful change.

It's hard not to notice when questions and reflections run aground on the shoals of discouragement and despair. They drop, like lead balloons, without triggering much of anything. Instead of encouragement and hope, clients have an experience of dread. When this happens, 5-PC shifts to conversations that bolster self-efficacy. Following social cognitive theory, such conversations include verbal persuasion, the cultivation of positive physiological and affective states, as well as the consideration of experiences that gives clients a vicarious sense of their capacity for change (Bandura, 1997). By supporting clients' positive anticipation of the future, in both individual and collective terms, 5-PC enables clients to achieve progressively more complex and satisfying mastery experiences.

When clients find it hard to stay focused on or to be inspired by their future intentions, 5-PC shifts the conversation to their present attentions. By noticing critical variables in the present moment, those facets of everyday experience that make the difference between success and failure, clients often unwittingly shift their way of being in the world (Gallwey, 2000). "The astonishing thing," writes Jon Kabat-Zinn, "is that nothing else needs to happen. We can give up trying to make something special occur. In letting go of wanting something special to occur, maybe we can realize that something very special is already occurring, and is always occurring, namely life emerging in each moment as awareness itself" (2005, p. 63). Such is the poetic power of positive attention in the present moment.

Conclusion

5-PC enhances the practice of both AI and coaching by exploiting the connections and developmental applications of the five principles of AI. In so doing, 5-PC makes transformational change both more likely and more substantive. "How do we get that?" is a question that assists coaches and clients alike to realize the fullness of their potential.

References

- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. New York: W.H. Freeman & Company
- Bennis, W. & Nanus, B. (1985). *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers
- Csikszentmihalyi, M (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers
- Csikszentmihalyi, M (1997). *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Perseus Books, L.L.C.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M (2003). *Good Business: Leadership, Flow, and the Making of Meaning*. New York, NY: Penguin Books
- Frederickson, B. L. (2003). "The value of positive emotions: The emerging science of positive psychology is coming to understand why it's good to feel good," *American Scientist*, 91, 330
- Gallwey, W. T. (2000). *The Inner Game of Work*. New York, NY: Random House
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our senses: Healing Ourselves and the World through Mindfulness*. New York, NY: Hyperion
- Kelm, J.B. (2005). *Appreciative Living: The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry in Personal Life*. Wake Forest, NC: Venet Publishers
- Wheatley, M.J. (1999). *Leadership and the New Science*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Communications, Inc.
- Whyte, D. (1997). *The House of Belonging*. Langley, WA: Many Rivers Press
- Zander, R.S. & Zander, B. (2000). *The Art of Possibility*. New York, NY: Penguin Putnam Inc.

AUTHOR

Bob Tschannen-Moran, an International Association of Coaching Certified Coach, is President of LifeTrek Coaching International (www.LifeTrekCoaching.com), a graduate of Coach U, and a faculty member with Wellcoaches Corporation. In business since 1998, LifeTrek has successfully used Five-Principle Coaching with both its individual and organizational clients to promote transformational change. Coach@LifeTrekCoaching.com

