

THE BENEFITS OF STANDING IN THE SHADOW OF MY NEIGHBOUR: EXPERIENCE OF A CHRISTIAN COACH

Eva KRÁLOVÁ

Alexander Dubcek University of Trencin in Trencin, Faculty of Healthcare, Študentská 2, 911 50 Trenčín

*Corresponding author E-mail address: eva.kralova@tuni.sk

Abstract

The contribution focuses on Christian coaching which is emerging in Slovakia mainly as the form of service. In the introduction authoress gives the definitions of life coaching, Christian coaching, and briefly differentiates what makes life coaching Christian. Christopher McCluskey defines Christian coaching as “*a way of helping people find God’s vision for their lives and learn to live accordingly.*” The first chapter approaches the added value of Christian coaching dialogue which leads to four unique characteristics of a Christian coach: A) Brings biblical world-view to the coaching dialogue; B) Reflects the qualities of Jesus Christ; C) Christian coach is not fully neutral: Is happy when clients move toward balance with biblical teaching; D) Prays for the clients. In the second chapter the authoress explains an important part of coaching dialogue, powerful questions that help clients process and move forward. Colins, G. R. created the following four quadrants with broad open-ended questions *Four Quadrants of Christian Coaching* that can be successfully used during coaching dialogue: 1. Awareness: *Where are you now?* → 2. Vision: *Where do you want to go?* → 3. Strategy and action: *How do you get there?* → 4. Obstacles: *What might get in the way?* The contribution is concluded with the brief description of survey results. The aim of the survey is to examine what a Christian coach gains by his or her voluntary retreat in the shadow of the client. This “retreat” is important, because during coaching dialogue a coach cannot interfere with the thoughts of the clients and should respect their independence and decisions.

Keywords: Christian coaching. Christian coach. Coaching dialogue. Powerful Questions. Survey results.

1 Introduction

“I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”
(12: Ephesians 4:1)

Coaching is expanding in Slovakia as a new profession and the new training programme *Christian Coach* has appeared there as the form of service. **The programme *Christian Coach*** is realised by the Advisory Centre Family Garden in Bratislava and is designed for the participants from helping professions (individuals, couples, priests and consecrated people aged above 40) who feel the vocation to serve by coaching others. As it is a new profession in Slovakia, in the beginning I am explaining the difference between experts from other helping professions such as teachers, nurses, therapists, or other specialists and between life coaches. The experts share their expertise or knowledge for helping others, while on the other hand the coaching skills let coaches help others in a new way. When a client is looking for information and answers by meeting an expert, she or he wants expert advice. A **life coach** is someone who is more of a partner than an expert, who gets the client to find his or her own answers instead of providing them for him or her. He or she helps clients discover their own motives and set their goals, focus on them, aid them in finding the best path towards these goals, help them explore their options and create a personalised action plan [2, 3].

A professional who, by asking the right questions, helps clients find their options and move them where God wants them to be, is a **Christian coach**. Christian coaching is based on a rich experience of spiritual accompaniment and is one of the successful paths of human development that are based on spiritual and Christian values. Figure 1 differentiates between sharing expertise, coaching and Christian coaching (figure 1).

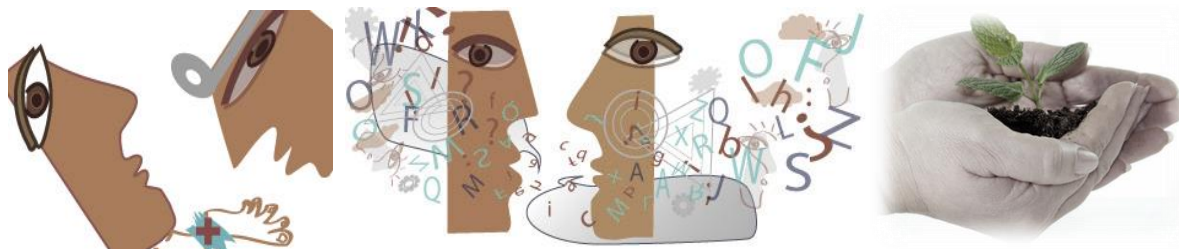


Figure 1 Consulting versus coaching [4]

By seeing a life coach, the client is more interested in [5]:

- a) Getting guidance which will help client **identify limitations** in his or her own internal and external processes.
- b) Looking to **find better strategies** for working → thinking → behaving in a more productive way.

- c) Being motivated to **take action** and act on the basis of the goals set by a client.
- d) **Breaking out of past patterns** that were not working for a client.
- e) Strategies that involve the **process of interaction** between a client and a coach.

Life coaching uses a methodology for enhancing personal development which includes conversation and asking questions. Collins, G. R. [1: 16] defines **life coaching** as the “*art and practice of enabling individuals and groups to move from where they are to where they want to be.*” According to Larsen, K. [6] the process of making sustainable and positive change, is about enquiry followed by action. Enquiry concerns thinking of what “I” (client) want, what works for me and what does not work for me, what prevents me from progressing, and what I am willing to do about it. Action involves doing these steps based on the goal I want to achieve. If the coach asks the right question in the right time, and the client is willing to adjust his or her actions to reflect his or her own answers, then he or she can achieve the set goals.

What makes life coaching Christian? The so called founder of Christian coaching, Christopher McCluskey [1: 20] believes that **Christian life coaching** is more than a profession: “*It’s a way of helping people find God’s vision for their lives and learn to live accordingly.*”

Avery, K. (Noomi.com) introduces the following example of the **key hypothesis for secular life coaches**: *We create our own reality. We are the scriptwriter and the director of our life drama, as well as the star. It is our responsibility to write a script that maximizes the good things and eliminates the bad things. We can attract people and success into our lives by intentionally seeing and feeling what our best life could be.*

In contrast, she summed up the **key hypothesis of a Christian coach** by the following words: *A life plan is God’s plan for your life. It is not a plan that you conceive and develop, but a plan that you discover through a series of helpful exercises and processes* [8]. A Christian life coach thus trusts in the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the process of recognition. Whether the clients are Christians or not, a coach believes that the Holy Spirit knows the plans, talents and callings that God gave to clients. Finally, Christian life coach partners with the Holy Spirit and adds His work in the clients’ lives [9].

2 The Added Value of Christian Coaching Dialogue

*“Summing it all up, friends, I’d say you’ll do best by filling your minds
And meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious
- the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse.”
(12: Phillipians 4:8)*

Crane T. [5] defines **coaching dialogue** (“*dia*” and “*logos*” meaning “*flowing through*”) as the respectful two-way, open ended flow of communication that balances listening and speaking for the purpose of learning. The primary distinction in Christian coaching dialogue is based on the principle that God wants to be an active part of the lives of his people. For this reason a Christian coach during Christian coaching dialogue [10: 1-2]:

- *“Invites the Holy Spirit to be present during the coaching dialogue in a 3-way partnership.*
- *Let the Holy Spirit guide the coaching dialogue.*
- *Directly asks questions pertaining to the integration of faith.*
- *Encourages the client to consider God’s will and plan.*
- *Allows the expression of the client’s faith to grow.*
- *Challenges the client to view life from a biblical perspective.*
- *Enables clients to create awareness, and affect change (design actions and formulate solutions).*
- *Encourages the client’s transformation more into the image of Jesus Christ.”*

The added value of Christian coaching dialogue leads to the following **four unique characteristics of a Christian Coach** [1: 20-26]:

- I. Brings biblical world-view** to the Christian coaching dialogue. Clients look inside with the help of a Christian coach to listen for the values, purposes and visions deep within them; to focus on their inner strengths; to discover their life purposes and passions. Christians believe that God is their sovereign who is aware of His people and is willing to guide and encourage them. Thus the life purposes and inner strengths for their future are God-given and Christian clients find ultimate fulfilment when they live in accordance with God’s plans for them. So it is God, who guides Christian coach through coaching dialogue.
- II. Reflects the qualities of Jesus Christ**: Christian coach is committed to Jesus and approaches every aspect of his/her life from Christ’s perspective. This affects his/her marriage, parenting, values, time management, vocation and also the style that Christian coach brings to coaching. Thus it influences who he or she is what has impact on everything he or she does. A coach devoted to Jesus Christ has the power that comes from the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- III. Is not completely neutral**, in the sense of indifferent or lax. He or she is happy when clients move in the course that is consistent with biblical teaching and is sad when they move away. It is honest for a Christian coach to admit it, although he or she honestly respects the independence and decisions of clients.

IV. Applies the established techniques of coaching, but also **prays regularly for the clients and is not reluctant to discuss spiritual issues**, especially working with clients who share Christian values. Christian values permeate a coach's life and flow into his or her coaching. Still a coach gives the freedom to clients to build the life as they want.

According to Collins, G. R. [1] during Christian coaching dialogue coaches use many of the same techniques as secular life coaches do. However, the added value of Christian coaching resides in the fact that a **Christian coach strives to develop the following skills** [11]:

- **Provide an atmosphere of trust, respect and recognition.** Display no judgment and there is no rush, no sense of irritation in his/her voice, everything fades except his/her deep interest in the client.
- **“Remain in the questions”** and is fully present and flexible during the dialogue.
- **Encourage clients to create new awareness:** To listen to and express their hearts and minds, their key values, all what Holy Bible would call “the desires of their hearts”. Based on the concept that God has plans for clients' lives and is eager to enable them to live these plans, a Christian coach facilitates clients' discovery of that plan and encourages them as they specify, create it.
- Coach then **invites clients to move proactively** toward their set goals – **into action** while keeping in mind the bigger picture of humanity as taught by a biblical worldview (Definition of Christian Coaching, Christian Coaches Network International). He or she has no personal investment in clients taking one path versus another. Instead, a coach will focus on the gap between where clients are now and where they perceive God is calling them to be [9].

3 Powerful Questions – the Source of New Insights

*“If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution,
I would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask,
For once I know the proper question,
I could solve the problem in less than five minutes.”*
(Albert Einstein)

A Christian coach during coaching dialogue **asks questions that** [11: 6]:

- a) *Reflect active listening and understanding of the client's perspective.*
- b) *Evoke discovery, insight, commitment or action.*
- c) *Create greater clarity, possibility or new learning, are called open ended questions.*
- d) *Move the client toward what they desire.*

Coaching questions are an effective tool of coaching dialogue for goal setting and achievement because to make lasting change, the client needs to approach the process from a different perspective that he or she has in the past.



Figure 2 Four Quadrants of Christian Coaching [1]

Legend: Each quadrant represents one broad question that leads to more specific questions which help a client to move forward

The tool that was created by the author of Christian coaching, Collins, G. R. [1] *Four Quadrants of Christian Coaching* (figure 2) can be successfully used during Christian coaching dialogue. Table 1 presents the four broad open-ended questions that lead clients to more specific open-ended questions which help clients process and

forward. In bold italics we highlighted the powerful questions which have to be clear, direct, lead clients to new insights and move them forward.

The powerful questions in bold italics (table 1) were inspired by the personality of Jesus Christ who purposefully used them to create followers develop new insights and to grasp spiritual principles so as they could see their own hidden motives new awareness for those who followed him. He asked questions (and also parables) to help his and attitudes. He also used them to draw from the followers their own answers (right, wrong or indifferent).

Table 1: *The Four Quadrants of Christian Coaching*

<p>a) Awareness: <i>WHERE ARE YOU NOW?</i> (The questions of this quadrant help clients talk through their problems by asking more specific questions about their present situation or difficulty):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What is dissatisfying (uncomfortable or troubling) to you? / How does it affect you? How does it affect others (your family; wife; colleagues)? / What's the worst that can happen?</i> - <i>What would be the best answer (solution) to your difficulty?</i> - <i>What would be the best result of this meeting (dialogue)?</i> - <i>If you were to consider what God might be saying to you, what would that be?</i> - <i>What is the connection of this topic to what is God speaking into your life?</i>
<p>b) Vision: <i>WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO?</i> (The questions of this quadrant help clients visualise what they would like to see their situation look like. This increases motivation for change.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What would like to achieve? / What would it do for you? / How would life look differently for you?</i> - <i>What courses of action align best with the biblical principles you are discussing? / In the light of what you have learned, what needs to happen?</i> - <i>How does this affect your identity as a child of God?</i> - <i>How open are you to what God might be saying?</i>
<p>c) Strategy and Action: <i>HOW DO YOU GET THERE?</i> (The questions of this quadrant help clients create action steps to move forward.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What might work for you? / What has worked for you in the past? / What has worked for others you know?</i> - <i>What are the opportunities that God is presenting in these circumstances?</i> - <i>Which course of action is most consistent with what God is already doing in your life?</i> - <i>What are you willing to do?</i> - <i>How does these actions line up with the eternal perspective? / From a heavenly perspective, how does that change things?</i> - <i>Which first step can you do to head in the right way?</i> - <i>Which step is the most consistent with what God is already telling you?</i>
<p>d) Obstacles: <i>WHAT MIGHT GET IN THE WAY?</i> (The questions of this quadrant help clients prepare for what might prevent them from their action steps):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What might prevent you from accomplishing your plan?</i> - <i>How can you manage it (overcome)?</i> - <i>What will you do?</i> - <i>What do you need if you get discouraged? / What will help you keep going when you feel stuck?</i> - <i>Where do you need God's grace to complete what's before you?</i>

4 How does Standing in the Shadow of Clients Affect Christian Coaches?

*“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”*
(12: Psalm 139: 7-10)

This chapter summarises the survey results. The aim of the survey is to examine what a Christian coach gains by his or her voluntary retreat in the shadow of the client. This retreat is important, because during coaching dialogue a Christian coach listens to understand, clarifies with coaching questions; respects, values and has partner relationship with clients; proves one's commitment to learning; supports clients and is open. However, a Christian coach never leverages questions to lead clients toward the coach's view of what God wants for them. He or she cannot interfere with the thoughts of the clients and should respect their independence and decisions. The survey question is:

5 What does a Christian coach gain by his or her voluntary retreat in the shadow of the client during Christian coaching dialogue?

For our survey we use purposive sampling, the sample consists of eleven Christian coaches. Their wide-ranging responses are transcribed and subsequently categorised – coded to systematically analyse their feedback in open-ended answers (table 2).

The responses were summed up in 7 categories with 30 subcategories (figure 3). The survey results indicate that by their voluntary retreat in the shadow of the client the eleven coaches gain serenity, trust, worthiness, love for another person, saving the energy and joy.

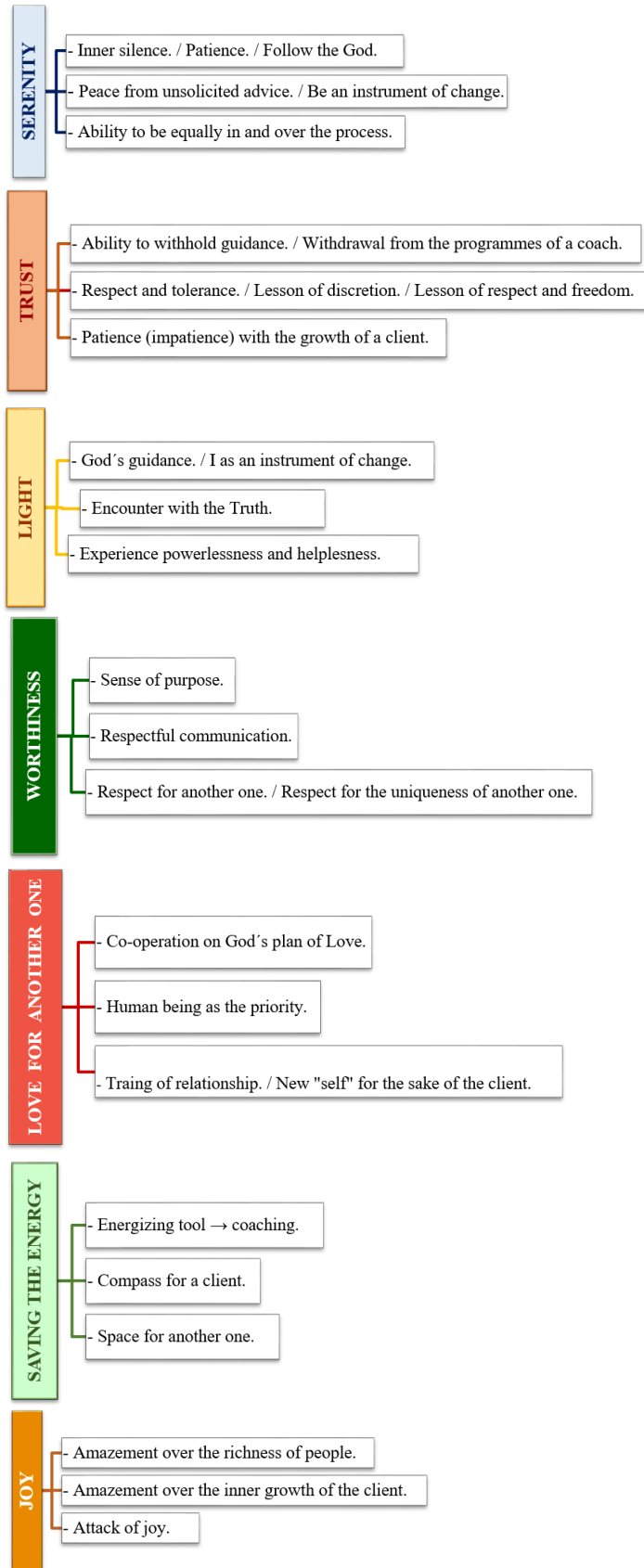


Fig. 3 Coaches' responses in 7 categories and 30 subcategories (Own survey)

Table 2 Transcript and categorisation of coaches' responses

Coach No	Transcript of responses	Categories
1MN (Female, married, 1 year of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possibility of deeper inner silence. The silence which is essential if I want to listen to another person. - Abandon the expectation that I know what is going to happen ... (when I sit down next to a client during coaching dialogue, I never know what will follow). - Space for me to be amazed. Be amazed over, how things could be "diverse – various – different" from how I perceive them. And also be amazed over the richness of God's flowers "children" – everyone is unique. 	<p>Inner silence.</p> <p>Ability to withhold guidance.</p> <p>Amazement over the richness of people.</p>
2JB (Male, married, 1 year of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Then I realised, with Anthony de Mello that „to lose myself brings sudden assurance that I am something else – not the one who I thought I was before. I thought I am in the middle, suddenly I enjoy being a satellite“. - I used to give advice and suddenly there is the new experience – the zest of listening – not guided listening. 	<p>New "self" for the sake of the client.</p> <p>Ability to withhold guidance.</p>
3JM (Male, married, novice coach)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The experience of holding space for another one – for his life (freedom and space for another one) - Contact with the life of the other person. - Experience of respectful communication. 	<p>Space for another one.</p> <p>Respectful communication.</p>
4VM1 (Female, married, novice coach)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not to control and not to define borders. - It is more comfortable not to know everything. - The morale of standing in the shadow of my client: Not to take the responsibility for the other one; respect people as unique. - In the role of a willow tree I do not need to worry over the consequences of my wrong advice. - I learn to help others look into their hearts, aspirations, dreams, what God has put them into them. - I learn to support a client to be able to search for the answers and let the seeds grow, took care of them... The bush of weed usually flood the rays of light and the client can discover a precious flower or a nutritious fruit and there s/he awaits the main source of living water 	<p>Respect for the uniqueness of the other person.</p> <p>Peace from unsolicited advice.</p> <p>Patience with the growth.</p>
5VM2 (Female, consecrated religious nun, 1 year of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less is more. This statement leads me while I listen to the client. It is sometimes very difficult, because naturally a person tends to give advice and to be "wise" in helping the other person. - However, if I am silently present during the meeting of the God and the client – this is a great experience. - God guides also the coach in the sense, to ask the right questions and then I am amazed over the ease of access of the client to discover new solutions, ways to growth, change – new and better life. - Then I finally find out that it is the God who leads the dialogue, it is the God who leads the coach and as a coach I have the mercy to follow the God who leads the conversation... and I can thank Him that I can accompany the client. 	<p>Ability to withhold guidance.</p> <p>God's guidance.</p> <p>Amazement over the inner growth.</p> <p>Follow the God.</p>
6MK (Male, married, 20 years of practice)	<p>It helped me gain the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Withdrawal from the programmes in my head, from myself. - Possibility be the gift – be there for the other person, be gift for him or her. - Experience of powerlessness and helplessness. - Ability to perceive the other person's abundance. - Perceive what I did not perceive before. - Possibility to learn and to love another person. - Gratitude for everything I got. - Sense of purpose, why we need one another. 	<p>Withdrawal from my programmes.</p> <p>Be the gift.</p> <p>Experience powerlessness and helplessness.</p> <p>Love for another.</p> <p>Sense of purpose.</p>
7EK (Female, married, 1 year of practice)	<p>It helped me perceive the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - „We all have problems that need to be solved. My voluntary retreat in the shadow of my neighbour gives God the space to give Himself to another one – to be present“. - During coaching dialogue it is always from darkness to Light. And I can observe how important it is for the client to experience this transition to Light. - I am invited to be patient with the slow growth of every client. When I calm my soul during the dialogue, I gain His serenity. - As the God does not allow us to pull weed mixed with wheat (so as not to pull the wheat) (MT 13: 29), during the dialogue I am invited to co-operate with God – to create the world according to His plan of love. 	<p>God's guidance.</p> <p>Light.</p> <p>Serenity.</p> <p>Co-operation on God's Plan of Love.</p>
8MS (Male, consecrated Catholic priest, 1.5 year of practice)	<p>Today I really realized that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From the retreat I can observe. In front of me, there the world opens in front of me, the world I have respect for, "the world of working man" who is immersed in his inner self. - I am becoming an instrument of the beginning and the process of change. - At the same time there is this impatience from my voluntary retreat that makes me think of something, that belongs to my own story. It is interesting. Thanks to this question I realised that. 	<p>Respect for another one.</p> <p>I as an instrument of change.</p> <p>Impatience with the growth of the client.</p>
9DH (Female, married, 1.5 year of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I gained freedom for myself and the client. For myself in the sense that I do not feel the burden of responsibility to provide him or her a good and right advice, answer. For the client it is good because I do not "wear his/her shoes". I am free from the burden of client's responsibility. And this is freedom from unsolicited advice. 	<p>Freedom from unsolicited advice.</p>

Coach No	Transcript of responses	Categories
	- <i>An encounter with the Truth: It is up to the client and his/her conscience and that is to me the paramount and the most important feature. Not my "output" ... and the client is essential. The encounter with the Truth is the most vital element of all.</i>	Encounter with the Truth.
10LK (Male, married, 1 year of practice)	- <i>I gained joy, which "attacks me" during coaching dialogue. This joy is preceded by two-way trust of a coach and the client.</i> - <i>The benefit of making the own self smaller during coaching is the touch of the truth, when the client from the honesty of his/her heart searches answers to the questions of a coach. During the dialogue there often arise poems of dreams, desires and values of the client – who can see his/her self or burdensome situation through the new optics. This touch of with the truth is deeply authentic and human to me, this is the reason and also motivation why to be a coach.</i>	Attack of joy. Trust. Encounter with the Truth.
11DC (Female, married, 1 year of practice)	- <i>The more I 'm in the back row, the more the client is in the front row. And that is exactly what I mean when, as a coach, I give as much space to the client as possible. The more I am in the back row, the more choices the client has. It gives me the peace of mind that if I'm in the back row, there's a little chance I would put my foot on the client's 'circles'. When I'm in the back row, the client can "draw the universe"... and I can observe him or her from the distance. When I snuggle close to the client, he or she can draw only the path to the greengrocer's. When I am in the back row, the client processes forward.</i> - <i>It is hard to stand in the shadow of the client, because I cannot cry out the first thing that comes up my mind – because I cannot offer the client my recipe, and cannot listen to my judgement or assumption. And that this is the lesson of discretion. It gives me the ability to be simultaneously in and over the process.</i> - <i>When I am in the back row, I can offer the client the subjectivity that s/he needs. The client can experience a lot. And I cannot allow the process to drag me in. Otherwise I cannot take the client on the top of the hill from which s/he can have a better perspective. Be in the back row gives me a lot. It is the lesson of respect, tolerance and freedom.</i> - <i>And that urges me to "reduce" myself, which is the great training of partnership or the member of a team. It often "saved my life" during our family celebrations. Especially when they talked of politics. Oh, if I weren't in the back row, my sisters-in-law- would not open the door if I visited them.</i>	Peace from unsolicited advice. Lesson of discretion. Ability to be equally in and over the process. Lesson of respect, tolerance and freedom. Training of relationship.
12ER (Female, consecrated religious nun, 1.5 year of practice)	- <i>I'm often a person shot to the very first row – which is the position of a supervisor and organizer. At the same time, I am open to the problems and life of people in general, because in my "value ladder" the human being was shifted at the very front row.</i> - <i>After various experience I positively responded to the offer of a coaching course. And I speak highly of that. Coaching is a unique energizing tool (in the sense of energy expenditure of a coach), which energizes the sources of the client hidden deep in him or her. I understand this tool as the compass, with the help of which the client orientates in his/her inner world. It means that in the position of a coach – I am second-rate, subordinated to the client. Because the client and his or her reality are much more important than me. And that is very well :)</i>	Human being as the priority. Energizing tool. Compass for the client's inner world.

References

- [1] COLLINS, G. R. 2009. *Christian Coaching: Helping Others Turn Potential into Reality*. People Helper's International, Inc., 2nd edition. ISBN 978-1-60006-361-9.
- [2] WHITMORE, John. 2016. *Koučování. Rozvoj osobnosti a zvyšování výkonnosti. Metoda transpersonálního koučování*. 3. doplnené a prepracované vydanie. Praha: Management Press. ISBN 978-80-7261-273-4.
- [3] KUBEŠ, M. 2016. *Křesťanský koučing. Základy koučingu pre dobrovoľníkov v pomáhajúcich profesiách*. Bratislava: Family Garden, jeseň 2016.
- [4] What is Life Coaching? *Life Coach Hub* Ltd 2016. A community of life coaches dedicated to improving your life.
- [5] CRANE, T. – PATRICK, L. 2002. *The Heart of Coaching: Using Transformational Coaching to Create a High-Performance Coaching Culture*. PTA Press San Diego California 2nd edition. ISBN 0-9660874-3-7.
- [6] LARSEN, Kate. 2012. Lessons from a life coach. in *Life Time, Inc. Healthy Way of Life*. January to February 2012. [Online]. [Cit. 22 November 2017]. Available from: <https://experiencelife.com/article/lessons-from-a-life-coach/>
- [7] Noomii.com. 2009-2017. *Christian Coaching*. An Interview with Kim Avery. Noomii – the web's largest directory of life coaches and business coaches. [Online]. [Cit. 20 November 2017]. Available from: <https://www.noomii.com/christian-coaching>
- [8] PATERSON, T. 1998. *Living the life you were meant to live*. ISBN 978-0-78527-195-6.
- [9] Coaching for Christian living. 2016. What is Christian Life Coaching? [Online]. [Cit. 2017-11-20]. Available from: <http://christianlifecoaching.com/christian-life-coaching/>

- [10] Definition of Christian Coaching. In *Christian Coaches Network International*. 2014-2017. [Online]. [Cit. 2017-11-27]. Available from: <https://christiancoaches.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CCNI-Christian-Coaching-Distinctions.pdf>
- [11] Christian Coaching Competencies. 2015-2017. In *Christian Coaches Network International and International Coach Federation*. [Online]. [Cit. 2017-11-20]. Available from: <https://christiancoaches.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Competencies-Edited-Final-2017.pdf>
- [12] Catholic Bible Online. [Online]. [Cit. 5 December 2017]. Available from: <http://www.catholic.org/bible/>