

Support for Coaches



Interview with Julie Starr:

How does our ego affect us in coaching?

Q. In your recent talk at the 3 Shires Coaching Group, you referred to the Ego and its influence on the coach and coachee. What got you interested in this topic?

I've been engaged in personal development topics forever, beginning with topics such as NLP, behaviour profiling, transformational leadership, etc. Through this, I realized I was learning tools both to help me develop my awareness and work 1-1 with people (this is how I got into coaching). During any quest to search for knowledge or techniques, there comes a point where you stop looking outside yourself for information, theories, etc. and you discover self-enquiry, e.g. meditation, spirituality, etc. So, I'd say these days I tend to choose different 'experiences' that help with this enquiry, for example, I've been to India eight or nine times, visiting sacred sites, ashrams, temples, etc. Not that anyone needs to go all the way to India! I gain a lot just by being peaceful, still, and silent, so sitting with my dog out in nature can be just as fulfilling.

In work relating more directly to ego, I've attended programmes by Brandon Bays' which teach an emotional processing technique called The Journey. This has been hugely formative in the way I work with the connections of mind/body/emotion. I also attended Byron Katie's School for The Work which was both challenging and liberating. 'The Work' is a deceptively powerful process to help us loosen the illusions and projections of the mind. 'The Work' is a simple series of questions that you put an issue through. Your responses show you how we don't have to believe everything that we think. This is an odd notion when we realise that we tend to do just that!

Like a lot of coaches, I also read books to support my development and have been very influenced by teachers such as Eckhart Tolle, Deepak Chopra, Ram Dass, Dr David Hawkins, Joe Dispenza, etc.

Q. How would you define 'ego'?

I like Brandon Bay's quote: 'Your ego is a false identity that your mind constructed and then you took up residence in.' Byron Katie would say that 'Ego is the mind that has realized itself' which is no less true although a little more challenging to comprehend.

Another way to describe this is that your ego is a function of your mind; a little program that's running in the background (that's a little overly simplistic but might help). There's more on this in chapter three of my book Brilliant Coaching if you're interested, or I'd recommend 'A New Earth' by Eckhart Tolle.

Q. What was the biggest impact your work on ego has had on your own coaching sessions with clients?

It enables me to be much more present. I've learnt to trust that all true coaching work happens in the present. I've also learnt to challenge my own thoughts in some situations, (to not believe everything I think). I've learnt to tune my thoughts down and quieten the mind by focusing on being present.

Q. Under what circumstances does your ego serve you positively?

Your ego is useful as it gives you a sense of who you are and who you are not because your ego compares and judges. It has a practical function which stops you from walking into chairs, etc. So, because of your ego, you can recognize yourself as distinct from others. Your ego lets you know who you are in the world, and as a logical result, it also tells you who you are not.

However, as its judgements are often flawed, e.g. 'I'm not talented, clever, creative, etc. it can also create false limits, blocks, or barriers. For example, 'I can't start my own business because I'm not a businessperson.'



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Q. As coaches, what should we be aware of (in terms of our ego) during coaching sessions?

Just to maintain an awareness of its drivers, e.g. to look good, sound smart, be impressive, be liked/admired, etc. Self-awareness is key because it creates a 'gap of choice' e.g. 'Ah, I'm talking too much – I need to use silence more.'

Q. What should we do to minimize the negative impact of our ego on the coaching process?

I love the Eckhart Tolle sentiment 'The ego's greatest enemy of all is the present moment' He is teaching us to shift our attention and awareness to the present moment so that the influence of the ego is diminished.

However, in the process of change please remember to employ kindness, rather than get 'tough' or harsh with ourselves. Put simply, in a war with the mind, the mind will always win! We need to soothe the mind and use gentleness, kindness, and compassion. When we realise that our minds 'troubled' or negative thoughts are cluttering our ability to coach, in that moment, breathe, smile inwardly and ... begin again.

Q. How can we understand how our ego is affecting our coaching sessions?

Think of a coaching session or relationship that isn't going as well as you want to, or indeed any situation in your life where you are frustrated. In the moment of discomfort or concern, as you notice your frustration/discontent, try asking yourself, 'What am I seeking here, approval or control?'

An obvious follow-up question to that would be: 'And if I gave up that need for approval or control, what other responses would be available to me? Or 'What could I do?'

You see the ego has drivers of safety - which drives a need to control - and of maintaining image or approval from others, so a need to manage perception. When we can relax those drivers down, we free ourselves up to make a purer (more authentic) choice in a situation, try it!

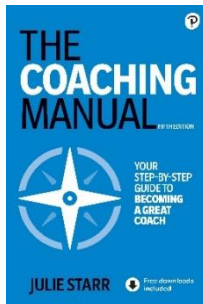
Q. How do you ensure your ego is quietened during your coaching sessions with clients?

That work is mostly done outside of sessions. I have a daily meditation practice which helps calm my mind and stay centred more of the time, so I usually manage to do that most days. My other practice includes qigong, mindfulness out in nature, going on retreats etc. Throughout a session I'll remind myself to practice present moment awareness, e.g. use my breathing, to ground into an embodied sense of my surroundings.

My favourite (Buddhist) quote from the interview from Julie:

- 'The mind is a wonderful servant but a terrible master.'

About Julie Starr



Translated around the world, and recommended reading on many coaching programmes Julie's bestselling book is trusted globally as the definitive guide to coaching. Includes clear principles, tips, and free supporting downloads. Her other books, *The Mentoring Manual* and *Brilliant Coaching* build coaching ability through simple principles and practical approaches. Julie is the founder of Starr Coaching, a leading provider of leadership and management development. Find out more at www.starrcoaching.co.uk and www.LearnStarr.com

