

A graphic of puzzle pieces in various shades of blue and black, arranged in a pattern that suggests a missing piece or a path. The pieces are interlocking, with some missing, creating a sense of incompleteness or a journey.

EFFECTIVE GROUP COACHING

Tried and Tested Tools and Resources
for **Optimum** Group Coaching Results



Jennifer J. Britton

A graphic at the top of the cover shows a grid of puzzle pieces. The pieces on the left are dark blue, while the pieces on the right are a lighter blue. The boundary between the two colors is irregular, following the shape of the puzzle pieces.

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Jennifer J. Britton

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EFFECTIVE GROUP COACHING

*Tried and Tested Tools and Resources for
Optimum Group Coaching Skills*

Jennifer J. Britton



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This book is dedicated to coaches and group facilitators around the world who are committed to refining their craft.

Also, to the teams and groups globally which I've had the privilege of working, and learning, with.

And, of course, to Matthew and Andray, Mom and Dad, without whose support this book would not have been possible.

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Just as group coaching is not all about the coach and is created by the experience and wisdom of the group, there are a number of people I would like to thank who have made this book possible.

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Jennifer J. Britton
Toronto, September 2009

Introduction

Over the last few years, economic realities and client requests have propelled group coaching to become one of the most quickly evolving areas of the coaching profession. Moving out of its early adopter days, group coaching is starting to become recognized as a subdiscipline of coaching by coaches and clients, organizations, and individuals alike.

For years, there has been little written about the experience and foundation of group coaching. This book serves to finally put into the hands of coaches and group practitioners core information about what group coaching is, core skills, and best practices, as well as practical how-tos for designing, marketing, and launching your own group coaching programs.

This book provides a foundation and practical perspective on group coaching—what it is and how it differs from one-on-one coaching and training, ready-to-use tips and resources for coaches/practitioners in the development, implementation, and marketing of their own group coaching programs. Highlighted in this book are case studies from coaches who are undertaking this work with widely diverse groups around diverse topics.

Effective Group Coaching takes a practical, resource-rich look at group coaching—one of the fastest-growing parts of the coaching profession. Organizations, community groups, and individuals are discovering that group coaching is an exciting and sustainable model and process for learning and growth.

Written for coaches (both internal and external), HR professionals, trainers, and facilitators wanting to expand their work into this area, this book provides tested tips and tools. New and seasoned coaches will find *Effective Group Coaching* a practical road map and go-to guide when **designing, implementing, and marketing** their own group coaching programs.

Groups have been my passion since the late 1980s when I first started as an outdoor experiential educator and leader. My work with groups blossomed over the years to include work in the realms of facilitation, training, and performance improvement. As a global manager and director working in the international development sector, it was usually up to me to develop my teams and groups. Since 1988, I have run group programs in over sixteen countries and touched others virtually in many more.

I entered into the coaching profession as a professional coach in 2003, surprised to find that a coaching approach with groups was not widely pervasive. In fact, as I moved through my coaching certification in 2005, I could not even count my group coaching hours towards certification. In wanting to follow my passion—groups—and also to leverage my own skills and expertise in the areas of small group process and facilitation, I have been one of the pioneers in taking this work forward. Since 2004, having supported hundreds of coaches who were eager to launch their own group coaching work through the Group Coaching Essentials™ program, group coaching is now becoming mainstream.

As more and more coaches are adding their voices to what group coaching is and how it impacts the world, I have invited a number of coaches to add their voice throughout this book. I am pleased to be joined by other thought leaders and pioneers in the realm of group coaching, such

as Ginger Cockerham, MCC; Suzee Eibling, PCC; Mary Allen, MCC; and Eva Gregory, MCC, as well as several other stellar practitioners who are breaking ground across a number of industries and issues: Deena Kolbert, CPCC, ORSCC; Maureen Clarke, CPCC; Lynda Monk, CPCC; Jill MacFadyen, ACC; Victoria FittsMilgrim, CPCC; Ann Deaton, PhD, PCC; Marlo Nikkila; and Rita Weiss.

As you read through this book you will notice that I often use a number of terms interchangeably, including participant and client, as well as coach and facilitator. It will no doubt become obvious to you that group coaching has strong roots in the realm of training and facilitation, as well as small group process.

I encourage you to engage fully with this book—mark it up, undertake the exercises, and create some accountability for yourself as you read through it.

OUR ROAD MAP

Throughout the book are various “In the Spotlight” and “Voices from the Field” sections, which spotlight real-life group coaching experiences and the voices of coaches undertaking this work. These will highlight practical strategies around what works and what you need as a coach to make successful group coaching programs happen. Group coaching programs range from in person work to virtual phone-based programs, programs for the public, to programs run for small business owners, community groups, and managers.

The early chapters of the book set the context for group coaching. Chapter 1 will provide you with foundational information, such as What is group coaching? How is it defined? How does it differ from one-on-one coaching,

therapy, workshops, facilitation? How is it the same? This chapter also includes a discussion on the Continuum of Group Process to illustrate the similarities and differences between different disciplines.

Coaching does not take place in a vacuum, and increasingly individual and corporate clients and sponsors are asking “Why is this work important? What impact does it really have?” Chapter 2 looks at the “Business, and Learning Case, for Group Coaching.”

Core principles of adult education, learning styles, experiential education, and group process form the foundation for work within the group coaching realm. Chapter 3 looks at “The Foundations of Group Coaching: The Essentials of Adult Learning.” This chapter will provide new insights, or a refresher, on these core topics.

Coaches, and other practitioners, are eager to not have to reinvent the wheel. Chapter 4 looks at “Core Skills and Best Practices for Group Coaching.” Throughout this chapter we will also hear from coaches across the industry with some of their best practices for group coaching.

The next set of chapters provides you with practical exercises, tools, and templates to help you design, market, and implement your own group coaching program.

Many coaches have great ideas for their programs but don’t know how to move from vision to actual program. Chapter 5 looks at “Designing Your Own Program,” and includes several core tools for design work, including the Group Coaching Design MatrixTM.

With group coaching work taking place in person, by phone, and by web, Chapter 6 explores “Powerful Delivery Options” including virtual delivery in both phone-based and web-based environments. This chapter includes a short self-assessment for you to check your readiness for virtual work.

Chapter 7 covers “Essential Elements for Your Own Group Coaching Program” including core items you will want to add to your toolkit, questions for group coaching and other resources. The chapter also includes lessons learned from group coaches in the field.

Chapter 8 covers the essential topic of “Marketing Your Group Coaching Program.” Without clients on the phone or in front of you, the most important ingredient for group coaching is missing. This chapter covers seven core areas of marketing including foundational marketing principles, claiming your niche, developing a powerful marketing message and creating a marketing strategy and plan. Specific considerations for marketing corporate group coaching is also included in this chapter.

Chapter 9 covers “Preparing for the Program—Systems and Logistics.” This chapter covers core business and program systems that will streamline your work, facilitating the entire program cycle—from design to marketing, registration, implementation, and evaluation. The chapter also covers core logistical tips and includes a group coaching checklist.

Coaches are often eager to learn from the past and avoid possible pitfalls in group coaching work. Chapter 10 covers “Implementation Tips and Pitfalls” to avoid in your group coaching work. Challenges faced by group coaches and suggestions from the field are also included.

This book would not be complete without the inclusion of group coaching exercises. The appendix includes a mini-toolbox of exercises for coaches and other practitioners to adapt for their own group coaching work.

For those interested in undertaking this work with a partner, or co-facilitator, you can download a bonus chapter

on Co-Facilitation by visiting
<http://www.groupcoachingessentials.com>.

This book is a starting point for a very diverse field. Add your voice to the diverse tapestry of group coaches around the world—visit the Group Coaching Ins and Outs blog at <http://groupcoaching.blogspot.com>.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS GROUP COACHING?

*A leader is best
When people barely know he exists,
Not so good when people obey and
acclaim him
Worse when they despise him,
But of a good leader, who talks little
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled
They will all say “We did it ourselves”*

— Lao Tse

THE CONTEXT

The time is now! The coaching industry generates approximately \$1.5 billion (all dollar amounts are in U.S. dollars unless otherwise noted) annually¹ with group coaching quickly gaining ground. The economic events that began in 2008 continue to make group coaching a pronounced growth area for clients.

Group coaching is still a young profession as can be seen in the ICF Global Coaching Survey² estimated that there are approximately 30,000 active coaches. A majority of coaches has been operating for fewer than ten years.

When asked about their coaching specialties, 58.1 percent indicated that their specialty involved leadership, 57.8

percent indicated executive coaching, and 53.6 percent indicated business or organizational issues.

In 2007, \$139.39 billion was spent by U.S. organizations on employee learning and development. Two-thirds or \$83.62 billion was spent on the internal learning function, including staff salaries, and internal development costs. One-third, or \$50.77 billion, was spent on workshops, vendors, and external events.³

Throughout this chapter we will explore:

1. Is group coaching for you?
2. The diversity of group coaching—models for group coaching
3. What group coaching can look like—virtual/in person and corporate/public
4. Why group coaching is even more important today
5. Continuum of group processes: coaching, training, facilitation, and retreats
6. What is the role of the group coach?

You will meet and hear from other group coaches undertaking this work with their clients while reading through this book.

WHAT IS GROUP COACHING?

Fusing together principles, skills, and practices from the realm of group development, coaching, and facilitation, group coaching can be defined as follows:

Group coaching—a small-group process throughout which there is the application of coaching principles for the

purposes of personal or professional development, the achievement of goals, or greater self-awareness, along thematic or non-thematic lines.

—Jennifer Britton, MES, CPT, CPCC, *Potentials Realized*

Ginger Cockerham, MCC (creator of the “Power of Groups”), defines group coaching as:

a facilitated group process that is led by a professional coach and formed with the intention of maximizing the combined energy, experience, and wisdom of individuals who chose to join in order to achieve organizational objectives and/or individual goals.

Grounded in coaching processes and skills, group coaching utilizes core coaching skills and competencies, while adapting skills and approaches from facilitation and training.

The International Coach Federation (ICF) defines coaching as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.”

The ICF continues, “Coaching honors the client as the expert in his/her life and work, and believes that every client is creative, resourceful, and whole.

“Standing on this foundation, the coach’s responsibility is to:

- Discover, clarify, and align with what the client wants to achieve;
- Encourage client self-discovery;
- Elicit client-generated solutions and strategies; and
- Hold the client responsible and accountable.”

Source: www.coachfederation.com/find-a-coach/what-is-coaching/

Over the past two decades I've worn an array of hats—manager, facilitator, trainer, coach and performance improvement specialist—as I have engaged with groups throughout the learning process. Over the last six years, in fusing coaching with my other approaches, I have seen even greater impact in our work together. Supporting hundreds of coaches in acquiring group coaching skills has led me to identify core skills and approaches which make great group coaches.

I believe that *great* group coaches bring to their profession solid group facilitation skills, as well as mastery of core coaching skills and approaches. They create a solid and intimate connection with their groups, and listen for what the participants want is important to them, so that the group's agenda is respected. Great group coaches adopt their style and approach based on the different needs, creating the space for clients to learn from each other and share experiences is paramount in the group coaching process.

Most significantly, group coaches distinguish themselves from other group facilitators with their strong focus on having the client identify and take action on their goals. A key priority for group coaches is to hold the space for clients *to be accountable* for taking steps in achieving their goals and *integrating their learning* to their “real life” and work. It is this focus on making the learning and results stick that drew me to coaching years ago, and continues to be a primary focus and driver in my work.

As we will see later in this chapter, group coaching exists along a continuum of group processes, including training (workshops, retreats), facilitation, and other group processes. Coaches will find that they sit on different places

along the continuum, heavily influenced by what the client wants. Some programs will be more *pure* group coaching than others. The continuum is offered as a foundational principle, which we will continue to revisit throughout the book.

THE DIVERSITY OF GROUP COACHING—IN PERSON, VIRTUAL, CORPORATE, AND PUBLIC

In her interview for this book, Suzee Eibling, the coordinator of the Coach U Group Coaching SIG, commented on the tremendous diversity that exists within the coaching profession around what's offered to both individuals and group coaching. Throughout the book you will hear directly from a dozen coaches about the group coaching programs they offer, as well as their insights on what makes this work successful and rewarding. The sections "In the Spotlight" include spotlights and comments from group coaches undertaking this work.

Group coaching is occurring in corporations, small businesses, government programs, and with the general public, either as intact groups or groups of strangers coming together. Gaining significant ground in North America, group coaching is also taking root across Europe and Australasia.

Regardless of the themes groups are coached around, at its simplest distinction, programs may be in person or virtual. Chapter 6 of this book provides you with more information on the considerations for group coaching programs in virtual environments.

What Does Group Coaching Look Like?

As you may have guessed, group coaching can take a number of forms. Group coaching is becoming just as diverse as clients' needs and preferences are.

Throughout this book, we are going to explore a number of case studies—programs that take place in person and those that take place virtually (by phone or web). We will also explore the work of coaches and programs that are delivered in organizational settings, as well as those marketed publicly to individuals who then form a group.

In-Person Programs

In-person group coaching programs may include:

- A one-hour drop-in session with different participants each week, where clients are coached on specific themes or topics;
- A six-hour program delivered over the course of several weeks or months in smaller modules (i.e., one-hour sessions) to the same participants;
- An evening group coaching program; or
- A one- to five-day intensive group coaching program.

From Experience: In-Person Female Entrepreneur Group Coaching

One of my favorite group coaching programs that I both developed and delivered was a series of group coaching programs for small business owners. As part of a nine-month government-funded program for new female entrepreneurs, I was invited to launch the first two weeks of the program several years ago. For ten consecutive business days I met the women for a three-hour group coaching session.

I was asked by the program coordinator to launch this intensive nine-month program by coaching the group and setting a positive learning foundation. We had thirty hours to create and move through a very powerful business development program using a group coaching approach. Over the span of those two weeks, the women and I explored topics such as strengths, values, the wheel of life, work-life, and time management, as well as core business areas such as business vision and planning. Having been given *carte blanche* from the program coordinator, I was able to really bring in a wide variety of approaches and coaching tools. We had small group discussions, large group discussions, assessments, and visualizations, and we kept journals. Each afternoon, I designed the next session from where we had left off in the morning with the questions and priorities. The group's feedback at the end of the session as well as the check-ins the next morning iteratively pointed us to the next topic.

This experience allowed me to truly clarify the difference between using a training and coaching approach. It also allowed me to experiment with many of the core coaching tools in a small group environment. Looking back almost four years later, more than 90 percent of these women are still self-employed, a much higher statistic than the norm.

Practically, the experience of working with two separate groups of female entrepreneurs allowed me to adapt much of the material that I was using as a business faculty member and lecturer for the group coaching context. This experience also created the foundation for the 90 Day BizSuccess Group Coaching™ program that I now offer quarterly to business owners globally, in a virtual format.

So, what are other coaches doing in person?



In the Spotlight: Jill MacFadyen, MSIR, ACC **(www.careercoachjill.com)**

Jill MacFadyen, a career coach, writes the following about her group coaching programs in the nonprofit sector:

I offer an in person two-day group coaching program on how to get a new job. It covers dealing with transition issues; identifying values; visioning the future; writing a resumé; job search techniques; writing cover letters; networking; interviewing; and salary negotiation. It is very interactive and energetic. It runs from 9:00 to 4:30 over a two-day time span. Ideally, there would be a week in between the two sessions.

I also offer a two-hour in person coaching program on any of the topics mentioned above.

JB: Who are your participants/clients? What do they value the most from your programs?

JM: My clients have been local nonprofit agencies. Participants are those looking for a new position. Frequently, they are people who have been laid off. On a personal level, participants have mentioned that they feel empowered and energized afterwards.

JB: What have been the successes of this program?

JM: Clients develop job search skills. We practice in the session and this increases self-confidence. Some who have been in a rut have learned techniques to re-energize their search.

Virtual Programs

In addition to in-person programs, many coaches develop group coaching programs which are delivered virtually—by phone and/or web to clients around the world. Virtual programs might include:

- A one-off group call;
- A monthly group call held with the same participants each month (1 to 1½ hours per session);
- A six-week program delivered weekly by phone (one hour) to a group of eight participants around a common theme;
- A twelve-week program which meets every other week with assigned work in between; or
- A ninety-day program, delivered as both group calls and email support;
- A blended program of two group calls per month, and one individual coaching call between sessions.

From Experience—Needing to Virtualize

Almost a year into my starting my business I gave birth to my son. I quickly realized that I did not want to continue traveling to deliver programs to teams and groups either locally or around the world. At the same time, I needed to keep revenue coming in to support my growing family. This was enough to push me to look at how I could take my in person offerings virtual, which at the time, revolved around work-life issues, leadership, training issues, and business development issues. The trial-and-error process I undertook during that first intensive year of converting all of my offerings to a virtual format has informed a lot of this book.

As you will see throughout this book, group coaching can be a very powerful vehicle for connecting clients around the world. As a former global manager myself, there is nothing more exciting than having participants from five or six different countries and time zones all on the same group coaching call. The diversity of perspectives, insights, and “ahas!” are greater than we could ever create in an in person environment with the same effort.



**In the Spotlight: Victoria FittsMilgrim,
CPCC (www.truelifecoach.net)**

Sovereignty Circles is a group coaching program which I offer over a six-month period. It includes group calls twice a month, and a private thirty-minute coaching call once a month. For a full description, please visit www.truelifecoach.net/sovcircles.htm.

JB: Who are your participants/clients? What do they value the most from your programs?

VFM: My clients so far for group coaching have all been women looking for tools to increase self-awareness, self-care, and living as the Sovereign in charge of their own lives. I believe they value:

- The coaching tools I provide to unveil who they are to themselves more fully;
- The connection with others—to see themselves in the mirror;
- The clarity about obstacles they generate internally and how to overcome them.

JB: What have been your successes with group coaching?

VFM: With the Sovereignty Circles, I feel my success comes from creating a safe and loving space of acceptance to try new modes of *being* and *doing*. I have seen my clients grow and become more confident in this container to moving into authentic action towards their goals. My success comes when I facilitate a place to grow, learn, and take action in alignment with their true selves.

JB: What's the one tip you'd like to share with other coaches as your golden nugget (i.e., your most important lesson)?

VFM: Designing as many ways as possible for the group to interact, listen to each other, and connect even outside the scheduled calls (Yahoo! group, buddy system that rotates), all fosters more trust and openness among participants. This, in turn, makes the calls more lively and open, as people feel safe to be transparent. They can remove their masks.

Public/Corporate Programs

Another distinction I will make throughout the book is that groups may come together in corporate realms, or a group may consist of individual members who are initially strangers to each other. These groups I call public groups.

Corporate group coaching programs are increasingly becoming very popular. Lower in cost than traditional one-on-one coaching, group coaching programs get more employees involved and have the potential for greater impact. As we will see in Chapter 2, a group coaching