ARTFUL COACHING

Charles J. Palus

Artful coaching is a genre of practices and perspectives that applies abilities, media, and methods from or related to the arts to the coaching of managers, leaders, and other professionals. It works by enhancing the perception and meaningful reconstruction of developmental challenges and their solutions by coachees, using artful media such as stories, metaphors, and images; body language and movement; self-narratives and scenarios; and the material context of artifacts and environments.

Several characteristics describe the process, content, and implementation of artful coaching:

- Artful coaching is not a stand-alone approach; rather, it is typically combined into a diverse repertoire of coaching methods. Artful coaching is especially effective in promoting synthesis, that is, at helping the coachee perceive and assemble large amounts of input in ways that build coherence and meaning. Thus, artful coaching is complementary to analytical methods such as assessments and 360-degree feedback.
- Artful methods can be practiced by leader coaches in one-on-one situations and in groups. Basic competence as a leader coach is assumed in much
of the discussion in this chapter, although some of the perspectives and tools can be applied without prior formal experience as a coach.

- Artful coaching, like other coaching forms, aims to improve the coachee’s performance, learning, and development.
- Artful coaching is about bringing the whole self to the coaching experience and engaging the whole self of the coachee. Artful media typically allow people to bring more of their experience, intuitions, and wisdom to bear on developmental challenges.
- Artful coaching does not necessarily have to be used in difficult situations or for deeper or more complex issues. Leader coaches can use it at various levels and with varying degrees of skill and sophistication.

This chapter describes the history and characteristics of artful coaching and the drivers for it. It outlines three levels of artful coaching, discusses the relationship of artful coaching to the CCL coaching framework, and ends with some cautions and tips for coaches interested in using these techniques. (The term artful coaching is used by the Adler School of Professional Coaching and predates my use of the term. Our meanings are compatible. I use it as an umbrella for a family of perspectives and practices. The Adler School of Professional Coaching uses it in more specific ways as part of a certification process.)

**About Artful Coaching**

Artful coaching as an explicit topic is newly emergent (two organizations exploring it are the Adler School and The Banff Centre), yet it has its roots in well-tested practices in counseling and therapy (Bandtler & Grinder, 1975; Eriksen, 1998; Perls, 1992) and is related to recent insights about creative leadership (Palus & Horth, 2002) and management amid uncertainty and complexity (Nissley, 2002; Vaill, 1989).

The media and methods of artful coaching fall into six basic categories:

- Creating, perceiving, and interpreting images such as drawings and photographs
- Making, telling, and listening to stories
- Becoming aware of and crafting metaphors
• Dialogue around artifacts from people's work and personal lives, including their creative endeavors
• Becoming aware of and crafting the environments in which coaching occurs
• Becoming aware of and reshaping body movement, posture, kinesthetics, and voice

Why this particular list? First, it's what effective coaches who work consciously with artful methods say they use. Second, this list includes most of the artistic media available to us in our work and social lives for making meaning out of our opportunities and predicaments—what Eric Booth (1997) calls "the everyday work of art."

As an example of how artful coaching techniques integrate with the coaching process, consider the case of Chris:

Chris is the director of a corporate research center specializing in advanced polymers used in consumer products. Because of rapid changes in the industry, Chris's company has tried to become a learning organization, and Chris's role has come to include the coaching of his direct reports in ways that emphasize participative leadership and shared learning.

It is time for performance appraisals, and Chris sits down with Ki-Hun, a senior scientist. Ki-Hun is Korean and one of the many professionals in the organization for whom English is a second language, which adds cross-cultural issues to the complexity of the work. To prepare for the meeting, they have reviewed Ki-Hun's objectives and accomplishments for the year (part of a Management-by-Objectives system the organization uses). In spite of Ki-Hun's many achievements for the year, neither of them is happy with the performance appraisal process, finding it stilted and somehow unable to capture the highs and lows of Ki-Hun's contributions and motivations. Language and culture differences also seem to get in the way.

This time, Chris tries a different approach. After looking at the MBO forms, Chris pulls out a box of diverse images clipped from Web sites and magazines. He says, "Ki-Hun, I feel that there are a lot of important things about your work and your role that we aren't getting at with this list of objectives. What do you think? How about if we each pick several pictures that somehow represent the positive things about your work this year, and several more that get at your frustrations this year? Then we'll share the pictures we each picked and talk about them." The ensuing conversation flows freely and is surprisingly candid. They laugh a lot, especially when Ki-Hun admits he felt like "this fat goat" when his project tied up the electron microscope for a month without anything to show for it.
Chris was being an artful coach when he brought out the box of images and changed the nature of their dialogue. He was able to say some tough things to Ki-Hun, while also expressing in a vivid way his perception that Ki-Hun was potentially a star performer. And Ki-Hun remembered for a long time afterward the picture Chris chose of an eagle in flight and what it meant to be a star performer who is somewhat isolated from his peers.

Why Artful Coaching?

Why would a leader coach engage in artful coaching? For Chris, it was because he was dissatisfied with the limits of formulaic, management-oriented procedures as applied to human relationships. And there are many other drivers to using artful coaching for leader development. Successful artful coaches report six basic categories of drivers:

- Supporting desirable leadership qualities
- Creativity and innovation
- Information processing
- Whole-person functioning
- Rapport
- An expanded coaching repertoire

Any single artful coaching intervention typically is done with several of these acting in concert.

Supporting Desirable Leadership Qualities

Artful coaching addresses many qualities and competencies that are desirable in leaders. “Business leaders have much more in common with artists . . . and other creative thinkers” (Zaleznik, 1977). For example, good leaders tell stories, and they are astute listeners of other people’s stories. Thus, it seems natural that coaching should use storytelling as a way to create and apply insight. Leadership is also about creating vision, grasping and communicating scenarios, and painting the big picture.
Creativity and Innovation

Artful coaching fosters creativity and innovation in coachees. This often includes an organizational competency aspect and a personal aspect. Many organizations cite creativity as a desirable competency and yet have few means for building it. Artful coaches assume that everyone is creative in a significant way and that they can find a foundation for further creativity development if they look in the right places. Thus, a productive line for coaching to take is to explore the coachee’s inner resources for creativity and apply those to dilemmas in work and life. Many coachees are in some sense stuck or experiencing some sort of threshold that may benefit from a more creative approach.

Information Processing

During a coaching engagement, the coach and coachee deal with huge amounts of potentially relevant information, including diverse sources of data, observations, emotions, and knowledge. Much of this is implicit rather than explicit, intuitively accessed, and subject to blind spots and other kinds of misperception (Nonaka, Takeuchi, & Takeuchi, 1995). The techniques described in this chapter can be enormously helpful in placing knowledge in context. The use of metaphor, for example, is often used in coaching to surface implicit knowledge and to see connections. Human beings naturally assimilate meaning from stories more effectively than from piles of data. One way to understand art is that it is how people create meaningful themes and patterns within turbulent streams of information.

Whole-Person Functioning

People in organizations typically draw on a narrow part of their skills and abilities, to the detriment of their developing adaptability and resilience. Coaching addresses the whole person. Artful coaching supports that process by giving coachees the chance to draw on resources they might otherwise keep out of sight and to connect all of those resources in a developmental, transformational way.
Rapport

Coaches practice artful coaching to enhance rapport with coachees. This means being attuned to subtleties like use of language, hidden talents, body language, and contextual clues about underlying issues. Once attuned in these ways, the coach can steer the coaching in ways that feel authentic to the coachee.

An Expanded Coaching Repertoire

Leader coaches can derive great satisfaction in expanding their repertoires to include artful coaching techniques. These practices let the coach move beyond narrow, analytical approaches. In working with their coachees, leader coaches can themselves learn to be more creative and whole, able to process large amounts of complex information.

Practicing Artful Coaching

How does a coach build artful coaching into his or her everyday coaching with direct reports? The three-level stepwise approach detailed in Table 10.1 offers a useful path. These levels were derived from my interviewing artful coaches with different levels of experience and expertise (Palus, 2004) and from research on the practices of creative leaders (Palus & Horth, 2002). There is a consistently identified starting place for creative work of many kinds, and for artful coaching that place, level 1, is paying attention. That sounds simple but it’s not. Artful coaches and creative leaders consistently point out the difficulty in adequately paying attention (perceiving, noticing, apprehending) in complex interpersonal settings such as developmental coaching. These coaches and leaders turn to various forms of art as a partial defense against the enemies of careful attention: stereotyping, boredom, snap judgment, and overanalytical detachment.

As coaches move from paying attention to using tools, they move into level 2 artful coaching. Coaches make this move often because they are looking for a creative response to regaining momentum in a coaching initiative. The choice of tool is highly individualistic: some coaches seem especially drawn to photography, for example, others adopt storytelling, and others explore techniques related to using metaphor. For the leader coach who is aware
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TABLE 10.1. THREE LEVELS OF ARTFUL COACHING.
of these techniques, selecting a tool often requires reflection: What is my art? What artistic media do I enjoy using or appreciate? What artistic approaches do I have talent for? What kind of art often gives me new insights?

At level 3, coaches typically attain mastery by discovering or inventing a set of artful tools in a particular domain and deepening their knowledge about how to use them and where they can lead. In almost every case, such coaches come to value the transformative potential in working with an artistic sensibility; and they choose to master some domain in order to effect transformation more adeptly. Coaches working at this level often have a history of personal passion for their chosen media and a history of risk taking; they might even test their skills with coachees. Master artful coaches grow into their unique expert practices, which include storytelling, metaphor work, voice development, designing creative environments, and other practices.

**Level 1: Paying Attention**

The first move in artful coaching is paying attention, which is a close cousin to the skills of observing and attending that are foundational components of coaching. Of course, everyone pays attention. What’s at issue here is how and to what one pays attention. Artful coaching expands and deepens attentive possibilities for the coach and coachee. Artful coaches and their coachees attend to artful media in specific ways, and artful coaches also pay attention to the same things all good leader coaches pay attention to: assessment data and interpretive formulas, behaviors, emotional tenor, nonverbal behaviors, competencies, personality, and goals, for example.

Many forces operate in everyday life to narrow and dim our attention, such as pressures to make snap judgments (Edwards, 1989) and blind spots produced by stress and anxiety (Goleman, 1985). Both coach and coachee tend to see what’s in front of them through lenses created from the mental models they carry with them (those formed out of culture, for example, or from personal values). Artful coaches deliberately work to make their own and their coachees’ attention accommodate multiple perspectives, with the purpose of making it deeper and ultimately more accurate.

What coaches pay special attention to are coachees and their contexts and challenges. The premise of artful coaching is that coachees and their challenges are composed and revealed in significant ways by use of artful media. Thus, artful coaches pay special attention to the stories coachees tell and to
the metaphors and imagery they use. They pay special attention to the environment of the coachee and to artifacts from life and work. They pay attention to the physical being of the coachee, including how he or she moves and speaks. Finally, they attend to the gestalt or overall unity of how these media are used by the coachee in "composing a life" (Bateson, 1989).

One of the main benefits of art—making it as well as viewing it—is that it can invite the best of our powers of perception. Harvard University's David Perkins has studied how the discipline of looking at art can discipline the way we think within the broader territories of life and work (1994). He identifies four principles of paying attention characteristic of what he calls "the intelligent eye"—ways of looking at art that transfer to intelligent ways of looking at people, things, and experiences in the world:

* Give looking time.
* Make your looking broad and adventurous.
* Make your looking clear and deep.
* Make your looking organized.

These principles accurately describe how effective artful coaches pay attention to the six categories of media described at the start of this chapter, separately and combined, while working with coachees. When paying attention to complex, meaningful subjects—whether works of art or the work and lives of the people you coach—following these four principles can help you see better and think better. For leader coaches just starting to delve into artistic techniques, it’s helpful if they think of Perkins's principles as a sequence or cycle. With practice, they become a set of attitudes that overlap each other and pervade every moment. Let’s look at them one at a time and how they build on one another:

* **Give looking time.** Typical managerial attention is rapid-fire and staccato. Good managers zero in, judge and act, and quickly move on. But good managing is not the same as good coaching. A key to artful coaching is regularly slowing down and lingering over the nuances of things that at first glance may be familiar, boring, complacent, or painful.

Almost anything that people can hold in their hands and examine is potentially a good vehicle for slowing looking. Something tangible that invites close examination counters the disposition to take a quick read and move on.
For example, coaches know that detailed reports from feedback instruments can slow down attention in positive ways. In the previous story of Chris and Ki-Hun, a collection of images and a process of finding meaningful ones amid all the others and looking at the details slowed a difficult conversation and invited deeper insights.

Pay attention to what your coachee keeps in his or her office. One coach interviewed for this chapter describes using objects this way: “I pay attention to the physical objects I see when I enter. If we get stuck in the data or run into tough feedback, I pull out of it and comment on what I see around me. I might ask, ‘What’s that object? Where did it come from?’ It might seem to them as random, or a tension breaker—but I am looking for another avenue into who they are and what they are about.”

- *Make your looking broad and adventurous.* One of the pitfalls of coaching is that if you let the process become too formulaic, you can omit possible solutions for developmental challenges. This happens if you are coaching an individual and ignore parts of who he or she is and what this person can do, or when working with a group and too narrowly define the problem and the available resources. This is part of what the CCL framework means when it says to assess the person and the context. There is pressure in some organizations to narrow in on a list of competencies and behaviors in the name of focus and efficiency. Therefore, one of the moves of an artful coach is to make looking broad and adventurous and to admit the possibility of surprise.

- *Make your looking clear and deep.* This principle involves focusing, asking probing questions about what you are seeing, and forming and testing hypotheses. “Time and broad thinking can still just skim the surface,” Perkins says, and we need to pursue lines of inquiry by which to see into the image, artifact, or other object.

Most leader coaches try to see clearly and deeply when looking at various kinds of assessment data. In artful coaching, they would extend this same kind of rational scrutiny to a different kind of information. They might, for example, ask coachees to bring to a coaching session mementos of some time and place in their lives when they felt truly creative or when they experienced the roots of their own leadership. By making time to tell stories about these mementos, the leader coach encourages a dialogue that often becomes broad and adventurous. The leader coach can provoke deeper attention by asking specific, rational questions:
“Why is this picture glass cracked, and when did it happen?”
“Who made this? Where did you learn how to do this?”
“Who are the people standing with your father in this photograph? What year and place is it?”
“What happened on the project after you received this award? Why?”
“And why was that?”
“Okay, and why was that?”

(“Asking why five times” is a technique that helps make attention clear and deep.)

- **Make your looking organized.** Leader coaches can develop comprehensive strategies for organizing their attention in order to direct it and integrate the results for the benefit of the coachee. A desirable outcome of paying attention is that separate perceptions cohere into a whole and take on added significance. This principle employs dual, integrated approaches to coherence: topical and emergent. Topical approaches use categories to cover all the territory of interest. An example of a topical approach is the five-part developmental planning model of career, self, family, community, and spirit (Sternbergh & Weitzel, 2001). CCL’s leader development framework (assessment, challenge, and support) is another example. In practice, such a topical structure might provoke a leader coach to ask such questions as, How does the coachee adequately perceive his or her support network? How does he or she map it? How does he or she imagine it changing?

An emergent approach to coherence focuses on the gestalt, the configuration or pattern of elements so intertwined and unified that the properties of the whole can’t be adequately captured by simply summing up its parts. Artful coaches pay attention directly to the coachee as a complex but unified whole person. As a leader coach, that means becoming immersed in all of the information and context surrounding the coachee and attempting to perceive the whole picture—the gestalt—directly or intuitively.

A leader coach interviewed for this chapter describes how she organizes her looking using the data at hand, before meeting the coachee for the first time: “I wait for a sense of the gestalt of the person to frame itself in my mind. It often comes with an intuitive sense of the connections among the issues they express, their biographical information, their key attributes, and the subtle
patterns in their behavior. I have a sense of unreadiness to begin the coaching process until I get that sense of the gestalt.”

Leader coaches take their first steps in paying attention themselves, without actively engaging the coachee’s attention. But they soon find their way toward actively shaping their coachee’s attention. At that point, coaching becomes a collaboration of attention between coach and coachee (and can even encompass groups, teams, and entire organizations). One leader coach from the Netherlands describes the kind of collaborative attention that is possible:

If I am sitting in a person’s office, I talk about what they have in the office. I was with somebody who has lots of wooden pieces in his office. It turns out that he is working for a wood technology institute. He is accustomed to working with wood. He also has sailing pictures in his office. Later I asked him, in the context of his career: “If you changed course one degree, where would you go?” At the start of a coaching conversation, even though we work together, I tell my background and ask theirs. I ask, “Do you have any hobbies?” Things in their hobbies are interesting. Take this as a start. Then you have a relationship, and later you can compare work to hobbies.

Level 1 of artful coaching is about paying attention in certain ways. It is an entry point, a sensible place to start an artful coaching engagement. The emphasis at this level is on reviewing certain kinds of media according to principles guiding the skillful perception of art. All leader coaches can use this approach without special tools. And after gaining some experience, they can add tools and move to level 2.

**Level 2: Tool Use**

The tools that leader coaches have available in a level 2 artful coaching practice are structures, processes, and devices. What sets this level apart from level 1 is that the coach is involved in choosing, naming, and shaping media in a structured and sustained way rather than only looking at it. At this level, the coachee realizes the coach is doing something different. Coachees may show some resistance because this step requires more vulnerability on their part (and from the coach).
At level 2, leader coaches need a certain amount of familiarity with the media, competency in techniques and the underlying principles, and knowledge of the tool itself. This chapter is only a tour of artful coaching tools. In practice, learning to use these tools happens through experience, much as artistry is learned—by apprenticeship, imitation, feedback, mistakes, and immersion in particular media. This section starts with a look at three principles behind tool use and tool invention. It then looks at a number of tools that artful coaches use and how coaches manage the coachee’s experience of those tools. It also explores in more depth the media within which the tools are used.

**Principles for Tool Use.** Four important principles of tool use for artful coaching are:

- Putting something in the middle
- Adapting to the circumstance
- Shared sense making and meaning making
- Serious play

*Putting Something in the Middle.* Dialogue is a form of conversation that allows underlying assumptions, meanings, and emotions to be surfaced in service of shared understanding and effective action. According to Peter Senge (1990), it’s one key to learning in organizations, and it is often cited as a feature of effective coaching (Marsick, 2002). Yet dialogue can be difficult to practice.

One way of enhancing dialogue is to have one or more tangible objects serve as a kind of conversation piece. There is enormous value in having something that can be seen and touched, held, examined, and passed around. Such objects carry meaning that can be symbolic, metaphorical, or literal—or all three. For example, a physical prototype of a product or process provides a centerpiece for a probing conversation. Likewise, images or personal mementos can be anchors for paying attention and scaffolds for fresh interpretations. We call this “mediated dialogue” (Palus & Drath, 2001), or “putting something in the middle.”

*Adapting to the Circumstance.* Nothing about artful coaching is a cookie-cutter or one-size-fits-all experience. Because these tools evoke hidden assumptions and deeper meanings, coaches must use them in ways that are responsive to what’s
happening in the room, with the coachees and their challenges. Consistent with CCL’s coaching principles, artful coaching centers on the coachee, not on the coach, and much depends on how coachees pick up the tool and where it takes them.

To deal with changing circumstances, artful coaches sometimes invent their own tools, but more often they adapt something they have used before. With experience, leader coaches can become increasingly improvisational and flexible in choosing and in applying tools as they adapt to the coaching experience.

**Shared Sense Making and Meaning Making.** The tools used in artful coaching help make complex information available to the physical senses—vision, hearing, and touch—and to the internal sensing of kinesthesia (“body sense”), emotions, and intuition. Adequate sensing is necessary for logical and reflective thinking (Kolb, 1984; McCarthy, 1996). This powerful combination of sensing plus reflection is what we call sense making—in other words, making sense of complexity (Palus & Horth, 2002; Weick, 1979). When people do it collaboratively, as in coaching, it is shared sense making.

Ultimately the tools used in artful coaching help to integrate the sense made of complex input into broader frames of meaning, such as values, vision, mission, morals, ethics, and spirit. This processing of information all the way from sensing into integrated, higher-order meaning is meaning making and is an essential component of leadership (Drath & Palus, 1994). Human beings share a drive toward meaning making above and beyond the mere compilation of information (Kegan, 1982). This principle addresses two partially incorrect and thus misleading stereotypes about using art in coaching. The first stereotype is that the main purpose of art is to express emotions. A related stereotype is that the main purpose of art is self-expression. Managers typically reject any process that stops at the mere expression of emotion or stops at self-expression without going on to address complex challenge in meaningful ways—a truer goal of artful coaching. Artful coaching is not window dressing, nor is it just an icebreaker or used for merely setting a creative mood.

**Serious Play.** This form of play helps people learn. Serious play involves putting something in the middle and then bending, testing, and exploring it, even to the point of having some fun (Gergen, 1991; Palus & Horth, 2002; Schrage, 2000). A coach interviewed for this chapter describes using a big paper desk
pad as a kind of playing field: “I want the coaching sessions I do to be playful work. I put data and ideas on the pad between us, in this neutral place, and we play with it until the person can take it in. If I were barreling numbers at them, they don’t get to that relaxed place. Having a neutral place to play in makes it easier to have humor. Then the humor is not located ‘in’ you, not directed ‘at’ the person, but rather it is in this neutral place. It is between us and becomes like a ballpark, like a bridge, like Switzerland.”

**Artful Coaching Media and Associated Tools.** The media introduced in this chapter are the ones artful coaches report as using to perceive, portray, explore, and reconstruct developmental challenge with their coachees: images, stories, metaphors, environments, artifacts, and body/kinesthetics, as well as the gestalt of all of these.

**Metaphor.** Metaphor has been called the foundation of all conscious thought (Jaynes, 1976) and the poetic basis of mind (Hillman, 1996). Such descriptions don’t necessarily mean much to busy managers whom leader coaches work with. The whole notion of metaphor transports some people back to school and grammar lessons. The coach might do best by not overexplaining the tool is but just using it. The fact is that metaphor is basic to human thought, and people use it more or less naturally, without much thought as to what it is or how it can be talked about.

In essence, metaphor is a comparison of one thing to another, and it acts as a springboard to new knowledge. A fruitful metaphor is one that propels people into fresh perspectives and insights and forms a scaffold for new behaviors (Erikson, 1998). Another helpful feature of metaphors is that they tend to travel well: people remember and communicate them because of their uniqueness and imagery. Coaches talk about metaphor as a friendly means of establishing rapport with a coachee. Metaphors often play a key rôle in invention and design and as such are called “generative metaphors” (Schön, 1983). The root meaning of the word metaphor is “moving across,” and metaphor tools are often used to get unstuck and depict transitions.

A useful kind of metaphor is a root metaphor, one that captures some aspect (not necessarily all) of a person’s identity, down to the roots (Horth, 1993). For example, a coach interviewed for this chapter describes working with a coachee who had lost a sense of who he was:
He had a high position. He was trying to be what other people wanted him to be. So I talked to him about what made him unique in the past. For him it was a passion for photography. So we began exploring his situation using photography as a metaphor: “What do you want in the foreground? What is lighted, and not lighted? What is in the background?” It opened a lot in our conversation. It was a nice way in. When you get a sense of what makes their heart sing and what makes them cool and unique, they want to stay with that. But often they have set that aside.

Some coaches take coachees through a process of forming metaphors for current state, transitional state, and future state. For example, one coach interviewed for this chapter often leads her coachees through a metaphor process she has created. She uses it only after there is a good level of trust, often when the coachee appears to be stuck. She offers it as a choice, and tells this story of its use:

Jack was a financial vice president at a large manufacturing organization. Having been a “hatchet man” at another company, he was brought in to streamline, flatten, and modernize accounting. Jack was very controlled, hyperrational, unemotional, and extremely private. People were afraid of him. He demanded compliance, and his people were kept at a distance.

So we started the metaphor process. His current metaphor was himself as God directing people to build the temple. In the same session we arrived at a metaphor for the future: himself as a bishop, among other bishops. In this image, the people were not quite as afraid, there was not as much distance, and he was getting more done.

Three months passed, and Jack was successful. He had been tapped to help them go international. In order to do that, he needed to be freed up from his first task of streamlining accounting. The middle managers were his greatest resistance, and he needed their buy-in. So I did another metaphor in the sequence, which I call *next future*. His next metaphor was himself as a basketball coach. He said, “Now I see myself on the sidelines. I love seeing the team perform in the moment. We have practiced, and they can do it.” I asked him to “find some things that will remind you of this new basketball image.” He wound up with a basketball in his office. Later I did a survey on people with whom I did this kind of metaphor
work. Jack said he thought about his metaphor every day, and that the metaphor had been very influential for him reaching his goals.

**Images.** Artful coaches often use images as the something-in-the-middle to support dialogue with individuals and groups. Recall the earlier case of Ki-Hun’s performance appraisal: a variety of printed images provided material to slow the conversation, provide a favorable medium, and focus on hard-to-express topics. Images used in coaching include photographs, schematics, drawings, collage, paintings, video, and maps. To bolster its power as a coaching tool, use an image that is tangible to eye and hand so you and your coachee can handle it, examine it, return to it after a while, and so on. Some coaches work with mental imagery but reinforce it with a tangible object.

The notion of drawing is readily accepted by many coachees. For example, people with science and technical backgrounds are used to sketching all kinds of things. A coach from the United Kingdom interviewed for this chapter said, “Many managers in the U.K. are used to drawing, and to the idea of ‘sketch that out for me, give me a visual.’ It’s used a lot in action learning.”

Almost everybody can and does draw using some mode or other. Talent or skill in drawing is not an issue. Simple stick figures, graphs and flowcharts, or just impressionistic doodles can all play a part as image tools. Artful coaches tend to keep paper, sticky notes, pencils, and markers at hand. Returning often to drawing pads, white boards, and easel sheets during a coaching session can uncover useful modes of visual representation and shared sense making between the coachee and the coach. A coach interviewed for this chapter describes how he attends to his coachee’s drawing and uses it as a springboard to deeper insight: “How things relate to each other is interesting in a drawing. I am interested in their experience—strong lines or weak, the mood of the drawing. What’s happening to them in it? And then what shifts as they draw? What images do they use?”

Sometimes working with images can be as simple as saying to a coachee, “Tell me what image you have of that situation. What does it look like? Imagine what happens next. Imagine there were no barriers, and tell me what happens next.”

Metaphors chosen by coachees can be made into tangible pictures or objects. One coach interviewed for this chapter uses a metaphor process to help her coachees picture a current state, future state, and transitional state. She
uses a professional artist to render images of the coachee’s metaphors. At the coaching session, the coachee reviews the images to see how well they match the metaphor. Once perfected, these artistically rendered images become touchstones to the coaching engagement.

Stories. Effective leaders tell stories. This means three things for coaches. First, coachees have an underlying propensity to tell stories. By evoking these stories and paying attention to them, coaches have a way into a coachee’s worldview and the language he or she uses to express it—a window onto the person and context. Second, leaders listen to and generally remember stories, so a repertoire of good stories is invaluable for a coach. Finally, getting coached in the art of storytelling is a valid undertaking for many coachees because it makes them more effective in leader roles.

One coach interviewed for this chapter makes a useful distinction between pull stories and push stories. She defines the use of a pull story as a way to help the coachee reflect, in a sense, pulling the story out of himself or herself and experiences as a way of remembering and understanding. A push story is designed to have an impact out in the world, as if the coachee were pushing an idea into a new arena.

Almost every artful coaching tool described in this chapter pulls for stories. Any time the leader coach points to an object, image, metaphor, or artifact and asks the coachee, “Tell me more about what you mean by that,” the result is storytelling. But that’s just half of the tool. The other half is listening to the story with close attention. Doug Lipman (1999) describes some important questions that ultimately should anchor the listening as well as the telling of a story: Where exactly in this story do I respond emotionally? What are those emotions? What are the images that stand out for me?

Steve Denning (2004), a former executive at the World Bank, adds another question to these: What are the key messages in the story that you intend as the teller or that you receive as a listener? He argues that push storytelling is “the only thing that worked . . . [for] persuading a group of managers or front-line staff in a large organization to get enthusiastic about a major change.”

Environment. Level 2 artful coaches go beyond paying close attention to the environment and actively shape and use the environment as a source of support for the coaching process. One coach interviewed for this chapter refers to the
power of the environment as “the place as coach.” Think of the coaching environment in terms of three categories of places where coaching sessions are conducted: my (the coach’s) place, your (the coachee’s) place, and the third place.

Level 2 artful coaches often put a lot of thought into the design of their own place for conducting coaching sessions. In no small measure, the coach’s place is designed to help the coach be centered and confident in the course of difficult work. The coach’s place is also set up to send a deliberate message to the coachee: the place (and, by extension, the coaching relationship) is safe, inviting, private, warm, interesting, thoughtfully prepared, and comfortable. These qualities are often held in tension with other qualities that suggest development: the coach’s place is not the equivalent of business as usual but may express creativity and offer the possibility of expansion into a larger or unfamiliar territory.

The second category of coaching environment is the coachee’s place. A level 2 coach will actively seek to understand the coachee’s environment, paying attention to the details and the gestalt, and then bringing this awareness into the content and process of the coaching. There is a lot a coach can learn from and expand on in a coachee’s place. For example, a coach interviewed for this chapter talks about a particular coachee’s place and how she used it in coaching sessions:

It was important for me to see this coachee in her own space. When I came for our appointment, she had me wait in a guest office. Her former boss had used the office in a similar fashion, and a lot of his belongings were still sitting out. I confronted her about this: “Why do you have this stuff? It’s as if he is still here. How does this affect you?” One of her issues was that this boss had squelched her and kept her in a subordinate position. I also gave her the feedback that her office looked very nonexecutive, with piles of stuff all around, as if she were overburdened and didn’t delegate. We got a lot of insight from this line of discussion, and as a result, she streamlined her office and put in more visuals relevant to her own corporation. Then she renovated the guest space for group gatherings. As a result, more people came to her space for meetings, and she was able to show her new look to others.

The last category of coaching environment might be called the “third place”: a place that is not the quarters of either coach or coachee but is chosen because it offers fresh sources of inspiration and insight into the coaching
process. In the same way that groups and teams often retreat from the organization's site to seek new ideas, so a coach and coachee can move to a new environment to encourage the facilitation of new thinking and behaviors. Level 2 and level 3 artful coaches typically are mindful and deliberate about the choice of such third places and the objectives in going there.

Another coach interviewed for this chapter describes the possibilities in having a leisurely meal with a coachee in an interesting restaurant: “In many cultures outside the United States, it may be impolite to do any coaching without having food first. It is a traditional setting for getting to know one another. The setting of the meal offers a chance to relax and take different perspectives. It creates possibilities—with different courses, we can change subjects. And there is a beginning and end, and that is good too.”

**Artifacts.** Level 2 artful coaches invite dialogue with coachees by soliciting various kinds of artifacts into the middle of the dialogue, where the artifacts become the objects of shared sense making. Previously I discussed how an artifact can be the physical embodiment, reminder, and model of a larger story.

A typical level 2 coaching technique is to ask the coachee to come to a coaching session with some artifact of his or her own creativity from the present or past. If the coachee pleads that she isn’t creative, the coach can ask her to bring something that is a memento of a time when she made something with a special level of quality or pride of workmanship. Inevitably, the coachee brings something that invites exploration and depth of insight.

One coach talks about making bridges from a personal or even private creative pursuit into another realm of their lives where they are looking for a breakthrough: “Sometimes I say to a coachee that one area of creativity helps another—and their eyes light up.” Specific artifacts thus can be seen as tangible parts of and pathways into some larger whole in the life of the coachee, such as creative ability, leadership style, work life, career, or personality.

**Body Movement and Kinesthetics.** Artful coaches at level 2 typically practice deliberate awareness of their own as well as their coachee’s physical and emotional being. The physical body is not only a source of information, but an arena for change when the awareness is made explicit in the coaching relationship.

One coach interviewed for this chapter cultivates an awareness of the physical presence of her coachee and frankly brings that awareness into the relationship: “This person I was coaching looked always ready to leave. His
whole vibe was 'I want to get out of here.' I told him directly, 'I observe that when you come into the room, you slouch. You lean way back in your chair, and you act slightly bored. You don't carry yourself like the others in this company.' So then I had him move his body and feet differently. We practiced what it is like to sit in a state of relaxed attention."

Level 2 coaches often use guided imagery to deepen rapport and help coachees slow down, relax, and allow their imaginations to open up. One coach, after establishing a trusting relationship with her coachee, uses her own body movement and voice to achieve this state with the coachee:

At this point, I am using an easy, soothing rhythm in my voice. I borrow some of their words and phrases. I pattern my voice on their own rhythms but usually slow it down and even it out. Posture-wise, I also match them but again tending toward slowness and relaxation. When they [begin to relax], you can see it in their faces. Their pace of speech will slow down; they use more silence and more pauses; their voice is quieter; their posture goes relaxed; they stop fidgeting and settle down. Breathing is deeper, maybe a yawn or sigh. They may stop intensively looking you in the eye as they are accessing their imagination.

**Level 3: Mastery**

Level 3 indicates a high degree of mastery in one or more of the six artful coaching media. Coaches working at this level are adept, innovative, and comfortable in their chosen media and can adapt a variety of tools in the moment to the needs of the coachee. There are many routes to mastery, but level 3 coaches consciously test and extend the limits of their own particular art without losing their learning orientation.

Level 3 coaching has two important aspects based in the masterful engagement of artful media: (1) appreciative inquiry (creating a positive integration of the past and a generative vision of the future) and (2) world making (transforming the core meanings by which the individual or group perceives and acts).

Appreciative inquiry is an approach to learning and change that emphasizes the leveraging of strengths and aspirations rather than focusing on problems and deficits (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). Level 3 coaches often report that the exploration of a coachee's special talents is a route to profound insight.
and growth. Such special talents in people are inevitably expressions of artistry—of levels of expression, composition, and execution, aesthetically informed, that go far beyond mere technique. But many people are unaware of the nature of their own artistry, and so its contribution to their lives and work is less than it could be.

Level 3 coaches often use artful media to help their coachees transform their personal and social reality. We understand this as world making: viewing, engaging, and constructing reality in more effective and satisfying ways through the invention and use of symbol systems and artistic modes of representation (Goodman, 1978). Level 3 artful coaches collaborate with their coachees to remake their personal and organizational worlds.

As an example of level 3 coaches engaged in appreciative inquiry and world making, consider the case of the Medic Inn as reported by Barrett and Cooperrider (2001). The authors were coach consultants to the senior team of this 380-room hotel complex. The team had to reinvent its work after being acquired by a health care center and receiving a new mission: to become a four-star hotel. The organization had the technical skills to pull this off, but they were riven by long-standing interpersonal and interdepartmental conflicts. The senior team had sunk into pessimism and cynicism and lacked any positive vision for how it might succeed. But instead of problem solving, the coaches saw that the task was “to break out of the current frame altogether.”

In what they call the Generative Metaphor Intervention Process, the coaches combined appreciative inquiry and world making in a four-step process. The first step was a journey into metaphor. In this case the coaches proposed the metaphor: the Tremont Hotel, a successful four-star hotel. Attention was thus temporarily pulled away from their obvious predicaments and into “conversations that resonated with a sense of excitement, adventure, and positive anticipation about the journey to come.” Step 2 was poeticizing the world. The team (after much preparation) spent five days at the Tremont in an appreciative mode, “learning how to perceive organizations as creative constructions, as entities that are alive, vital, and dynamically emergent.” Step 3 was co-creation of possibility. The group focused its attention on possibility and what might be. Their language shifted away from one based in problems to one based in values and aspirations. Step 4 was a return to the original domain. The managers on the team faced the hard work of returning to their problems and attempting to live out their aspirations. The authors reported an overall transformation of interpersonal relationships as a result of the con-
Artful Coaching and the CCL Coaching Framework

The tools and techniques of artful coaching can be used to good benefit within the scope of CCL’s coaching framework. Both the artful tools and approaches discussed in this chapter and the ideas collected in the coaching framework accommodate a whole-person perspective that coaches can use to work with coachees more effectively. Used together, they allow the coach and coachee to move back and forth between analysis and synthesis, exploration and discovery, expansion and focus. This rhythm of divergence and convergence is essential to creative processes of all kinds, including coaching (Gryskiewicz, 1999). Following are specific aspects within artful coaching where aspects of the framework may be informative to the process. In Exhibit 10.1, some cautions and tips for leader coaches considering these kinds of approaches are discussed.

Relationship

Coaches build rapport in their coaching conversations when they pay attention, use a metaphor or simile, or reference a piece of art or music that has relevance to or illuminates the coachee’s situation. This does not require an unusually trusting relationship; however, if the coach intends to use artful methods to uncover or draw attention to a more challenging issue, help the coachee get unstuck, or explore an uncharted developmental arena, then the nature and quality of the relationship may become critical. Using more artful coaching parallels the evolutionary process of developing a relationship, which takes time and is usually based on a series of interactions that allow rapport, collaboration, and commitment to grow. Part and parcel of that process...
EXHIBIT 10.1. CAUTIONS AND TIPS FOR THE ARTFUL LEADER COACH.

- Watch out for the “expressing our feelings” trap. There is a common caricature that the main purpose of using art in coaching situations is to express feelings. The real power of these techniques lies in their ability to integrate thought, perception, feeling, and action.

- It’s not about “getting artsy.” It’s about the coachee, the coachee’s context, and the coachee’s challenges. It’s about making sense of the complexity of it all.

- When using artful methods, connections and disconnections of attention are the vital signs. Stay attuned to your coachee’s visual and verbal cues. If the coachee starts to talk about himself or herself, you’ve hit a chord.

- Artful coaching requires willingness to play; to improvise, test, and bend; to explore boundaries; and even to have fun. Figure out what play looks like to you and to your coachee, and together push to the edges of your willingness to play.

- Attain and retain a good rapport with your coachee before going deeper with artful methods. It may take some coachees several sessions to go down another path than the strict analytical path.

- Like a good exercise session, artful coaching needs a warm-up. It may take 30 or 40 percent of the coaching session’s time to reach a relaxed enough place to use metaphors and other artful tools.

- Follow through to the underlying meaning produced from using artful media. Too many people use creative techniques and don’t allow time to process what comes from the work. That’s a waste of time.

is taking risks with one another and letting the relationship guide the level and type of risk the coach takes. More often than not, we would expect the coach to initiate and invite the coachee into an artful coaching process.

Assessment

By its nature, artful coaching techniques and approaches avoid relying too heavily on analytical assessments such as 360-degree feedback and psychological testing. But that information can be seen through artful eyes and is often useful when combined with artful coaching techniques. Artful coaching can be particularly helpful in understanding the human element of assessment.
Coachees often have a particular interest in a specific art, which a leader coach can use to round out his or her understanding of the coachee. Some other specific ways that artful coaching can add robustness to the assessment process include these:

- Fostering reflection on underlying drivers
- Making sense of large amounts of data by seeing patterns and connections
- Exploring the depths and uniqueness of the whole person
- Using artful media (artifacts or stories, for example) to provide a form of "soft" assessment data
- Using artful media to produce informal assessment and self-generated feedback as a complement to formal assessment and external feedback
- Integrating objective data with the coachee's subjective perspective
- Sensing issues that the coachee has not articulated and maybe cannot articulate
- Revealing other dynamics that underlie behaviors that may not be discernible through an instrument because it does not fully address context
- Enabling the coachee to put different language to his or her development needs in a way that makes the need and subsequent actions clearer
- Offering a more holistic, and in some cases less threatening, way to crystallize the coachee's leadership style or impact on others

Challenge

Developmental challenges are often not as they first appear. Seeing challenges in their true light does not come from analytical data alone. Artful coaching provides means to explore and make sense of the challenges faced by the coachee. A key step in facing complex challenges is to pay attention from a variety of perspectives and to see with fresh eyes. At level 1, coaches are learning to pay attention and to guide the coachee's attention to the challenges at hand in ever more skillful ways. At level 2, coaches deliberately use artful tools to engage the challenge, not only to see it but also to create and test scenarios for creative action. Active framing and reframing of the challenge are taking place. Coach and coachee collaborate on putting the challenge in the middle of their dialogue in order to see it differently. Level 3 coaches may go on to help the coachee experience a challenge as a transformative opportunity. Coaches use artful media to more fully experience the patterns as well as the
tensions and contradictions in their situations in support of significant learning. Developmental challenges are faced through creating whole new ways of understanding and acting in the world.

Support

In CCL’s coaching framework, support is about motivating, finding resources, and celebrating successes and managing setbacks. Artful coaching often works because it locates deeper motivations and neglected resources for meaning making in the face of both setbacks and success. The stories coachees make and tell about who they are and where they are going help clarify what support might even look like on such a journey. Ultimately, artful coaching is about the kind of support provided by making meaningful connections in a chaotic world.

Results

Artful coaching can be thought of as the complement to coaching that settles on a narrow set of objectives within an analytical framework. For example, it invites the intuition of the coachee to be active and inform the range of desirable outcomes. Whether this achieves results depends on how relevant the intuitions are to the challenges at hand. In our experience, the engagement of both sides of human abilities, the analytical and the artful, leads to a more informed and balanced approach and more satisfying results.

Conclusion

When managers can access more and different options for developmental experiences, they often improve in unexpected ways or break loose from obstacles that confine their perspectives. Leader coaches who show coachees how to use such techniques as storytelling to get a grasp of the narrative of their work situation or body kinesthetics to become aware of the physical image they are projecting report significant rewards and successes with coachees.

These outcomes rely on the skill of the coach to meld a traditional array of such tools as 360-degree feedback instruments and goal setting with a choice of nontraditional approaches, such as using metaphors and deep at-
tention to achieve meaningful reflection. The leader coach is responsible for knowing that these options are available, determining how to use them in conjunction with traditional development tools, and being able to work out a development program for each coachee that gets results.

**Coach’s Bookshelf**

Adler School of Professional Coaching. [http://www.adlercoachsw.com/ccp.htm](http://www.adlercoachsw.com/ccp.htm).


