



“New Day, New Possibilities”

Ontological Coaching ... A Deeper Dive

- *Ontological Coaching* is a professional practice organized around concerns that people face and the realization that who we are as “*Observers of the World*” limits our horizon of possibilities when dealing with “*Breakdowns* in life’s flow.
- An ontological coach connects with a client in ways that help shift the client as an observer of the world. This shift happens in response to a client’s request that the coach help the client explore his/her “*Way of Being*” in the world and to develop possibilities for future action to address needs, cares, and concerns identified by the client.
- Ontological coaching is rooted in the recognition that the human self is always becoming and that change is not always something we choose, but is something that we can expect to encounter throughout our life journey. Ontological coaching is also rooted in the belief that the client is entirely competent to decide what makes sense for him/her, what kind of life he/she wants, and/or what kind of person he/she wants to become.
- Ontological coaching acknowledges that every action an individual chooses to take has consequences. The role of the ontological coach is to help shift how the client observes the world, how s/he interprets the reality of life events and experiences. By shifting the client’s way of interpreting life events and experiences, the coach establishes a space in which he/she and the client are able to co-create different possibilities for action that would otherwise have been invisible to the client or beyond their existing *Way of Being* in the world.
- Ontological coaching is only possible within a space that is created through the establishment of a trusting relationship between a coach and client. The client is only likely to grant permission to be coached when trust exists; without trust, the client is unlikely to make him/herself vulnerable in ways that allow for the growth and learning needed to expand one’s horizon of possibilities for action and practice.
- Ontological coaching recognizes that trust is best cultivated through the demonstration of sincerity, competence and reliability. When a client senses 1) the coach is genuinely interested in the his/her well being, 2) the coach possesses the knowledge and skills needed to shift the client as an *Observer* and to help him/her see new possibilities, and 3) the coach can be counted upon to be fully present and consistently committed to creating a sacred space where work on one’s self can take place, then ontological learning is possible.
- Ontological coaching focuses on helping the client to declare “*breakdowns*” in the normal flow of life and to distinguish between life experiences (phenomena) and the client’s interpretation of these experiences (assessments or “*stories*”) that give the experiences meaning. Separating experiences from the interpretations or assessments we develop around our experiences is critical, for it is within the space between experiences and our interpretation of experiences that learning occurs. Thus, an ontological coach regards assessments held by the client to be essential, for they reveal the interpretative perspective from which the client speaks and acts.
- Ontological coaching is an *art* in that there is no structure or strict set of rules that will yield desired results. Rather, the coach-client relationship involves engaging in interactions where questions to be asked or distinctions to be made that are needed to shift the client as an *Observer* cannot be predetermined. The coach’s only agenda is to be fully present in the conversation and committed to asking questions and engaging the client in ways that shift the client’s perspective so new possibilities for action needed to help the client achieve his/her goals are identified.
- Finally, ontological coaching recognizes an important distinction between pain and suffering - just as pain signals a biological incongruity within our bodies, suffering signals damage done to our soul that challenges our ability to cope with or comprehend life events or circumstances. An ontological coach does not seek to eliminate suffering; rather, he/she views suffering as a transformational force, as a catalyst to help shift the client as an *Observer* and to become someone or something different. Suffering or discomfort provides an opportunity for reflection and can provide the impetus for designing a different future, for growing and refining the way we observe the world and act to produce the results we seek.