Coaching for Transcendence

Edited by
Neena Verma and Ram Ramanathan

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Cover image created by Neena Verma for this issue of AI Practitioner
Coaching for Transcendence

Welcome to November 2016 issue of AI Practitioner

Jannie de Weerd, one of my teachers, once told my wife, Nathalie: “Live the example”. And that’s precisely what’s this issue of AI Practitioner is about. Our guest editors, Neena Verma and Ram Ramanathan, have done a wonderful job in inviting people and editing their contributions on the topic: “Coaching for transcendence.”

The meaning of the word transcendence varies, depending on a person’s background and beliefs. In 19th century Europe, poets and philosophers thought of the transcendent experience as one of heightened self-awareness, and of understanding the world through philosophical reflection rather than exclusively through observation and empirical inquiry.

The Asian, and in particular the Indian, concept of transcendence and its attainment is far older, and more encompassing. This is the idea of transcendence as being beyond the self, the attainment of ‘pure consciousness’.

It can be argued that there is both transcendence, with a ‘small t’ (overcoming individual limitations) and Transcendence (going beyond the individual, the intellect and the ego). In this century, the links between Occident and Orient are intertwined and interconnected.

It is greater than the individual, and this is perhaps one area where there is a connection between Appreciative Inquiry and transcendence: the idea of aspiring to something beyond the individual, the limited entity. One tenant of AI is the idea of using positive framing to socially construct the world we choose to live in; another is that the words we use define the world we live in.

In a conversation that I very recently had with David Cooperrider, he told me about his new projects and about his dream to move beyond sustainability. If we can really tap in to our human connectedness, we can indeed create a flourishing world, he said. Neena Verma and Ram Ramanthan and all the contributors have put together a flourishing issue of AI Practitioner. I want to thank them all, and I’m very grateful to Anne Radford and Shelagh Aitken for their careful proofreading and editing.

Wick van der Vaart
Editor-in-Chief
AI Practitioner

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Coaching for Transcendence

When coaching for Transcendence, the coach tries to create a ‘coaching space’ where the client can attain ‘pure consciousness’. Coaching for Transcendence seeks to facilitate presence-based, essence-invoking deep-consciousness, being-level transcendence. In this issue of AI Practitioner, we share stories, concepts and applications that take the Western philosophy and approach as well as Oriental practices and wisdom to facilitate coaching for Transcendence.

Dear Readers, Namaste

We invoke you to the November 2016 issue of AI Practitioner, with the opening verse from Nirvanashatkatam, a composition consisting of six-fold sloka (hence the name ṣaṭ-ka, meaning six-fold) where Nirvana symbolises...
Nirvana symbolises equanimity, peace, tranquility and freedom. This verse, which summarises the teachings of Advaita Vedanta, was composed by the Hindu philosopher Sri Adi Shankara.

Why this verse, as opening to an issue based on the theme “Coaching for Transcendence”? The simple answer is that what and who lie beneath and behind coaching for transcendence are the coach, the client and the coaching space. Speaking of the coach, the ideal and ethical way to be is to strive towards embodying all that the above verse describes – as coach – not to be the mind/intelligence/ego; not to hear/see/feel on behalf of the client; not to embody the five elements on behalf of the client, but to create a “coaching space” where the client attains “pure consciousness”.

Dear Friends, this issue of AI Practitioner focuses on strengths-based, appreciative and generative coaching for transcendence. We went in search of stories, concepts and applications that take the philosophy and approach from Western as well as Oriental practices and wisdom to facilitate coaching for Transcendence. Happily, surprisingly, stories and storytellers found us.

The silence of now, Being and Self

We began with the premise that coaching for Transcendence seeks to facilitate presence-based, essence-invoking deep-consciousness, being-level transcendence. Such an approach to coaching helps the client experience her issue or context at personal and/or collective consciousness level, connecting with the individual’s own core, nature, elements, patterns and law. The individual is able to rise above and beyond her immediate context and issues, shifting from existential to essential. It is at this level of “Being” that an individual is able to hear herself in the “silence of now”, and the deep transcendental awareness begins to emerge, far above what one was struggling with, to find a solution to the immediate problem. The experience of oneself at this “deep-being” level helps one connect to the “Core Self”, also understood as “Transcendental Self”.

In Man’s Search for Meaning, Viktor Frankl says, “the true meaning of life is to be discovered in the world rather than within”, which he terms the “self-transcendence of human existence”.

Having, doing and being

In coaching, at the level of transcendental mastery, one differentiates between the verbs having, doing and being. Often, “having” and “doing” activities are transactional in nature. Crossing into transformational and transcending stages move towards the state of “being”.
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

This then begs the question, what is this state of “being”? Which part of us does it relate to? Maslow talked initially of five stages of needs; later he expanded this to eight stages. The fifth (and originally the highest) stage was the need for self-actualisation. This was later superseded by “Transcendence” as the eighth level. The difference between the original and revised Hierarchy of Need at its highest level is that between “self” and “Self”. It is between mindful mind–body awareness and no-mind energy being awareness.

In the Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna, the embodiment of divinity, explains to Arjuna, his human counterpart, that as long as we are focused on our self, we stay within our mind–body boundaries; when we focus on others, we transcend to our innate energy space.

Carl Rogers articulated this with his triune concept of empathy, congruence and unconditional, positive regard. This client-centered approach became the genesis, and still remains the core, of what we today know as coaching.

In Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, we hear of mandala, an eternal cosmic loop. As a space, it represents Buddha-field, a space of transcendental awareness, a space of receiving the “higher calling” beyond immediate issues. In a coaching context, this may be likened to the coaching space, which has innate generative potential to respond to the higher calling, beyond the immediate break-through issue, that the client may want to pursue, without having to wait for an external spur, in the form of another problematic issue. This happens when the coach creates that no-mind, energy conscious, Buddha-field mandala.

Transcendental mastery in coaching

To be truly a coach one needs to transcend oneself to move to the other. When this happens with a coach being present with “no projected sense of who, what or how I am”, “unconditional positive regard”, “no expectation of credit”, “the presence of service”, and in “the absence of ego–mind”, one reaches transcendental mastery in coaching. This calls a coach to transcend mindful mind–body awareness to no-mind energy consciousness.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is the transcendence of “Self” over “self”, social–actualisation over self–actualisation, and collective consciousness over personal accomplishment. It is also akin to the hero’s journey, in which after reaching the Holy Grail, the hero returns to his starting point with the mission to share and serve. In the same infinite spirit of positive psychology, social constructionism, generative metaphor, Taoism, spiral consciousness, Advaita, Zen, Sufism and all such strengths–based, generative approaches; this issue of AI Practitioner
humbly presents to you an expansive range of philosophy, process, construct,
paradigm and stories. Each article is both a story and a philosophy, approach,
construct or process.

An incomplete invitation

The issue begins with an article by Cees Hoogendijk, intriguingly titled “Should
We Transcend or Embrace Boundaries?” He calls his article an “incomplete
invitation” to “appreciating inquisitively in a boundary-less space”. His premise
is that the storyteller has only half the story; the rest is filled by “the other” –
the listener. He invites you to open up to your own wisdom, and experience the
possibilities of growth in yourself and in your others.

Coaching’s highest potential

A “deep coaching paradigm” from Leon Vanderpol follows. He helps us explore
coaching’s highest potential and understand how we actualise it. He contends
that coaching for transcendence is the ability to facilitate a person’s movement
into higher states of consciousness, which by nature of the process redefines the
sense of self, attitudes and worldview. Leon introduces the concept of a “map of
consciousness”, suggesting that human growth goes beyond what is apparent
to enable “sustainable shifts in consciousness”. He explains what it takes for a
coach to enable this.

A simple, profound way to move toward transcendental purpose

Leon’s case for “sustainable shifts in consciousness” is ably supported by Nick
Heap’s “Core Process” which has similarities to the “Positive Core” in AI;
however this core process goes deeper into an individual’s unconscious and
brings out her single reason for being. He argues that “Transcendence” with a
capital “T” is a rare mystical experience, almost like being reborn. In contrast,
“transcendence” is when a person becomes free of their limiting beliefs and is
able to move towards a realisation that “we are all special, valuable and uniquely
talented with a transcendental purpose”. His Core Process is a simple yet
profound way for a coach to help a client reach that space.

Connecting to the essential self

Miriam Subirana, in her article “Coaching to Flourish”, presents a way towards
the inner journey to connect to our essential self, opening the doors within to
see, accept and transcend. She contends that accompanying a person in the
discovery of themselves in resolving their crossroads or dispelling their clouds,
is both a fascinating task and a big responsibility. She proposes that residing in
one’s being is to live with full awareness, with an awakened heart, connected to
one’s roots and essence; and with four attitudes – active, positive, awake and one of trust. She shares a deep way of reaching that place using meditation.

The sovereign coach

Janet Harvey helps us move towards a more a concrete way of “coaching for transcendence”. She shares her impactful model of “sovereign coaching”, which puts trust and intimacy at the center of risk-taking, so helping the client attain maximum potential. She proposes that transcendence, in context of coaching, is about perceiving with “unconditional curiosity” and full acceptance of client-wholeness and innate creativity. She talks of a spontaneous moment that allows the coach to transcend role and identity to be sovereign as coach; and experience wonder at the miracle of being human. She argues that being a sovereign coach requires perceiving through a deeper, internal perspective that is naturally curious about another person and is agile in response to and with each twist and turn a client chooses to explore.

The home of all meaning

Colleen Trepte takes the exploration forward with her journey for being from inner to outer. She invokes the reader to comprehend the notion of “being”. According to her, the notion of being is the “home of all meaning”. For her the way of being emanates from a set of core qualities. She emphasises an “intentional way of being”.

Appreciative attention

Hans Uijen and Marieken Volz help us understand the coach–client relationship. The sibling authors present transcendence as a state of awareness and experience. The article calls for appreciative attention, constituting a responsibility on the part of the coach for appreciative interest, which in turn facilitates similar qualities and experiences in the client. They emphasise the value of a quiet mind. Their emphatic concern is about the coach being able to facilitate compassionate, open-focused, present-moment awareness.

Two stories

To end, we have two insightful story-based articles from different spaces of life. Jagruti Gala shares a story demystifying “transcendence”, proposing it as an everyday experience. Her article shares two inspiring stories, the first about helping a corporate client explore his “heroic potential”. This story highlights the insight that “transcendence is in moments” of any and every kind. She emphasises the value of appreciative conversations. Her other story is in the space of community development and discovering one’s “core self” in the process. This story is itself transcendental, in that the coach receives
transcendental awareness when clients choose to transcend their limited means and knowledge.

The final article is story-based. Karen Delk talks of helping an operational leader gain transcendental awareness in the context of organisational change process. She narrates seemingly simple but deeply transcendental awareness moments and insights that her client experiences in the course of leading a significant organisational change. On the surface, these moments may seem to be normal change accomplishments, but the fact that such moments and insights help the operational leader grow to his expansive self, and also facilitate similar growth in the people he was working with, is evidence of something deep having moved.

This issue is a labour of love and passion by one and all – our worthy author contributors, the highly competent production editor and her team, the very committed proof-reader, the supremely passionate and engaged editor-in-chief, and lastly we, the humble, serving guest editors, who have themselves undergone a transcendental journey in the course of designing and putting together this issue.

We hope and believe that this issue exemplifies the spirit of “coaching for Transcendence”.

Curiously awaiting your views,
With Love & Light
Neena Verma & Ram S. Ramanathan

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AIP Topics for 2016

FEBRUARY 16
How Has Appreciative Inquiry Lived Up to its Promises? What Will the Future of Appreciative Inquiry Look Like?

Wick van der Vaart
Founder, Instituut voor Interventiekunde (Institute for Interventionism), Amsterdam
Robbert Masselink

MAY 16
Bettering Sport through Appreciative Lenses and Practices

Tony Ghaye
Founder and director, Reflective Learning-International
Sarah Lee
Head of Department for Sport at Hartpury University Centre, Hartpury College, UK

AUGUST 16
Leadership in the Appreciative Paradigm

Dan Saint
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Freddie Crous
Professor of Industrial Psychology, University of Johannesburg

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Byrad Yyelland

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Appreciative Inquiry and its Impact on United States Municipalities

Dr. Anthony H. Schmidt Jr.

NOVEMBER 16
Using an Appreciative Inquiry Approach to Support Intrinsic Motivation in Higher Education Courses

Betty McQuain
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