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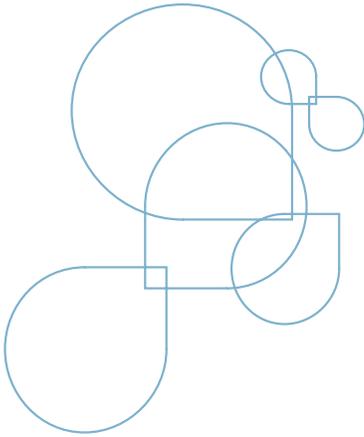
Co-Active Coaching and the Brain: Neuroscience Research Supports the Efficacy of the Co-Active Model

By Ann Betz, CPCC

"Contemporary neuroscience is beginning to provide a scientific platform to support the practice of coaching."

(Rock and Page, 2009)

August 1, 2012



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It's an exciting time in human development. The profession of coaching, approximately 20 years old this year, is starting to reach mainstream status with coaches in 162 countries. At the same time, technological developments in the past 30 to 40 years have enabled us to understand and take advantage of the true complexity and flexibility of the human brain. Due to advances such as Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), we no longer need to go on instinct or trial and error to understand why people change and grow – we can see certain brain activity right before our eyes. So, as brain science and its technology have evolved independently from the profession of coaching, the remarkable connections between the disciplines suggest the promising emergence of a whole greater than the sum of its parts: a scientifically defensible process for optimal human growth and change.

Everyone longs to be successful in their lives, whether it is at work, at home, or as a parent, friend or partner. We don't just want to change one particular circumstance, we want the fundamental ability to live, work, react and create in the most effective way. As this growing body of neuroscience research reveals, the tools of [Co-Active Coaching](#)[®] profoundly help clients develop positive new neural networks, respond more calmly to stress, make choices more easily, and access much more of their creativity. This inevitably leads to more effective, successful and fulfilling lives.

In this paper, we'll explore the many powerful links between the renowned [Co-Active Model](#)[®], applied successfully for 20 years to coaching, and some of the scientific research that suggests why this methodology of coaching is highly effective and produces transformative results.

The Four Cornerstones of Co-Active Coaching

The Co-Active Model stands on a philosophical foundation of four key cornerstones.¹ Every aspect of Co-Active Coaching is influenced and guided by these cornerstones;

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¹ The Co-Active Model applies not only to coaching, but to work, parenting, relationships and life in general. This paper focuses specifically on the model as it relates to coaching and the coach-client relationship, but broader applications can be made to other arenas of life as well.

they are central and foundational to the entire model. The cornerstones in particular are what distinguishes a Co-Active Coach® and guides them in every interaction, and there is substantial evidence from neuroscience that this philosophy is particularly effective in engaging, motivating, and helping clients experience lasting change and transformation.

The first of the cornerstones is the belief that **people are naturally creative, resourceful and whole**. That is, they can and should find their own answers, are not in need of fixing, and can recover and learn. This cornerstone is more than just seeing the best in people. It is a fundamental view that people are inherently undamaged, capable, and inventive. They don't need to earn or learn this status; it is innate.

Thus, in the Co-Active Model, we do not see people as broken or deficient – and for more than one reason, this is critical for how our brains engage. First of all, when we hold others as naturally creative, resourceful and whole, we level the playing field. The coach does not position themselves as higher, smarter, or more developed. The Co-Active Coaching relationship is, by definition, a relationship of equals having conversations for the sake of the client. While the coach certainly brings tools and skills, relative status is flat rather than hierarchical.

This is important because the brain is highly reactive to perceived threats to status. Research by professor and emotional intelligence expert Richard Boyatzis and colleagues found that when “research participants were being evaluated by others and therefore risked a reduction in status, their cortisol levels (an indicator of stress) remained higher for 50% longer” (Rock and Page, 2007). And when the brain is influenced by the chemicals associated with stress, it is less creative and less able to think of long-term solutions (Arnsten, 2008). Because there is no judgment or evaluation in Co-Active Coaching, the client remains open to input and is much more able to access their own unique creativity.

Additionally, there is substantial evidence that our expectations shape our experience (Kirsch, 1999). If the coach sees the client as whole, they will look for (and find) evidence of this wholeness. Just as we begin to notice red Toyotas everywhere after we've purchased one, what we are “primed” to see influences what we notice, remember, and put our attention on. The fundamental and uncompromising view of a Co-Active Coach that her client is naturally creative, resourceful and whole makes this creativity, resourcefulness and wholeness more and more actualized and accessible to the client.

The second cornerstone is the commitment to **dance in this moment**. The Co-Active Model stands on a dedication to being fully present in the here and now, open and flexible and ready to respond. Co-Active Coaches don't follow a program or script. Instead, they follow the movement of what is occurring in each moment,

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staying connected and flowing with the ups and downs of the conversation. They “dance” with the overall energy of the coaching and the needs of the client, all the while holding a focus and an intention for the client’s learning and movement.

There is evidence that the very presence of the coach has a profound effect on his or her client. According to research by the HeartMath Institute, “a subtle yet influential electromagnetic or ‘energetic’ communication system operates just below our conscious awareness...(and this) field plays an important role in communicating physiological, psychological, and social information between individuals” (McCraty 2010). Over time, a more organized and stable field will positively impact a less “coherent” one. Clients often come to coaching concerned, unsure, or thrown off their game in some area of their life, seeking help to get back on top of things. When the coach is present, flexible and open, they bring a more “coherent” energetic field, which actually impacts the client in positive ways that are not in conscious awareness, bringing them a greater sense of calm and efficacy. It is not uncommon for a client to say to a Co-Active Coach “I always feel so much better just talking to you.”

In addition, research shows the process of having “collaborative, contingent conversations” that are emotionally attuned and non-directive builds positive neural connections in the brain (Siegel, 1999). These conversations are similar to the best relationships of early development, when a primary caregiver is responsive and open to the needs of the child. There is a give and take in this “dance” of affection and love, which creates an ideal container for learning and growth. While Co-Active Coaching is by no means an attempt to re-parent, according to research, connected conversation with a present and open coach cannot help but have a positive impact on the brain.

The third cornerstone is ***focus on the whole person***. Co-Active Coaches are trained to work with the entire heart, mind, body and spirit of their clients, rather than simply focusing on each individual problem they bring to coaching. The commitment to focus on the whole person means seeing the client as more than the sum of their parts or the role they play (CFO, dad, dyslexic), but to look for and understand their entire being.

Neuroscience teaches us nothing if not that we are amazingly complex and multilayered beings – and the more we can integrate and be agile with this complexity, the better. While in the past, the argument may have been for developing one aspect over another (for example, the heavy emphasis on rationality and logic over emotion and intuition in business), there is evidence from current research that the most emotionally intelligent and effective people are those who can use the gifts of different parts of their brain together effectively; for example, empathy and intuition associated with the right hemisphere and logical and analytical skills in the left. (Siegel 2010).

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By helping clients expand their focus past the presenting issue or problem, Co-Active Coaching facilitates the engagement of the whole brain. Rather than just looking for the most logical answer, a Co-Active Coach will often encourage the client to explore both thoughts and feelings, and give voice to intuitive gut reactions. This kind of attention literally helps integrate the right and left hemispheres of the brain, which not only opens up new solutions and creativity, but also builds lasting connections that can be used for future problem-solving.² (Siegel 2010).

And the fourth cornerstone is nothing less than to **evolve transformation**. Co-Active Coaching is committed to lasting, sustainable change, which is more than finding one simple solution to a presenting issue. We long for our clients to achieve more effective ways of interacting with their jobs, families and world. We want them to move to the next level of human development as they continue to grow and expand their consciousness. Co-Active Coaches help their clients move beyond simply managing their “to do” lists; they help them develop new capacities to navigate whatever life throws their way.

There is significant scientific proof for the exciting idea that the brain demonstrates “neuroplasticity.” That is, it is more adaptable than we have previously thought, and it can – and does – change with effort and intention. As neuroplasticity expert Norman Doidge (2007) points out, there is substantial evidence we can “rewire our brains with our thoughts.”

There is a saying among neuroscientists: “if it fires, it wires.” In other words, much of what we do creates the potential for a new neural pathway. Due to a process called myelination, the more a pathway is used, the stronger it becomes. This is because every time we repeat an action, a fatty covering called myelin coats the neural pathway, making connections stronger and more secure. We have trillions of possible neural connections in our brains. Some of them have wired strongly into habits and behaviors that are effective, and some have wired into limiting beliefs and strategies that are not. And many exist simply as pure potential. Because the default in our brain is to go with the pathways that are developed, it is difficult to change without focused, supported, intentional effort. Co-Active Coaching brings this sort of focus and support, thus it is possible that we are literally helping the client’s brain rewire itself for greater effectiveness.³

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² “Integration in the brain...involves the linkage of differentiated neural areas and their specialized functions with each other. (This is done through focusing attention, which) directs the flow of energy and information through particular neural circuits.” (Siegel 2010).

³ Because before and after studies using fMRI technology have not been conducted with coaching, it is not possible to say for certain that this is what occurs. The direct research on the impact of coaching on the brain is very limited. As the field of neuroscience expands, we hope to see more explicit research on the effects of coaching, but for now, the best we can do is make such logical connections as seem viable.



Fulfillment Coaching in Practice

Eric is a highly effective mid-level manager at a large international company. During the time he was working with a coach as part of a leadership program, his supervisor approached him with three different possibilities for moving up the career ladder – all jobs with more responsibility, more direct reports, and more money. However, when talking with his coach, Eric expressed some reluctance and confusion about whether or not to pursue any of the new opportunities. “I just don’t know how to think about all of this,” he said. “I’m working on a big project and I really don’t want to leave it unfinished. Every time I start to think about the other possibilities, I feel stuck in my tracks – I get really confused and I don’t know what to do.”

Even though the new opportunities were exciting, positive developments, thinking about them and worrying about how to deal with the important project he was currently responsible for overloaded Eric with stress, making it harder to think, focus and make a decision.

Eric’s coach asked him a very simple question. “Don’t worry about the decision for a minute,” she said. “Just tell me, what values would you honor by staying in your current position and what would you honor by taking one of the new jobs?” Eric noticeably relaxed and was able to shift from unfocused and confused to much clearer and more reflective. “Well,” he said, “if I stay, that feels very responsible, which is important to me, but that’s actually about it. The other jobs actually fit more with my values of learning, growth, challenge and leadership.”

By the end of the conversation, he had identified clear steps to creatively figure out how to hand off his current responsibilities and explore which new opportunity would be the best fit. His coach effectively used the strategy of values reflection to decrease his stress, thus enabling clearer focus and positive forward movement.

Additionally, one of the keys to neuroplasticity is novelty, which gets our attention and causes a release of a chemical in the brain that makes a new neural pathway possible (Doidge, 2007). Co-Active Coaches bring this by challenging their clients to stretch out of their comfort zones and take risks, encouraging their clients to make bold leaps, not just do what they are already doing a little bit better. They also ask expansive, **powerful questions** which often lead the client to an “Aha” moment of clarity, a feeling of something new being opened before them.

Co-Active Coaching helps people identify the pathways that are not working and focus on creating new ones that lead to more resonant, effective, fulfilling lives. Over time, through commitment, support, practice and reflection, those “Ahas” become dominant neural pathways and what was once a reach and challenge becomes commonplace. The client has transformed in a grounded, sustainable way.

The Heart of the Model

At the heart of the Co-Active Model are three principles of Co-Active Coaching: Fulfillment, Balance and Process. Co-Active Coaches are thoroughly trained to help their clients expand into a satisfying and effective life using these principles: **Fulfillment** points the client to values, life purpose and the resonance and dissonance in their lives. **Balance** helps access creativity and choice, and **Process** helps open the ability to be aware of what is happening under the surface and bring it into conscious experience. All are strongly supported by various aspects of brain research.

Fulfillment Coaching. There is evidence that reflecting on personal values, a key component to Fulfillment Coaching, provides biological and psychological protection from the adverse effects of stress. In a 2005 study by scientists at UCLA, individuals were subjected to a stress challenge in a laboratory setting. Those who were given the task of identifying their values and reflecting on them showed significantly lower cortisol levels (the body releases glucocorticoids, including cortisol, as a response to stress), in contrast with a control group subjected to the same stress test but not asked to identify or reflect on their values (Creswell et al, 2005).

Additionally, in Fulfillment coaching, Co-Active Coaches use values and life purpose to help their client find meaning in their life and



Balance Coaching in Practice

Marisa is the operations manager for a very large national non-profit organization. She juggles budgets, staff, facility management, and much more. As second in command to the CEO, she has many duties large and small, and she takes them all seriously.

During one coaching session, she was struggling with her overwhelming workload. “Everything that doesn’t fit anywhere else lands on me!” she complained. “And there just aren’t enough hours in the day to do it all.” Her coach first helped her identify which of her many responsibilities was most frustrating and time-consuming (this was helpful in itself, as Marisa was able to see that the issue really wasn’t “everything”). They found it was largely her duties around the organization’s IT function, an area she was managing, but where she had little training or expertise.

In coaching, Marisa was able to see that her present view about the IT function – “it’s all on me and I have to do it myself” – was a way of seeing things, but perhaps not the only way. As she explored different possible perspectives with her coach, she became more creative and solutions that had never occurred to her emerged. “Wait a minute,” she said, a note of surprise in her voice. “I just realized that no one ever told me I had to do this on my own. I manage the budget, I can hire more help here. Maybe being responsible doesn’t mean I have to do it all myself. In fact, it’s probably more cost-effective if I don’t do it!”

Through the process of coaching, Marisa was able to move out of her ingrained, somewhat subconscious beliefs about how she had to do her job into a feeling of being empowered and much more in control. Her brain, by being assisted in reappraising the situation, found creativity and clarity around an issue that had been bothering her for months.

create a compelling vision for the future, which research shows contributes to an overall increased sense of well-being and reduction of stress (Recker et. al., 1985). Additionally, a 2010 fMRI study at Case Western Reserve University found that when subjects spent 30 minutes talking about their desired personal vision, the parts of their brain “associated with cognitive, perceptual and emotional openness and better functioning” were activated (Boyatzis, 2010).

Often used when a client is feeling stuck or constrained, **Balance Coaching** is a process by which the coach assists the client in shifting a limiting or negative perspective, or in neuroscience terms, *reappraising a circumstance for emotional regulation*. The coach then works with the client to develop an action plan to move forward from a new, more empowering perspective. The process as taught by CTI is fundamentally about helping clients understand that while they may not have control over all the circumstances in their lives, they do have the power to choose how to view them. This leads to an increased sense of perceived control, which studies in both psychology and neuroscience have shown to be effective at reducing stress, increasing life satisfaction, and even adding years to the lives of nursing home residents (Rodin. J., Langer, J. E., 1997).

In Balance Coaching, the client is encouraged to notice that both their initial perspective as well as subsequent “optional” perspectives are not necessarily the ultimate truth, but rather, a particular way of looking at the world that shapes how they feel and the decisions they make. Researcher Kevin Ochsner notes “amygdala activity drops during reappraisal, suggesting that reappraisal is successful in changing what the amygdala ‘sees’ – that is, it no longer detects an arousing and aversive event” (Ochsner, 2008).

Our amygdala – a small almond-shaped part of the brain in the limbic system – plays a key role in scanning for threats and, if it finds one, pushes us into “fight or flight” mode where our bodies become flooded with chemicals such as cortisol and forms of adrenaline. These stress hormones impact our ability to think clearly and often have us make poor decisions we come to regret later (Arnsten, 2008). Thus, the skill of being able to reappraise, or in coaching terms, choose a new perspective, can be an effective antidote to stress.

Additionally, in Balance Coaching, the client is asked to notice their body’s responses as well as their thoughts and attitudes in different perspectives. This brings in an aspect of mindfulness as the client is supported in



Process Coaching in Practice

Cynthia had been divorced a few years ago. Through working with a coach, she started opening up to loving herself more, and was also taking better care of herself and “moving on with life.” But one day during a coaching session, a deep pang of sadness hit her. Her coach, rather than moving away from the emotion, helped her explore and even enlarge it instead, bringing presence and awareness to Cynthia’s internal state.

A big knot in Cynthia’s stomach appeared, and she realized it was pain remaining from the divorce. Her coach helped her stay focused on her body sensations as the knot morphed and changed. After about 45 minutes of being present and observing herself, a profound shift happened: the pain and fear she felt were replaced by a sense of serenity and feelings of self-love.

Through this coaching, Cynthia realized that below the surface she had been anxious about loving, because she would run the risk of losing that love and being hurt. By paying mindful attention to the whole experience with the guidance and support of her coach, she was able to be present to a deep and buried fear, allowing awareness, insight and healing to emerge.

During the coaching, Cynthia was encouraged to talk about what she was feeling and noticing in her body. By using words to describe sensations, this linked the inarticulate yet emotionally present right hemisphere with the more focused, rational and articulate left hemisphere. When we do so, we enhance our ability to understand our feelings, a necessary step to move forward. It’s like putting the last pieces into a puzzle and finally seeing what the completed picture looks like: It comes alive. Coaching is vital to this process because the coach provides an observing mind, not attached or hooked into the client’s limiting beliefs. It requires courage to stay in an uncomfortable emotional place long enough to make the integration, and it is far easier with an objective guide like a coach than trying to do it alone.

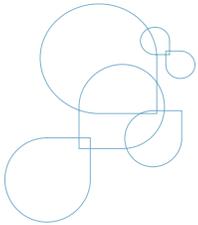
simply focusing attention on what they are experiencing in the present moment, and describing it to the coach. Numerous studies suggest that even something as simple as paying “mindful attention” can help develop integrative fibers in the brain, which increases empathy, focus, and the ability to recover from stress (Siegel 2010).

It’s also interesting to note that research shows we have a marked preference for the status quo – that is, the established neural pathway – when making decisions (Fleming et al 2010). When the client somatically (physically), emotionally and intellectually inhabits a number of new perspectives, this experience creates the potential for new neural pathways. Thus, choosing a new direction may not be as much of a challenge to the brain because a pathway may have been potentiated beforehand (sort of like digging a new ditch for water to flow in).

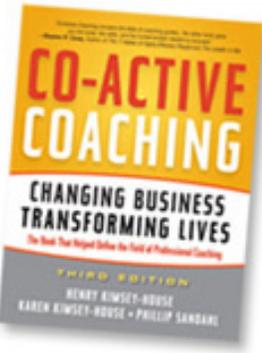
In **Process Coaching**, Co-Active Coaches help their clients enjoy the journey of their lives more fully and completely. The tools in this principle are designed to enable the client to be fully present to their experience rather than sleepwalking through life or subconsciously resisting certain aspects or areas. Process coaching helps make conscious what is bubbling under the surface – often only experienced as vague sensations or fleeting thoughts. It helps us understand our emotions, which makes it easier to respond rather than react to the challenges of life.

Amazingly, recent research has found we have neurons not just in our brains, but also in our heart and in our gut (McCraty, 2010; Siegel, 2010). Our whole bodies are taking in critical information all the time, somatically doing their best to make sense of the world. This useful information is all too often ignored in our day-to-day lives, possibly because the pathways from the body connect with the right hemisphere of the brain, which is not skilled at putting things into linear language and logical understanding. When the information is not processed and integrated, it stays vague and unfocused, and often continues to nag at the client even though they may not know why.

Process coaching helps the client become aware of this information, and through the use of metaphor, focus on body sensations, and other tools, to go deeply into the experience and connect with the emotions it holds. By doing so, issues that have been bothering the client, and ones they have been avoiding (sometimes for years), are often resolved.



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Although neuroscience has not yet identified the exact location of what is commonly called our “subjective brain” (the part of ourselves that is able to observe and narrate our experiences), it’s clear that humans have a distinct capacity to be both the observer and the observed. By supporting the client in paying mindful attention to their actual experience, Process Coaching helps attune what we might call the “observing self” with the “experiencing self,” building the capacity to be more awake for, and thus more effective with, everything life throws at us – the good, the bad, and the ugly.

The Five Contexts

The five contexts of Co-Active Coaching are an ever-present constellation of skills that deepen and enrich the coach-client relationship and create opportunities for the client’s learning and growth.

The first context is **Listening**. In Co-Active Coaching, coaches demonstrate the capacity to understand and listen at many levels. This means that coaches first learn to set aside their own automatic self-referential responses (known as Level One listening in Co-Active Coaching), focus intently on what the client is saying (Level Two listening) and ultimately learn to hear what is not being said, as well (Level Three).

Let’s look at this from a neuroscience perspective. First of all, we never actually get away from Level One. If we did, we would not understand anyone at all. This has to do with the fact that many of the neurons in our brain are “multi-modal” – the same ones fire if we do something (like lift a pen), if we watch someone doing something (even if we’re not doing it ourselves, the same motor neurons in our own brains fire if someone else lifts a pen), if we imagine something (visualizing ourselves lifting a pen), and if we remember something (recalling when we lifted a pen). As neuroscientist Jerome Feldman, an expert on how the brain understands language, puts it: “If you cannot imagine someone picking up a glass, you can’t understand the meaning of ‘Someone picked up a glass.’” We have to run an idea through our own experience. We simulate things in our own brains in order to make them meaningful.

In Co-Active Coaching, however, unlike most human conversation, the coach learns to skillfully delineate their own “Level One” thoughts and reactions from what is happening in the client, and

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use these thoughts only as helpful information and potential insight without being attached to their own view of the world.

Level Two and Level Three listening are ways of intentionally engaging the dual hemispheres of the brain⁴ for maximum connection and understanding. Ideally, they operate in concert in a Co-Active Coaching relationship, Level Two providing focused, precise (more left-hemisphere) listening, and Level Three broadening awareness to a holistic, inclusive, intuitive (more right-hemisphere) way of taking in the information. Skilled Co-Active Coaches dance smoothly between these levels, listening not only to the specific words and ideas, but taking in the emotional content and desires beneath the words, which are sometimes not fully realized by the client themselves.

The second context is **Intuition**. Those little hunches or gut feelings we have about an issue are something Co-Active Coaches are taught to identify and trust. As humans, we are designed to know each other pre-consciously (that is, intuitively) through our mirror neuron system. Scientists in Italy discovered this part of the brain only about 15 years ago, and there is still some controversy over how much of our intuitive connection we can attribute to it. As mentioned above, what they found was that the same neurons in our brain fire when we do something as when we watch someone else do something that has an intention behind it (it doesn't work with random, chaotic actions). The assumption is that we evolved this way as a survival skill to help us anticipate what others will do next. This explains why we can feel each other's emotions, tear up when someone else is grieving or in pain, and somehow even "know" what might be going on with someone under the surface.

Co-Active Coaches learn to recognize intuitive information and take a chance with it. Coaches discover that their intuition is incredibly valuable for the coaching conversation, even if their own interpretation of what it means may or may not be accurate for the client. They are encouraged to offer what they are sensing without attachment, asking the client what, if anything, it might mean in the client's life or situation.

The next context is **Curiosity**. Co-Active Coaches fundamentally hold the space of not knowing, staying open and being non-judgmental. The context of Curiosity calls for a fascination with everything, a way of being with clients as a sort of sponge of observation and learning.

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⁴ It's been known for a long time that the brain has two distinct hemispheres that are "in charge" of two different ways we deal with the world. Knowledge of exactly what each hemisphere does and doesn't do is still evolving, but the current thinking is that the left hemisphere provides one-point focus, the ability to distinguish one particular item of importance from the chaotic background of our world. This hemisphere deals with analysis and symbols, such as language, and keeps us from being overwhelmed by emotion. The right hemisphere, in contrast, provides a sense of interconnectedness and wholeness and receives signals from the other neural pathways in the body (heart and gut) and thus can be said to be our more intuitive side. For a powerful book on this subject, see *The Master and His Emissary*, by Iain McGilchrist.

The non-judgmental quality of curiosity in the coach is critical to the client's ability to learn and engage. Research using fMRI scans shows enhanced activity in brain areas associated with learning and behavioral change when a coach is open, compassionate, and helps the client focus on a positive future. This activity is not present when the coach focuses on their client's failings, has an answer for them already, and is judgmental (Boyatzis and Jack, 2010).

When a coach is truly curious, the client is required to do the work of coaching. Co-Active Coaches learn to ask curious, powerful, open-ended questions designed to make the client think. This stimulates reflection, which helps to anchor in learning, develop new neural pathways, and produce lasting growth (Zull, 2002).

The coach's curiosity also stimulates the client's own curiosity about their lives (perhaps through the mirror neuron system mentioned above). By being fascinated and non-judgmental, the coach shows the client new possibilities for looking at their life, enabling them to face even difficult issues from a more open, non-attached place.

The fourth context is **Forward and Deepen**. In [Co-Active Coaching](#), clients aren't just processing endlessly, nor are they simply moving from one thing to the next as if life were an assembly line. Coaches are taught to keep the focus on a dance between having the client forward the action – doing things that move their lives forward – and deepen the learning – reflecting and making meaning of what they have attempted and accomplished. According to James Zull (2002), this creates a positive upward cycle of learning for the client, as follows: When we *act*, our motor cortex carries out the plan of action. When we *recall* the experience, the sensory cortex receives the input from the five senses, and when we *reflect*, the back integrative cortex makes sense of the input. The frontal cortex (in charge of strategic thinking and planning) then uses the information from the back integrative cortex (that plays a role in locking in memory and reassembling sensory data) to develop or revise a plan of action for going forward.

To leave any of these steps out cheats us of potential development and growth, and yet it is all too common in today's busy society to skip reflection. If coaching did nothing more than provide a space for the client to simply act, reflect, revise, act and reflect, it would still be effective and provide worthwhile brain development.

The final context is **Self-management**. As we saw in the discussion above about Level One listening, it is natural for human beings to relate to others' experiences through their own filters. In fact, if someone tells us they are working on an exciting new project to “maxiloop” the performance appraisal process in their company, we would probably give them a blank stare (or tune out all together). But if they stop and say, “Oh, sorry, in our company we have this funny word for maximizing the connections between groups,” we can connect and relate. This is because subconsciously, without

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any effort or intention, we've gone into our own experience with "maxilooping" and therefore are able to sense what it might be like.

This is, of course, where self-management comes in. Co-Active Coaches are trained to develop the capacity to set aside their own biases and reactions, listen at Level Two and Three, remain curious and use their intuition for the sake of the client's learning and growth.

Because we are so programmed to understand each other through our own experiences, this context is absolutely critical. Co-Active Coaches learn to distinguish their own Level One listening, use it for information, but ultimately put the focus back on the client. Without this context, coaching can be limited and too directive as the coach succumbs to the idea that they have the best answer for the client. With this context, coaching is powerful, dynamic and exciting as the client discovers the power and answers they hold within themselves.

Conclusion

Current research in neuroscience provides mounting evidence that the philosophy and tools of the [Co-Active Model](#) are in powerful alignment with what is known about effective brain development.

The Co-Active cornerstones provide a strong undergirding philosophy of human effectiveness through their focus on wholeness, creativity, presence and transformation. By standing firmly on this foundation, the Co-Active Coach is positioned to engage the client's brain in ways that create openness, creativity and the optimal environment for neuroplasticity, leading to lasting, transformative change.

The Co-Active principles offer the coach a variety of ways to help their client move out of reaction and create new possibilities for moving forward. The tools of each principle can be linked to neuroscientifically proven stress-reduction techniques, right-left hemisphere integration, and, again, neuroplasticity.

The Co-Active contexts provide ever-present skills to the coach to help him or her work with the client's brain in highly effective ways, no matter which principle they may be using. They promote integration, body awareness, flexibility between the right and left hemisphere and maximized client creativity.

The entire Co-Active Model weaves all these together in a beautiful dance of ongoing learning, growth and development. By working in this model, Co-Active Coaches are highly effective partners in the transformational process. And because Co-Active Coaching also holds a fundamental value of "walking the talk", the coach's own brain is learning, expanding and developing itself through the use of these processes and tools, and embodiment of the Co-Active Way.

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About the Author

Ann Betz is on the faculty of the Coaches Training Institute (CTI) of San Rafael, California, where she also serves on the advisory team to the president and as the CTI neuroscience consultant. A long-time student and teacher of human transformation and neuroscience, she writes extensively on coaching and the brain in her blog www.yourcoachingbrain.wordpress.com, and is currently collaborating on a new book on Co-Activity and neuroscience with CTI co-founder, Karen Kimsey-House.

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About The Coaches Training Institute (CTI)

CTI is the oldest and largest in-person [coach training](#) school and one of the most innovative [leadership training](#) organizations in the world. With 35,000 students trained and courses provided in 24 countries, CTI was founded in 1992 by Karen and Henry Kimsey-House and Laura Whitworth. They developed the Co-Active Model that encompasses a philosophy, a methodology, a skill set and a communication form that balances self-awareness, relationship intelligence and courageous action so that people can be deeply fulfilled, connected to others and successful in what matters most. The foundation of all of CTI's training, the [Co-Active Model](#) is being applied in business, education, medicine, government, communities and families around the world.

Visit CTI's [Transforum Blog](#) for more on coaching, leadership and the application of Co-Active principles. For more information on CTI courses, call CTI at 800-691-6008 or 415-451-6000, email info@coactive.com, or visit our website at www.coactive.com. Inquiries regarding this paper may be directed to marketing@coactive.com.

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