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Peak Coaching Moments

While there is an abundance of stressful or low moments for all of us in pandemic time, coaches are also experiencing peak moments in coaching. What is a peak coaching moment? Czech authors Honsová and Jarošová published a lovely qualitative paper on peak coaching experiences (2018). Here is a summary of the research, as well as actionable tips for coaches.

First, what is a peak experience?

The authors note that the construct of peak experience was introduced by Abraham Maslow. Originally Maslow hypothesized that only self-actualized people have peak experiences. Later he concluded that most people have peak experiences, which was confirmed further in research studies.

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Other peak-like phenomena that while all being positive subjective experiences, they are distinct, including:

1. Peak experience – unusual experiences that create intensely positive emotions or high intensity of perception. Can be triggered by wild nature, music, and learning a new language.
2. Peak performance – a superior use of human potential, transcending expectations, inefficiency, productivity, or creativity.
3. Flow – immersion in an enjoyable activity.
4. Peak learning experience – vivid and memorable learning experiences.
5. Plateau experience – a serene and calm state.

Peak experiences have a variety of triggers, can happen unexpectedly, and are often not brought on at will. They happen in several areas – family, children and friends, other relationships, and work. Even though they can be brief or elusive, they tend to prevail in our memories. They can influence our futures and change how we view ourselves and the world. They can have permanent effects including improving self-esteem,

relationships, or optimism.

Now, what is a peak coaching experience?

The researchers interviewed 18 coachees, senior managers at a large Czech bank going through extensive organizational change, using the Life Story Interview method, adapted for the coaching context.

The coachees were asked: *Please describe a scene, episode, or moment in your coaching that stands out as an especially positive – peak experience.*

The researchers conducted a thematic analysis, compiling the data, disassembling and reassembling into labeled themes, and then reassembled into themes – summarized next:

1. Moments of insight. Some coachees reported the peak experience as the moment of insight: *'the moment of revelation or seeing the root cause of something which I wasn't able to find or change.'* (read page 5/6 for more quotes)
2. Moments of relief or release. Some coachees reported moments of relief, tension release, and calming down: *'I mentally convinced myself that I am here for this and that I am not looking for anything else.'* (read page 6 for more quotes)
3. Moments of mindfulness. Some coachees reported moments of mindfulness or awareness as a result of a coach's techniques for mindfulness or meditation: *'we went through a journey in meditation and suddenly I felt as if I could overcome this with much more ease...I was taken aback that something like this could happen.'*
4. New perspectives from external models. Some coachees found models using drawing or graphics, or tokens or bricks to help visualize an external situation: *'the feeling of excitement and joy..some kind of realization of the situation through the visualization she used.'*

The authors conclude: *"Our research shows that the key benefits of coaching might not lie only in what comes after coaching (e.g. leadership style change, stress reduction or enhanced self-efficacy) but also in the experience lying in the coaching process itself. Each of the participants associated their coaching experience to unique positive experiences, many of which were connected to learning and growing..."*

Key Takeaways for Coaches:

1. Ask your clients to share their peak coaching experiences with you.
2. Track and journal peak coaching experiences for you and your clients.
3. Experiment with new techniques to generate insights, releases, mindfulness, and new perspectives.

“The emotional reaction in the peak experience has a special flavor of wonder, of awe, of reverence, of humility and surrender before the experience as before something great.”

-Abraham Maslow



From the IOC Team.

Coaching with science in mind.

References

Honsová, P., & Jarošová, E. (2019). **Peak coaching experiences**. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 12(1), 3-14.