

What coaching means to me

Alberta Human Services Coaching Connections Program 5 year Celebration

I am honoured to be able to speak with you all today and to be a part of this celebration.

My journey with the coaching connections program began almost 3 years ago when an email popped up in my inbox inviting people to participate as coach-ees.

I was in a new management role with a new business area, and was always on the lookout for something that could help me grow and develop.

While I didn't really know much about coaching, something resonated with me and I asked to participate.

That simple request has truly been a life changing decision.

After my very first coaching session I was hooked. I walked out feeling invigorated and empowered. Not really sure in the moment why but I knew this was a valuable way to spend my time and knew I wanted to go back for more!

As the coaching engagement went on, I began to take more pauses and reflect on why this was such a powerful experience. Every time I left a session I felt better; more in control, more inspired, more committed. What was the magic that was happening in that hour?

What I came to realize was a few insights I'd like to share with you...

Coaching gave me time and space to think differently. We all know the 'busy' trap...too busy doing the things so we don't have time to think about the things we are doing, or why we are doing them, or what is causing us to feel frustrated, confused or badly when we are doing them.

Coaching sessions created space in my busy world to truly think about things, contemplate them, understand them differently, whatever it was I needed in that moment.

And it wasn't about someone telling me how to think about them, it truly was about having a safe place to talk out loud and explore other paths of thought about something I hadn't previously given myself space in my own head to do.

Coaching challenged me to not only conceptually think things through differently but also to create my own solutions. How often do we make decisions based on the information we have and take a familiar path? Most of the time I would guess, because we have a way of thinking about things and on the surface have a known set of solutions.

Coaching challenged me to explore different paths and create new solutions I may not have otherwise generated. For me this was often the result of having generated a deeper understanding of an issue or challenge or problem as I perceived it.

With a deeper understanding of something, felt through the time and space created by a coaching session to actually explore an issue with some depth I was able to see paths I hadn't seen before.

The issue was no longer the one I saw on the surface and so the solutions were no longer the obvious paths I'd taken before.

Coaching helped me to get unstuck from places I was stuck.

The most powerful piece of all of this was the fact that I had in fact generated this understanding from within myself and the solutions were mine...because my coach held me capable!

She knew well before I did that this was the power of coaching. She brought the process and I brought the content. Someone can tell you that's how it works but until you've experienced it I think they are just words for most people.

My coach asked challenging questions, and allowed me the space I needed to create my own understandings and solutions for the things I brought to our sessions.

There was never judgement or answers given but there was trust and support and a sense of knowing someone was in my corner, no matter what the issue or what I got stuck on, I had someone to turn to.

Someone who was free of an agenda in the outcome in any given situation and so truly was just there to help me help myself be okay in any given circumstance.

Knowing how life changing this experience was for me, I jumped at the opportunity to give back to the coaching community and begin coach training myself.

Being inspired by this practice of coaching and the gift of insight and thoughtfulness it brings I have taken advantage of the training offered through coaching connections and recently completed my first coaching engagement with a coach-ee.

Being able to pass this gift along, and bring the coaching process to others within the ministry has been an exceptional experience. We are incredibly fortunate to have dedicated people like Cathy and her team who had a vision and understood the value coaching can offer in our public service context, who have supported and nurtured this program to grow and blossom to its present state.

This is a journey, and I use the word journey deliberately. I very feel I am very much at the start of my coaching journey. There is always more to learn, more to explore and new paths to take.

The opportunities for training, coaching engagements, learning from a mentor coach and the support of the dedicated coaching connections team, for whom this is truly a labour of love I am sure, adds not just

to my journey as an aspiring coach but also adds to the richness and diversity of support the APS is able to offer to our most valuable resource – our people.

Outside of formal coaching relationships I have been able to utilize a coach approach with my team (and my family, which my 7 and 10 year old sons just LOVE, not to mention my husband!)

It absolutely changes the dynamics in any conversation or situation. It's reminiscent of the saying "people support the things they help create". It's amazing how much support people can put behind something they fully create.

Coaching allows people to wholly own their thinking or solutions about something. When someone is engaged, truly engaged, in the coaching process, they hold themselves accountable for their solutions and outcome.

This is the value of coaching.

We are the creators of our lives. A coach is like the architect, laying out the blueprint so the coach-ee can be the designer, unlocking creativity we may not have even realized we had.

I have a plaque on my desk I was given when facing some life challenges a number of years ago and I keep it with me as a reminder of many things. But as I sat down to write these thoughts for this celebration and looked over at it I suddenly reflected on it a bit differently.

What the plaque says is "we learn the ropes of life by untying the knots"

Through the lens of a coach and coach-ee I see this now as a coach bringing the knot guide book (the process or technicality to tying and untying!). But as a coachee what you do with the untangled rope is entirely up to you!

Thank you!

Jennifer Cassidy

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