



Is it Coaching or Psychotherapy?

Imagine the following scenarios where a clergy client is seeking help to become a better preacher. In the examples is the helper coaching or doing psychotherapy?

1. The helper provides preaching skill development such as voice production or text preparation.
Coaching or Psychotherapy?
2. The helper discovers that the client is poorly motivated to preach and spends time clarifying the clients values and identity related to preaching to improve the clients motivation to preach.
Coaching or Psychotherapy?
3. The client is quite miserable because the congregation wants to fire the client because of their poor preaching performance. The helper uses the misery as a starting motivator to develop the client's preaching competencies.
Coaching or Psychotherapy?
4. The client is feeling hopeless and overwhelmed because of the congregation's response to their preaching and has had ideas of killing them self to punish the congregation for their attitude. The helper first establishes the clients physical safety and then works to create appropriate responses to frustration and resentment and then helps the client in preaching skill development.
Coaching or Psychotherapy?
5. The client loves to preach and is often an effective preacher and wants to develop their skills. As part of the helping the helper uses hypnosis to help the client improve their preaching performance.
Coaching or Psychotherapy?
6. The client reports that part of their poor preaching performance is due to the distraction of memories of familial derision about their personal worth and that no one would want to listen to them because they are a "nothing" that has nothing worthwhile to say. The helper uses a cognitive technique to move the memories from consciousness so they are no longer distracting, which allows the client to focus on preaching effectively.
Coaching or Psychotherapy?

What is the strategy you have been using for deciding whether a form of helping is coaching or psychotherapy? Check the next column for our strategy and opinion.

Our Opinion

To determine whether the helping is coaching or psychotherapy we need to consider the starting point **A**. (See fact sheet 1 for details on **A**→**B**.) Psychotherapy requires that **A** be a diagnosable mental disorder whereas coaching can be provided to people who may or may not have problems.

1. *Coaching:* This an example of niche coaching where a coach, with public speaking expertise, helps the client develop specific preaching skills.
2. *Coaching:* Provided the lack of motivation is not part of a diagnosable mental disorder this is coaching. Clarifying values and identity related to improving motivation is a common task of coaching.
3. *Coaching:* Misery is not a diagnosable mental disorder. The helper is also not reducing the misery, but simply using it as an initial motivator to help the client work on their preaching skills. At some point in the coaching the motivation will need to move from misery prevention to a joy in the behavior if it is to be sustainable.
4. *Psychotherapy:* This client has a diagnosable mental disorder of suicidal depression. The helping offered is psychotherapy. In most States psychotherapy is governed by a variety of licensing Boards and should not be provided by unqualified and unlicensed helpers. This example also shows how skill development, a common task of coaching, is also part of the therapeutic endeavor. Once the client's safety has been ensured the helper assists the client in developing specific skills to ensure that they have a quality of life and work that sustains a new found sense of well-being.
5. *Coaching:* There is no diagnosable mental disorder that is being treated. Hypnosis, or the form, or technique, of helping does not make something psychotherapy. All psychological techniques are simply ways of helping people make changes and, provided the helper has the necessary training and expertise, can be used in coaching or psychotherapy. One of the common uses of hypnosis is in the field of sports psychology where coaches use hypnotic techniques of relaxation, visualization, and role rehearsal to improve their client's performance.
6. *Coaching:* The client is not reporting any symptoms of a mental disorder. While coaching is future oriented one of the common obstacles to achieving goals are self-defeating admonitions that stem from our past experiences. The technique of reviewing and replacing these unhelpful admonitions will be an essential coaching strategy to achieve and sustain excellence.