

Appreciative Coaching – A comparative case study of two appreciative coaching relationships



“Appreciative Coaching is a revelatory and generative conversation that enlivens, amplifies and sustains the positive core - source of the energy and intelligence of life - of both client and coach. This relationship cultivates new possibilities, health and fulfillment, accelerating us to our highest and deepest good.”

Coaching and reporting by

Stephen Davis,

*Coach and facilitator at **Beyond the Summit Coaching and Facilitation***

Contact details: **Email:** sjdavismail@gmail.com
Tel: **+27 (0)82 508 9750**
Website: <http://beyondthesummit.co.za/>

*Practicum supervised by: **Ezelle Theunissen, Karen Pratt and Luke Younge***

Introduction

This report is submitted as part of the requirements for receiving a Certificate of Completion of Appreciative Coaching Training (AICT) from the Center for Appreciative Inquiry. I coached two clients for this practicum. Chantelle Allen, a fellow AICT participant, was my client in the AICT coaching circle, and Phindile Mangwana was my external client. I have chosen to compare both of these coaching experiences for this case study because of the diverse learning they offered me as a coach. In summary, working with Chantelle, who is well versed in the coaching method, and also an Appreciative Inquiry (Ai) Facilitator herself, we were able to hold an in-depth coaching conversation, and progress towards her destiny was an enriching yet seamless process. As an appreciative coach, I merely had to bear witness to the positive transformation that was already happening when we started (the simultaneity principle at work), and continued to happen throughout our interactions. Phindile had neither been coached before nor had any experience prior experience of Ai, making for a more challenging although equally fulfilling coaching experience. I am compelled to report on both of these experiences which, I hope present some powerful insights into what it is like being a relative pioneer as an Appreciative Coach, and being a relative new-comer new to the formal coaching profession.

A comparative summary of the two coaching engagements

a) Name and a description of the role of the client (personal or professional)

Chantelle Allen is the country director for the Ghanaian office of worldwide healthcare support and training organization. Chantelle was trained as a nurse and midwife in South Africa, which is her home base but has been living and working overseas in a variety of health-care contexts in developing countries. She is a certified Appreciative Inquiry Facilitator, and a Co-active coach.

Phindile Mangwana is an environmental education practitioner who despite his humble beginnings in the Eastern Cape, has managed to overcome significant adversity to ensure he obtained his university degree. He is now involved in environmental training and leadership development. When we started our coaching conversation he was an environmental training project coordinator at the Western Cape branch of WESSA (the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa), and has since moved to a new position in the Directorate for Climate Change and Biodiversity, Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning, Provincial Government of the Western Cape.

b) Brief description of the client's environment and context (personal or professional)

Chantelle took a courageous plunge into her current position that – in spite of her initial trepidation – has challenged and grown her ability to affect transformative change in the world. Taking on a massive challenge to make a difference in the world through her work, she has through her own success realized that the best way to do this is to empower others to be the best they can be, and to embrace the adventure in the journey towards goals. In the process of challenging what's possible for herself, Chantelle has become a master of making a difference with people in her team and developed herself as a true leader. Having (another) appreciative coach support her growth over the last year, allowed her to overcome a number of professional challenges, allowing her to experience the power of coaching, and recognized the value coaching-type support in her organization. In her team conflicts arise often arise and need to be dealt with quickly and

powerfully. The branch of her organization is also committed to growing in the depth and scope of projects that they deliver. Chantelle is open to the coaching method, and very constructive in her approach, and appreciative of me as a coach. I coached Chantelle during the AICT practical exercises, and for 3 sessions beyond our training.

Phindile and I met when he was selected as a participant in a youth leadership program I facilitated in 2011. We had a very inspiring bunch of youth in that program, and Phindile was already a shining example among that great group. I then had the privilege of working alongside Phindile as a co-facilitator in a subsequent environmental leadership program. Phindile is an inspirational example to other young South Africans who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and are able to succeed in the face of substantial adversity. The fact that he is only 24 years old belies his actual maturity. His wisdom and successes are clearly the result of challenging the norm, hard work, and allowing others to contribute to his development. He is passionate and dedicated to the protection of the environment, and the empowerment of people who live in it. During the course of our coaching interactions, Phindile tragically lost his father, and we ended our coaching agreement prior to completion of the Dream and Destiny aspects so that he could mourn his father's death. Our intention is to re-commence the coaching when he is ready to do so. Phindile was curious to learn more about what coaching is, and use it as a tool to in his personal and professional life. We completed four sessions including our initial discussion to establish an alliance and coaching agreement. There was no payment for the coaching, but we agreed I could use the coaching as a learning opportunity, and to report on it for my own certification.

c) Describe the process you used to identify the Topic and name the Topic

Chantelle: We used the generic questions of best experience, values and wishes for the future to brainstorm key words. From this, Chantelle was able to quickly come up with the topic:

"Believing and actualizing possibility"

Phindile: I used a less structured process to identify the topic. I asked Phindile questions such as:

1. What gives you life, when are you most alive and energized?
2. What are you learning and accepting about yourself at present?
3. What are the exciting possibilities for you?
4. I also asked some of the generic questions around best experiences, values and wishes.

These questions were energizing, however it was clear that a reframe was also required given that Phindile was struggling with certain relationships with his work colleagues at the time. So in combination with his responses to the above questions and some reframing of his current working relationships we created the following topic:

"I create and sustain productive relationships"

d) Attach or include the modified interview guide or questions you used to Discover into the positive core

The questions I used to Discover into the positive core of Chantelle's topic were:

1. Tell me a story about your most life-giving experience of believing and actualizing possibility.
2. Let's talk for a moment about some of the things you value deeply, specifically the things you value about yourself when you are believing in and actualizing possibility. When you are feeling best about believing and actualizing possibility in your work, what about the experience itself do you value?
3. What do you experience as the core value in believing and actualizing possibility, and give some examples of how you experience those values?
4. What three wishes would you make that will both challenge and support you in believing and actualizing possibility?

For Phindile I chose to use a less structured process than for Chantelle. For the discovery we used similar questions as for defining the topic, but focused them more on Phindile's historical best experiences of creating and sustaining productive relationships. Phindile shared stories of people who believed in him, and supported him in enrolling in his tertiary education, facilitated his success as a professional cyclist, and mentored him in his work environment. In this discovery Phindile was able to identify the positive merits in the relationships he thought weren't working before we started the coaching process.

e) Include the core values that emerged from the Discovery interview

Chantelle shared a story about her experience of stepping into a leadership role in a new country, and into an organization that was bordering on dysfunctional at the time. The core values that emerged from her story were:

- Making a difference and a common sense of purpose (with people in her team, as well as in producing results in the work that they are doing as an organization)
- Success (appreciation and celebration of milestones being the fuel for an expanded ability to make a difference to humanity, leading to future successes).
- Playfulness and adventure (taking risks and the joy in the journey)
- Humility and love
- Leadership (creating and utilizing support structures)

Phindile's core values emerging from the discovery interview were:

- Partnership
- Family
- Trust and support
- Leadership and empowerment
- Being non-judgmental
- Going against the grain, challenging the norm towards a better world
- Acceptance
- Developing a common language

f) Include the wishes that emerged from the Discovery interview

Chantelle: Functional working relationships, where maximum reward can be achieved with minimum effort.

Phindile: An adequate income, to get back into cycling as a form of recreation and stress-release, healthy open work relationships

g) Include the Dream/ image/metaphor that your coachee created, and the creative process you used to facilitate this image. What were the powerful questions that guided the process?

Chantelle created a metaphor of an “Amazing Race” adventure for her professional life. The process was simple. I merely asked what image came to mind if she could imagine her wishes being fulfilled, and she immediately described the “Amazing Race” reality TV series. I found the following questions were useful for creating more meaning around the metaphor and what it represented for her:

- Describe your map, what colours do you see? (Chantelle thinks in a visual way, so I played to this strength in my questioning).
- Your backpack, what’s in it? Tell me about the useful stuff in your backpack
- What is your role in the race, what is the role of others in your race team?

It was clear from her energy and excitement that this was a powerful metaphor for Chantelle, and one that embraced her values outlined above. The metaphor continued to resonate for her 2 months later when we began our Destiny sessions.

With Phindile, we played with several metaphors, one being his past experience as a professional cyclist, others having a distinctly wildlife slant where he described himself, his colleagues, and his trainees as various animals in an ecosystem, and we explored the dynamics at play between them. We explored several possibilities in the discovery interview, but put our coaching on hold prior to reaching a final dream metaphor.

h) Include the Provocative Proposition that emerged from the Design phase and describe the process of crafting this proposition.

I reminded Chantelle what the definition of a Provocative Proposition is, and supported her in iteratively morphing the Amazing Race metaphor into the following final provocative proposition:

“I am sharing a journey to exciting and inspiring destinations, learning and growing in our relationships, achieving more than our wildest dreams.”

With Phindile, by the 4th session we were on the verge of creating a provocative proposition, and finalizing the image that Phindile had created. He found this to be a very new experience, and quite challenging, though he experienced a breakthrough in his own creativity. We had to have some uncomfortable conversations about time-management with regard to the sessions, and I had to learn to be empathetic to his circumstances, and the limitations of transport, and communication resources I often take for granted myself. I also realized that focusing on this one weakness could be potentially detrimental to the coaching, and I learned that both

parties need to honour the administrative part of a coaching contract for the coaching to continue productively. Shortly after this coaching session, Phindile's father died tragically, and with increasing pressure at work he chose to put his coaching on hold. He had also resigned from his job at WESSA and taken up a new post that he believed would be more supportive of his life goals. Although I felt at this point that the coaching was incomplete, the feedback Phindile sent some months later is quoted in the results under header j).

j) What shape did the on-going exploration in the Destiny phase take?

Chantelle: In a series of 3 hour-long Skype calls in which we explored examples of how her Provocative Proposition had come into being, and how she envisaged its ongoing evolution.

Phindile: Not yet complete

a. What was your best experience or highlight in facilitating the Destiny phase?

Celebrating the fulfillment of my Chantelle's dream with her. In this celebration I was personally moved and inspired by the unleashing of her greatness on the people in Chantelle's team, and the impact that had on the work ethic and productivity of the organization.

b. Did you notice any patterns emerging in the sessions over time?

The one pattern that became clear over time is that the past, present and future realization of the dream seemed to merge in the conversation to the point they were almost indistinguishable from one another. I also noticed that by continuing to hold a positive intention for my clients they would always have a breakthrough of some sort, and I would always feel satisfied that I had given them great value in the coaching conversations.

c. What kinds of attitudes, questions and core enablers helped the most?

Some of the enablers that helped the coaching were:

- Listening for the positive core.
- Reflecting back and repeating historical learning's and conversations.
- Asking my clients to re-state their topics, Provocative Proposition, core values and wishes.
- Celebrating successes.
- Being genuinely curious and interested in their stories, and being prepared for the conversations (recollection notes and interview questions ready).
- Consciously choosing to be open and excited for my clients during the conversations made a difference.

With Phindile I found that he would feel guilty about bringing negativity to the conversation (given his new encounter with the appreciative approach and its focus on the positive). In view of this I welcomed whatever he brought to the conversation, with curiosity and interest, and chose to be committed to reframing his challenges without forcing the "positive" approach. I found that he would eventually re-frame himself once he had the opportunity to "download", a principle that emerged as a key learning in our AICT trainings.

d. What do you know now about Destiny that you didn't know before?

I had never thought much about what destiny actually was, but I see now that it is not a place to get to but a living thing, that contains elements from past experiences, the current reality, and the desired reality. It is

possible to identify where destiny is already being fulfilled in a client's life, and inquire into those successes, which fuels the conversation and makes the desired future more tangible.

e. What is significant about what you have learnt? What do you value about this part of the process?

I had initially imagined a cyclical process of learning with each of the 5 D's one phase of an appreciative coaching "process", however I see that each of the D's mesh with each other, and Destiny is the foundation of an upward spiral of ongoing definition, discovery and dream.

f. What would you still like more of – either in terms of your own development as a coach, and / or support from the training?

Now that I've been through a formal accredited coach training (subsequent to my AICT) I have been wondering how appreciative coaching can best be viewed or integrated with other coaching methodologies. I have also been grappling with how to market myself as an appreciative coach and increase my client base, and perhaps the training could touch on that aspect of being an appreciative coach.

j) Impact or Results: What shift in attitude or process has the client made as (s)he tapped into the Positive Core and created the Provocative Proposition? Where was the most energy for your client during the coaching process? What stories of success can you share?

It was evident to me that Chantelle became very committed to bringing an appreciative coaching conversation to all her professional relationships so that they too experience the power of appreciative inquiry in direct and indirect ways. Where her PP rings true is that she really is committed to the sharing part, which for me is indicative of a humble form of effective leadership. From her commitment to empowering all the members of her team, including dealing with some difficult situations of internal conflict with her team, it is clear that the destiny she created includes and supports her team members, as well as her fellow country directors and seniors in the organisation. Every meeting, new project proposal, human resource activities was centred on the fostering of appreciative relationships. I can only speculate about where the most energy was for her, but she clearly appreciated the positive validation of what she was creating, and earlier on in the inquiry when she was sharing how she had learned from and been supported by others. Chantelle described these historical experiences of being mentored in a vivid and descriptive manner.

Several weeks after our last coaching conversation I received the following communication from Phindile, which I think speaks for itself as an articulation of impact or results:

"Dear Stephen,

Apologies for being quiet for quite some time, this was largely because I just got my internet access and my e-mail account at my new job. Otherwise things are moving swiftly along and I am taking things as they unfold. I just wanted to give you a bit of a brief reflection on the coaching sessions and how these have been useful and contributed towards my personal development:

The first time I heard that you were attending a coaching course, I was immediately interested in being involved. When you approached me to be your mentee I was very excited and wanted to jump at the opportunity.

To cut a long story short, the coaching sessions provided me with a space to connect with my inner being and to think about some very important values that shape my being. In particular I was also interested to look at the various ways of being and how these affected the way I related to people around me – particularly in the working environment. I find myself referencing these in the back of my mind in almost all situations that I come across.

Now that I have embarked in a new career path – I need to move out of my comfort zone, meet and work with new people – hence the coaching conversations about the aspects of what goes into creating and sustaining good and productive relationships have helped me to rise to the occasion and approach my work and personal life with positivity - keeping in mind that there is always something new to learn and every person brings something different to the diverse energy locked within the group (be it co-workers/peers/or friends).

Thanks for being there when I needed guidance.”

I was very moved by what Phindile had said, and know that his success came on the back of some very challenging period in his life. As an appreciative coach, I learned that the power of the approach does not lie in its completion, but rather in the depth of inquiry that takes place at each point in the process, and the positive intention held for the client. Like Chantelle’s Amazing Race metaphor, the success and the joy are in the adventure of the journey, and the successes of the process should be celebrated throughout the process.

Reflection on my own learning through the process of both coaching engagements

a) When did you feel most alive and inspired in the coaching?

PM:

On hearing Phindile’s stories of how as a youth with very little resources was supported a very generous benefactor, that supplied him with a bicycle, and the crucial support that resulted in him becoming a professional cyclist

b) What emerged from working with two different clients –one from the programme and another from outside?

I learned in Phindile’s case that I need to remain committed but unattached to completing all elements of the appreciative coaching process, and that he was dealing with some major life circumstances required me to honour where he was at, and trust the benefit of the coaching we had had up until then.

c) What did you learn about your coaching in the process? What do you really value about yourself as a coach?

My commitment to the process, being prepared, and coaching with integrity and sincerity. I succeed in holding a positive intention throughout, staying present with my client.

d) What did you learn about yourself in the process? What do you value about yourself as a person?

I learned that it takes me time to realize that I am in fact coaching from a place of love for other people, as my agenda sometimes seem to be cluttered by ulterior motives (such as obtaining my certification, earning an income). I need to reconnect with my own core values to remind myself of why I coach, so that the other material benefits are peripheral, and handled in a professional contractual manner. I learned through

feedback from my clients that I tend to be rather harsh on myself, and that there is room to be more appreciative with myself as a coach, focusing more on what works, identifying and playing to my strengths and acknowledging fertile ground I co-create with my clients in the coaching sessions.

e) *What did you wish for in the coaching, and what would you still like more of in your Appreciative Coaching practice?*

One of my main wishes was to integrate my previous non-accredited coaching experience into a more direct coach training, and to discover how appreciative inquiry can be used in coaching individuals. What I would still like more of in my Appreciative Coaching practice are more clients with whom I can continue to my own discovery as an appreciative coach!

Statement of consent

Chantelle and Phindile have willingly and generously allowed me to share their stories as outlined above. They have each granted permissions for *Company of Experts.net* to share their stories with others to enable the continuing discovery about what Appreciative Coaching is.