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*From TRIAGE to*  
**RECOVERY**

Coaching through COVID-19

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# *From TRIAGE to RECOVERY*



## **Coaching through COVID-19**

COVID-19 is presenting coaches and their clients with significant challenges. How does coaching offer a solution to the world's 'new normal'? What is the impact of COVID-19 on our clients' ability to perform? How can we help clients recover after a major crisis? How can we coach teams from chaos to health? How can you reinvent your coaching practice? Join us as we explore how coaches can help their clients get ahead of the curve.

# The JOURNEY AHEAD

7 ways coaches can help

By Emma-Louise Elsey, BSc, NLP Prac



**T**his COVID-19 crisis will probably be the *defining* event of our lives: a worldwide major upheaval forced upon us. Our lives, governments, businesses and economies literally turned upside down.

It's also a worldwide crisis that reminds us we are global citizens. We are all connected. Our choices matter. We matter. So, what is the role of coaches during a crisis like this?

During a crisis, everything is amplified – both difficulty and opportunity. Under normal circumstances, coaches help people advance their careers, grow as leaders, run stronger businesses, take better care of themselves and lead more fulfilled and meaningful lives. The role of coaches when there's a crisis is the

same, but we also have the opportunity to 'step up our game' and make an even bigger difference than usual.

## WE'RE ALL ON A JOURNEY!

In the early 1900s Arnold van Gennep, a German Folklorist researching rites of passage coined the term *Liminality*, which comes from the Latin word *limen*, and means threshold. Liminality is the middle of three stages of a rite of passage where people are 'in between.' In this stage we experience uncertainty, confusion and discomfort because we don't know what happens next, when it ends or how things will be afterwards. And it's very uncomfortable.



Van Gennepe's work has since been expanded to incorporate major change and crises in society – and it's an incredibly useful model right now, both for ourselves and our clients.

## ARNOLD VAN GENNEPE'S 3 STAGES OF MAJOR CHANGE

- 1. Separation:** we get separated from ordinary life.
- 2. Liminality:** we are in 'limbo', caught between what 'used to be' and what is 'not yet'.
- 3. Re-integration:** we return to ordinary life, only we're different – changed.

As a result of this COVID crisis, the entire world has been separated from ordinary life and is living in a liminal space. Every country, every business and world leader, every parent, adult and child has been affected.

First, van Gennepe's framework lends a structure to what we're going through. And second, it suggests there can be a silver lining to this experience *if* we pay attention and integrate what we learn into our lives. This three-step framework can give comfort. And this is where coaches come in.

People were blindsided by the COVID-19 situation when it happened. And now we're all beginning to re-integrate – returning to a more ordinary life as different people than we

were just six months ago. We've all struggled with uncertainty and the loss of autonomy – the personal power to choose what we do, when we do it, how and where we do it.

"Loss of Autonomy" is one of Dr. Karl Albrecht's '5 Core Fears,' which he describes as: "... the fear of being immobilized, paralyzed, restricted, enveloped, overwhelmed, entrapped, imprisoned, smothered, or otherwise controlled by circumstances beyond our control."<sup>1</sup>

People are still afraid and anxious – and need help acknowledging and processing. Coping techniques have been stretched to the limits, with some people taking habits to unhealthy extremes.

Many people are still dealing with life challenges, whether it's how to pay the bills, repairing their careers, relationships, businesses or rethinking their expectations of life. And some people are grieving the very real loss of loved ones. Finally, many people may feel strangely sad about the thought of life 'returning to normal.' Coaches can help people with this re-integration.

Coaches can help people ask the difficult questions and see the truth in their hearts. We can help people process what they've learned from this experience. And we can help people understand, and connect more deeply to, their values (have they shifted during this time?) for a more meaningful life going forward.

## 7 WAYS COACHES CAN HELP

### 1. Develop Resilience

Resilience is an important skill that can be learned. Coaches can help people develop belief in their ability to cope, and maybe even thrive, in difficult situations like this one.

**ACTION IDEA** How have your clients grown during this crisis? Where are there still challenges? Help clients formalize self-care routines and learn to recognize their signs of stress so they avoid burnout. Encourage clients to prioritize themselves and set boundaries with others.

### 2. Flex & Adapt

The echoes of this crisis will likely continue to reverberate into next year and beyond. Finances, relationships, careers, fun and recreation – and more – have all been impacted.

**ACTION IDEA** Use a blank 'Wheel of Life' to help your clients identify issues in the eight core areas of their lives, brainstorm solutions, and make an action plan to ensure they and their families are taken care of.

### 3. Be More Heart-Centered

This crisis has provided a space and distance from ordinary life that has helped people see their lives in a whole new light. This is a great time to get people away from 'mind,' logic and 'shoulds' and connect to their hearts.

**ACTION IDEA** Help your clients connect with and get to know themselves more deeply. What do they really think, feel and need? What makes their heart sing? What would a more heart-centered life look like?

### 4. Live Your Values

When so much is outside of our control, it's deeply comforting and empowering to feel a sense of purpose in what we do. One powerful way to do this is to live our values – no matter what.

**ACTION IDEA** Help your clients identify their values, and then add meaning to their life by finding ways to live those values, even (especially) in difficult times.

### 5. Encourage Leadership

Whether it's at work, volunteering or in the home, we all have something to offer the world in a crisis. Help people see their unique contribution to make their world a better place.

**ACTION IDEA** Help clients identify a list of strengths. What strengths have they used during this crisis – and how? Where could their strengths be useful going forward? What can they do to improve the situation for themselves, their families or others?

### 6. Move Forward with Grace

We are on our return journey as we re-integrate to 'ordinary' life again. Help people make meaning and grow by focusing on what they have learned and what they will do as a result.

**ACTION IDEA** What insights have your clients had about themselves, life, society or how we live and work? What are the silver linings? How will they live their life differently going forward?

### 7. Be Grateful

While there may be limits and restrictions placed on us, many of us still have much to be thankful for. Gratitude can be a helpful focus, and become an uplifting habit, assuming we also acknowledge any pain, difficulties and challenges that remain.

**ACTION IDEA** Clients can keep a gratitude diary or use the '5 Finger Gratitude Technique' where you simply count off five things you're grateful for on the fingers of one hand daily.

There are as many opportunities for people to shift, learn, shine and grow as there are opportunities for coaches to help.

### MOVING TOWARD RE-INTEGRATION

In uncertain times, structure and frameworks can be comforting. We can start by giving people context, sharing van Gennep's three stages of a crisis, and reframing this as their hero's journey.

**Coaches can help people ask the difficult questions and see the truth in their hearts, process what they've learned from this experience, understand, and connect more deeply to their values.**

Coaches can help clients navigate out of the 'liminal' in-between stage and through the re-integration stage – the return to 'ordinary' life – with positive new learnings.

Specific ways to help include offering a coaching session, webinar or workshop on a particular topic or start a Facebook

group. You could also record a video or podcast, or write an article or newsletter to help your audience reflect and incorporate their learnings from this challenging time.

Even once we come out of the crisis, there are fears of a 'second-wave,' a mutated COVID-19 or simply the next coronavirus. Will we have to go through this all over again? No-one knows. But as the world begins to loosen restrictions, it's the 'beginning of the end' for this liminal stage of the crisis.

So, what can coaches do? Well, it turns out we can do a lot! Reach out to the people who follow you. Support them as they move back into 'ordinary' life. Be a role model in how you live, what you share and offer. Step up, lead, and help others make meaning – and grow – from this life-shaping event. As Viktor Frankl, author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, said, "Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose." •

#### REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> "Loss of Autonomy" definition from Dr Karl Albrecht in Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/brainsnacks/201203/the-only-5-fears-we-all-share>  
Viktor Frankl Quote: "Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose." From [charleskochinstitute.org/blog/lessons-leaders-past-viktor-frankl/](http://charleskochinstitute.org/blog/lessons-leaders-past-viktor-frankl/)

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