

The Listening Guide for coaching: exploring qualitative, relational, voice-centered, evidence based methodology for coaches

Christine Woodcock*

American International College, School of Arts, Education & Sciences, 1000 State Street, Springfield, 01109, USA

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Now that coaching has developed into a more recognisable and established profession, coaches must articulate and understand their own practices with growing precision (Kauffman & Bachkirova, 2008). Since coaching is an evolving field, coaches are being encouraged to document research on their emerging profession (Drake, 2008). Considering this need, a new demand arises for coaches to be supported by colleagues who are familiar with existing research, best practices, and empirical bases. Because concepts such as listening, relationships, voice, and silence matter to many coaches, and given the fact that more coaches are seeking valuable methods of analysis to better understand their coaching in research-based ways, the purpose of this article is to introduce the Listening Guide (e.g. Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003; Raider-Roth, 2005; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995; Tolman, 2002; Way, 1998) to the field of coaching. The Listening Guide (LG) is a qualitative, relational, voice-centered methodology, which may be used to seriously reflect on the ways in which we listen to our clients, learn from them, and form relationships with them. In this article, the author takes the reader through a comprehensive 'how to' of the LG, including step-by-step explanations and examples.

Keywords: coaching research; coaching methodology; Listening Guide; evidenced based coaching; coaching science

What would I hear if I really listened?

'I learned, too, how the stories we hear and the stories we tell . . . shape the meaning and quality of our lives at every stage and crossroad' (Oliver & Lalik, 2000, p. xvi).

How many of us, whether we are being coached, or we are the coaches, have secretly wondered about the quality of our listening? Coaching is admittedly a transformational, yet vulnerable process. It is only natural to contemplate the quality of our coaching experiences, in ways that are specific to not only the listening embedded, but also the coaching relationship, and the ways we interpret stories, voice, and silence.

Now that coaching has developed into a more recognisable and established profession, we must articulate and understand our own practices with growing precision (Kauffman & Bachkirova, 2008). We need and deserve to have both simple

*Email: kwow@hotmail.com

and sophisticated information readily available so that we can clearly communicate the theoretical foundations of our work. Since coaching is an evolving field (Drake, 2008), we are being encouraged to document research on this emerging profession. However, more coaches need to be persuaded to do formal research on their practice, while being supported by colleagues who are familiar with existing research, best practices, and empirical bases. In essence, we need to be regarded more as researchers.

Since concepts such as listening, relationships, voice, and silence matter to many coaches, and given the fact that many researchers are seeking valuable methods of analysis to better understand their clients in research-based ways, the purpose of this article is to introduce the Listening Guide (e.g., Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003; Raider-Roth, 2005; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995; Tolman, 2002; Way, 1998) to the field of coaching. Because the Listening Guide (LG) places emphasis on the psychological complexities of humans through attention to voice, and is distinctive in its emphasis on the importance of human relationships, it is an extremely well-suited method of qualitative analysis for coaches to examine their practice.

In the steadily emerging field of coaching, where the recognition now exists that we need new explorations of theory and research to seriously reflect on the ways in which we listen to our clients, learn from them, and form relationships with them (Kauffman & Bachkirova, 2008), an examination of the LG and its theoretical underpinnings is relevant. In this article, the author will take the reader through a comprehensive 'how to' of the LG, including step-by-step explanations and examples.

Originally conceived in the field of psychology by Lyn M. Brown, Carol Gilligan and their colleagues,¹ the LG is a qualitative, relational, voice-centered methodology used for listening to narratives of a relational nature (Brown, Tappan, Gilligan, Miller, & Argyris, 1989; Brown & Gilligan, 1992). The LG is 'a systematic psychodynamic method for interpreting narrative data' (Tolman, 2002, p. 38) used most commonly to analyse interview transcripts in qualitative research.

Once coaching sessions are recorded and transcribed, they are analysed with several 'listenings' or re-readings of the transcript. The theory behind the multiple listenings is to allow the researcher to truly hear the nuances of a client's story, and to provide the researcher with opportunities to unravel and pay close attention to the important themes and relationships that emerge from the data. The procedure behind the LG calls for certain session excerpts to be listened to at least four discrete times. A detailed description of each of the four listenings will be made available in the next portion of this article. When researchers across disciplines ask people to draw upon complex, internal dialogues, which they may have never previously shared, '... [one] require[s] a method of analysis that will allow [him/her] to hear the intricacies and various voices in this conversation' (Raider-Roth, 2000, p. 45).

The Four Listenings of the LG

The First Listening

In order to engage in the LG, it is essential that certain client sessions be audio-recorded; of course, proper permission must be obtained from the client in order to

do so. Once sessions have been recorded, they must be transcribed so that the coach may more closely examine his/her practice.

The objective of the first listening is to attend to the stories that clients share. The researcher is to articulate a succinct, yet rich synopsis of the basic trends and themes emerging from the first listening, in order to hear the general scope of a client's story. It is imperative for the coach to understand the client's main story lines, and this is referred to as 'listening for plot' (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Raider-Roth, 2000). The first listening of the Listening Guide gives the researcher a view of the landscape of the session, an overview of the client's experiences. Important elements of the first listening are: the client's stories or the 'plot,' emotional resonance, repeated words, phrases, and images, information and comments that jump out at the coach, contradictions, omissions, and revisions (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Raider-Roth, 2000; Taylor et al., 1995; Way, 1998). All are carefully traced and recorded, helping the researcher follow not only what is significant to the research, but just as importantly, what is meaningful to the client. Attention is paid to what portions of the client's stories necessitate further analysis.

It is suggested that a color-coded system of some sort be used to organise themes that the coach sees emerging from the data. One may also consider placing stars or other markings in the margins of sections one may think need further attention in subsequent listenings. This purposeful rainbow of color-coded sequences allows one to create a 'trail of evidence' to later support one's claims (Brown, et al., 1989; Taylor et al., 1995; Raider-Roth, 2000). It may also be helpful to create a master list of the themes, to later examine overlapping patterns across clients or across sessions.

The coach is to look for evidence of silence in portions of the session, which may manifest as pauses noted in the transcript, as well as instances of clients either lowering their voices, or allowing their voices to trail off. '(T)ake care to note the silences and collect related evidence that might explain these moments of quiet' (Raider-Roth, 2000, p. 46).

In a serious effort to avoid the possibility of using the client's voice to tell the researcher's story, careful attention is paid to the coach's own 'reader response' in the first listening (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). The first listening demands that the researcher be mindful of his/her own responses, questions, and confusions in the first listening. By examining the coaching relationship itself, the researcher is able to appropriately learn from the tensions, the moments of feeling lost, and/or the times when connections are made with the client. Since personal agendas can potentially inhibit the listening process in this type of research (Anderson & Jack, 1991), the first listening portion of the LG affords the researcher opportunities to note all personal reactions to the research and coaching process, helping the coach to remain close to his/her own reactions to the story (Raider-Roth, 2000). These reactions and reflections are not simply noted and ignored; instead, these reactions are openly explored in the research and coaching process, used as prompts to promote thinking and analysis. This 'reader response' feature of the method helps to strengthen validity in the ways it pays attention to personal reflexivity. In this fashion, coaches can examine how personal values and social constructs play a role in one's practice and interpretations. In addition, there is an element of epistemological reflexivity in the LG in the ways it heightens further attention to findings and implications of one's practice and research.

During the first listening, if at all possible, it is recommended that the coach listen to a recording of the session as he/she reads through the transcript. A researcher could use one color to mark repeated phrases and words, as well as anything that may have surfaced in a compelling fashion. One could also note on a separate paper themes and stories, discrepancies and contradictions. It is often useful to keep responses to the listening in a journal. After finishing the listening, it is suggested that the coach re-write the underlined notations and themes, including any responses, and write a summary of this first listening. This summary will include an introduction to the client and the setting.

The Second Listening

By placing a firm, strong focus on the voice of the self, which is most often expressed as the first-person 'I,' the coach is able to closely attend to the thoughts, wishes, desires, needs, conflicts, and silences spoken by the client, by tracing them in a purposeful way. This allows the researcher to hear a depth to the clients' stories that is not possible by just looking at basic plot and themes in sessions (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Raider-Roth, 2000).

A crucial phase of the second listening is to actually extract a series of 'I' statements from the client's narrative transcript, and then create an 'I poem,' or voice poem. When we do this, we study all of the color-coded marks we have made that denote a particular theme that was extracted from the first listening. Once one has studied these 'I' statements, one crafts an 'I poem.' Frequently, the 'I' voice is intermingled with 'you's and 'they's, which may be interpreted as internal dialogues and/or dissonance within the client. One may display the interspersment of 'you' and 'they' with 'I' in order to convey and explore the client's feelings and tensions within a given theme. 'The 'I poems' and 'voice poems' are central to this analysis as they draw out the internal conversations so that they are audible and the nuances can readily be seen' (Raider-Roth, 2000, p. 49).

The purpose of constructing voice poems is twofold. First, it provides a systematic way for coaches to listen to a client's first-person voice and to attend to any distinctive patterns within it. Second, this methodical attention to voice provides us with opportunities to hear how clients speak of themselves, in relationship to themselves and others.

According to Gilligan et al. (2003), two rules manage the construction of an 'I poem.' First, one is to extract every first-person 'I' within the given excerpt, along with the verb and any seemingly important accompanying information. Second, one is to maintain the precise sequence in which the phrases originally occurred in the person's story. As the coach extracts the sequenced 'I' phrases, he/she places them in separate lines, like the lines of a poem. Often, 'I poems' capture concepts not directly stated by the client, yet central to the meaning of what he/she has said. In any case, the 'I poem' attends to an associative stream of consciousness carried by the first-person voice running through a narrative, rather than being contained by the full structure of sentences. Focusing just on the 'I' pronoun, and at times, its relation to other pronouns, brings the client's subjectivity to the foreground, providing the researcher with the opportunity to attend just to the rhythms and patterns in the client's relationships to him/herself and to others as expressed in his/her narratives.

The second listening focuses the self-voice of the client; how he/she speaks about him/herself (Brown & Gilligan, 1992), while listening to the client speak on his/her own terms (Way, 1998). What is he/she saying when he/she refers to him/herself? How does he/she describe him/herself? This is often expressed by the use of 'I,' 'me,' and 'you.' By following the 'I' statements of the client, a coach can listen for the client's 'thoughts, desires, wishes, needs, conflicts, and silences that are articulated in the first-person voice' (Raider-Roth, 2000, p. 47). The 'sense of I' is the 'Psyche' of the individual that he/she brings to the session, to each question (Gilligan, Brown, & Rogers, 1990, p. 97). What is he/she really saying/thinking? This analysis process allows the researcher to respond to the client both emotionally and intellectually. In other words, as the researcher develops a relationship with the client's self-voice, the coach becomes an even more empathic and responsive listener.

Just as it can be enlightening to explore the ways in which the client speaks of him/herself, it can be equally, if not more enlightening to explore the ways in which the client speaks of him/herself in relation to others, such as 'you' or 'they.' In some voice poems, the interplay of 'you's' and 'I's' appear meaningful on different levels. At times, clients may have simply been speaking in reference to 'you' or an 'other.' Yet other times, clients may have been knowingly or unknowingly separating themselves from a particular statement by using the pronoun 'you,' rather than owning the statement, and using the pronoun 'I' to claim a statement. It is important to be sensitive to 'you' statements and possible interpretations of them, especially considering the institutional restraints and cultural norms that potentially silence voices, or constrain expression (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

During the second listening, it may be valuable to listen to a recording of the given session if possible, and to read the transcript again. A coach may use different color-coding systems to underline phrases with 'I,' 'me,' 'you,' and 'we.' Upon completion of the listening, it is suggested to re-write each of the phrases in their order of appearance, creating poems from each of the stories, analysing and making notes in the margin while writing the poems. This analysis will culminate with a summary of what was found during this listening.

To illustrate the effectiveness of this method, an example of a voice poem follows. This example comes from Woodcock's (2003) work with Emilia. In this example, Emilia was explaining the conflict of why she enjoys reading magazines, while at the same time, she refers to the magazines as a guilty pleasure:

To me it's like a guilty pleasure because like, ok, so here's the way I'm supposed to be, and here's the way I'm supposed to dress . . . and there's that whole the do's and don'ts of relationships . . . you end up getting sucked into these articles . . . Sometimes, it makes me like, oh my god, get a grip like. You read it, and like girls write in, and you feel like oh my god. (laughs) Wow! . . . I remember it was sort of like this metaphorical thing. I was flipping through *Cosmo* and there's all these women like beautifully made up and stuff and like, the best clothes. And the one thing I kept noticing is that they have really nice hands and really nice nails and I was looking at my own hands, flipping the page. I was like, oh my god! Because my fingernails are short because I play guitar and I uh, am always like building things or something like that. And it was just sort of funny how my hands sort of like stained the whole image . . . I don't know how I could really describe it. There's part of me that wants to do it and wants to know what other people are doing, and what the norm is up to . . . But sometimes I find myself, like comparing? And contrasting like, what other girls are concerned about . . . I never write anyone's feelings off, but a lot of times to me, it's sort of like, laughable? I just really feel like those aren't

concerns of mine at all. And a lot of it comes from like, males. Those are concerns that I don't have because I'm not worried about impressing a man, or trying to understand a man.

By creating a voice poem, Woodcock (2003) was able to attend to Emilia's 'I' statements, in the ways she spoke about herself in relation to this context. In the poem, 'it' refers to the notion of guilty pleasure that Emilia addressed. 'They' refers to the 'other,' which in this case, is 'the norm,' or the girls in the magazine.

I	You	It	They
		Guilty pleasure	
I'm supposed to be, I'm supposed to dress.			
	you end up getting sucked into	it makes me	
	You read it,		girls write in,
	you feel		
I remember		it was sort of like this metaphorical thing.	
I was flipping through <i>Cosmo</i>			these women
I kept noticing			they have
I was looking at my own hands I was like, oh my god! I play guitar I uh, am always like building			
<i>my hands sort of like stained the whole image.</i>			
I don't know		the norm is up to.	
I find myself, like comparing?			what other girls
I never		it's sort of like, laughable?	
I just really feel		it comes from like, males.	
I don't I'm not worried about impressing a man			

In the voice poem, the first line refers to this notion of guilty pleasure. The voice poem helps to examine this further, in Emilia's own words. While guilty pleasure is often associated with indulgence in the forbidden, it appears that Emilia refers to magazines as a guilty pleasure for several reasons. Her guilt derives from her feeling of being torn between 'the norm,' or what she is 'supposed to be,' and who she is becoming. While the magazine makes her question herself, the questioning is not always entirely negative, as evidenced at the end of the poem, saying 'I don't, I'm not

worried about impressing a man.' With this pragmatic way of making meaning, she understands that she can be whatever she would like to be as a woman, and not what the pages of a magazine tell her are 'the norm' in order to impress another. From a complex poem such as this, much discussion and analysis can continue.

The Third and Fourth Listeners

Third and fourth listeners, referred to by Gilligan et al. (2003) as contrapuntal, are a more in-depth way for a coach to re-visit his/her research questions by examining his/her color-coded transcripts and creating voice poems to explore the ways themes or voices either melodiously interact, or are in tension with one another. Once themes or voices are decided upon by the researcher by first 'listening for plot' (e.g., Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Raider-Roth, 2000) and by secondly sketching a trail of evidence (Brown et al., 1989; Raider-Roth, 2000; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995) to substantiate claims that those voices are indeed demonstrative of an client's way of making meaning, then the contrapuntal third and fourth listeners are a way to further examine the voices and how they relate to one another.

These listeners allow the coach to focus on the various ways in which the clients speak of relationships in their lives (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). The third and fourth listeners are meant to allow the researcher opportunities to bring to light insights into how the client attends to his/her life, as a way of knowing, or as a channel of discovery. Of particular significance in these two listeners is to extract two themes of the narrative that melodiously react with one another, or that are in tension with each other (Raider-Roth, 2000, p. 50). This tension or interweaving of the two themes is termed by Gilligan, Brown, and Rogers (1990) as 'contrapuntal' (p. 115). The key is to look at these two themes as being in relation to one another. By using color-coded themes, one may see that colors tend to overlap at particular places. This harmony of color flashes a tangible sign that those overlying colors are the badge of a contrapuntal point for analysis and exploration. An essential understanding of the third and fourth listeners is that any knowledge to be gained is complex, and that the themes interlace into an intricate and textured unit of insight. This final listening exemplifies the relational nature of the method because it directly lends itself to uncovering the relationships to be found in the clients' stories.

During the third and fourth listening, it is helpful to again listen to the session recording, and to read the transcript as one underlines phrases that relate to either of the two contrapuntal themes. It is suggested to then re-write all that is underlined, analysing as one writes, and making notes in the margins. The analyses and notes from the two readings will then be summarised.

As prompted by the LG, while the third and fourth listeners are sometimes done separately, they are analysed together, noting the relationship they have to each other, how they talk to each other, and what this relational conversation is telling the coach about his/her client that is pertinent to the research. In this particular example, based on the work of Cruz (2006), the first and second listeners uncovered themes of competition and pressures her client felt in her job. The poem below displays her voice of 'pressure' heard during the third listening and her voice of 'struggle' heard during the fourth listening. The phrases are arranged in the order they appeared in the session transcript.

Pressure

Struggle

So, I was shot down.

So then sometimes from that meeting on, I find myself saying, 'should I say something, or shouldn't I say something, should I bother or shouldn't I bother?'

I've gotten to the point that if it means something, if it's important to me, I'm not going to bring it up in a department meeting anymore.

When we're in a meeting, I'm, there are times when I do say what I think.

But, I know I'm being judged by certain people in my department.

Like, oh, 'she's getting a little too pushy there, put her back in her place.'

When read aloud, Cruz (2006) interpreted that this woman felt that her peers judged her when she spoke. This relational experience embodies mistrust, and for her, this is an uncomfortable situation. The client admitted that she has silenced herself within the staff meeting setting when she said, 'I'm not going to bring it up in a department meeting anymore.' This type of analysis allows a researcher to see distinct patterns in the client's stories, thus empowering both coach and client to unearth new, positive pathways in moving forward.

In the LG, one allows the contrapuntal themes to emerge from the first and second listenings. Coaches can look for themes relevant to their research questions, because during this listening, one returns to the heart of his/her research. In these third and fourth listenings, one may give attention to what new knowledge the client offers the research topic, while staying very much attuned to the clients' voices and relationships.

With respect to validity, the LG method allows a coach researcher to continuously check claims in several fashions. First, in the careful, systematic way the researcher color-codes full interview transcripts, one creates a 'trail of evidence' to later support any claims (Brown et al., 1989; Raider-Roth, 2000; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). Second, the coach may perform member checks, asking clients for follow-up sessions to clarify any thoughts, questions, or confusions. Third, researchers can also become members of an interpretive community (Tappan, 2001; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). This community can be a collaboration of other coaches, all trained in the LG and/or sensitive to the issues involved in coaching research. As a willing and engaged audience, the interpretive community can meet regularly to offer support and suggestions for interpretations of data. Fourth, as mentioned earlier, the LG itself has built-in the notion of reader response (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). The first listening portion of the LG affords the researcher opportunities to note all personal reactions to the interview, helping the coach to

remain close to his/her own feelings, and provides an avenue through which the coach can carefully categorise his/her reactions as separate from those of the client.

Conclusion

There is a palpable force trying to usher coaching into the realm of evidence-based practices (Drake, 2008). To respond to these demands and to progress the field, coaching professionals must gradually engage in more research. However, coaches should find topics and methodologies that are pertinent and exciting to them, based meaningfully on their daily practice, in ways that will sincerely help their clients. By exploring the theoretical underpinnings of relationships and voice, in addition to sharing the relational, voice-centered methodology of the LG, it is believed that coaches will now be exposed to this LG method as either a true possibility for their work, or at least a spark to spur further ideas.

While in research we must be intensely careful not to tell our stories through the voices of our clients, it is equally as important that we locate ourselves as coaches in the research, and allow our experiences to guide a suitable path (Coddington, 1997). As a result of this thinking, it is essential that all researchers, and especially coaches, carefully select a methodology that provides them with the freedom and the structure necessary to hear the voices of their clients, while locating their own experiences and reactions as coaches in a purposeful manner as well. 'In a postmodern world of theory critique and multiple subjectivities, researchers must eschew innocent constructions of themselves . . . The personal, . . . is a starting point, and a valuable one' (Coddington, 1997, p. 22). A method of analysis such as the LG provides this precise freedom and structure, while allowing the personal as a starting place. In fact, the LG has renewed interest in recent methodological circles (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008) as a multi-layered means of exploring how much we can really know about people, and how we come to know people enough to respectfully write about them.

Of course, the LG is one methodological approach among many. The LG is certainly not for everybody, and is not appropriate for every coach, client and audience. The LG is most appropriate for research questions that ask clients to draw upon complex, internal dialogues, which they may have never previously shared. At times, a researcher requires a method of analysis that allows him/herself to hear the intricacies and various voices in the coaching conversation (e.g., Raider-Roth, 2000, p. 45). The LG should only be used for coaches who need to systematically and constructively attend to the many dimensions and tenor of voices, as well as make sense of the intertwining and complex relationships in a study.

In the end, it is up to each individual to determine which analysis is best for his/her practice and research. With these thoughts in mind, since 'coaching is, in many ways, an unprecedented phenomenon that requires new levels of thinking' this is one small step towards the 'larger goal of helping coaches and coaching to evolve and, in doing so, find their way home to their deepest calling and contribution' as they embark on negotiating the role of evidence in a new era of coaching (Drake, 2008, p. 16).

Note

1. Central participants in the collaboration that rendered the Listening Guide included 'Dianne Argyris, Jane Attanucci, Betty Bardige, Lyn Mikel Brown, Elizabeth Debold, Andrea Doucet, Carol Gilligan, Dana Jack, Kay Johnston, Matasha Mauthner, Barb Miller, Dick Osborne, Pamela Pleasants, Annie Rogers, Amy Sullivan, Mark Tappan, Jill Taylor, Deborah Tolman, Janie Ward, Grant Wiggins, and David Wilcox' (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003, p. 158).

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Notes on contributor



Prior to becoming a professor, Christine Woodcock was a special education teacher. With a Ph.D. in Reading from the University at Albany, her research interests focus on the role of literacy in people's lives. After being a full-time professor for several years at institutions such as the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, Towson University, and Southern New Hampshire University, Christine is now an adjunct instructor for American International College, while staying at home to care for her newborn baby. Please visit www.ChristineWoodcock.com for more information.