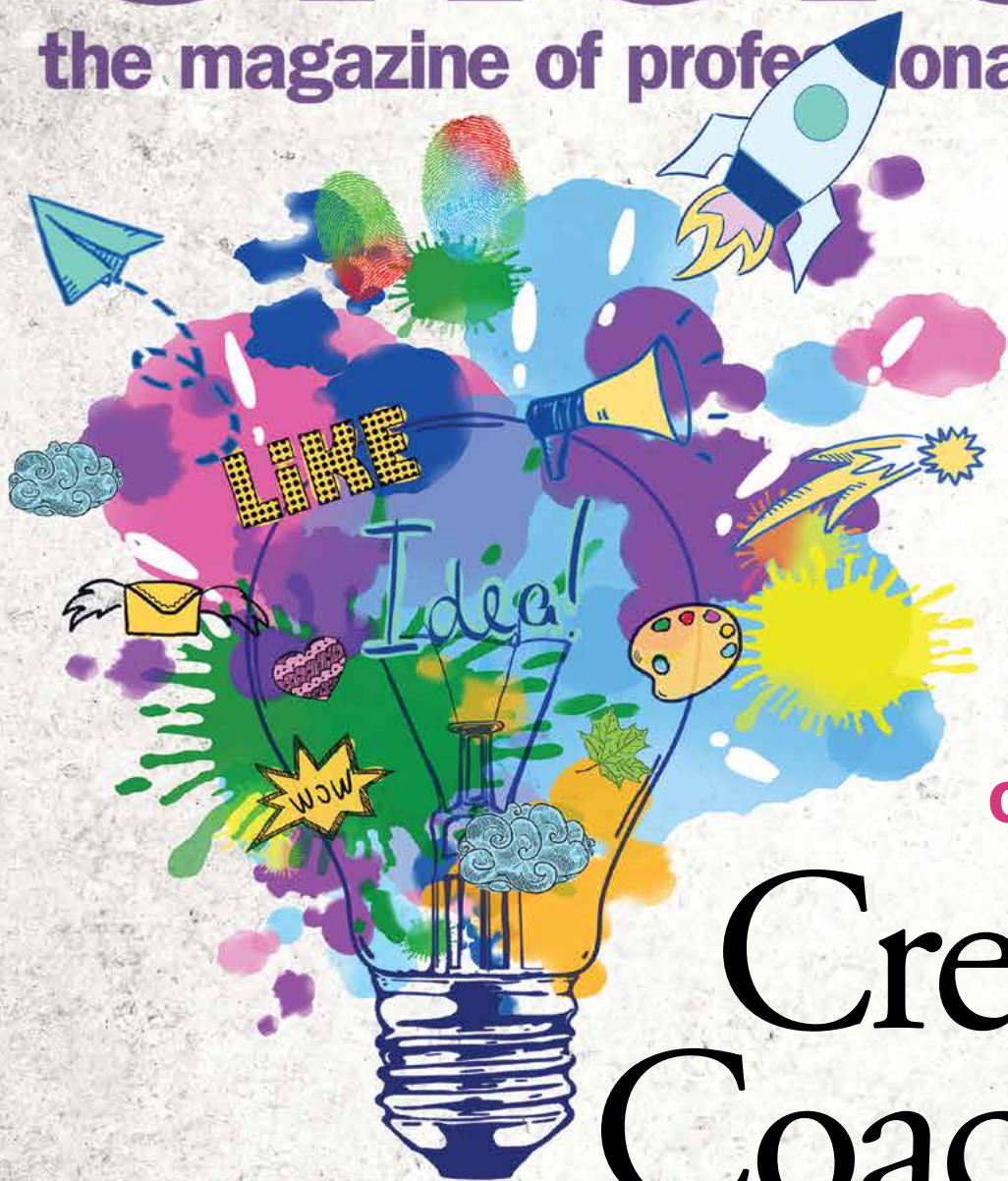


choice

the magazine of professional coaching



**CHANGE
YOUR
POINT
OF VIEW**

**WRITE
YOUR
PATH!**

Integrating
journal writing

**MINDSETS &
QUESTIONING**

Creative Coaching

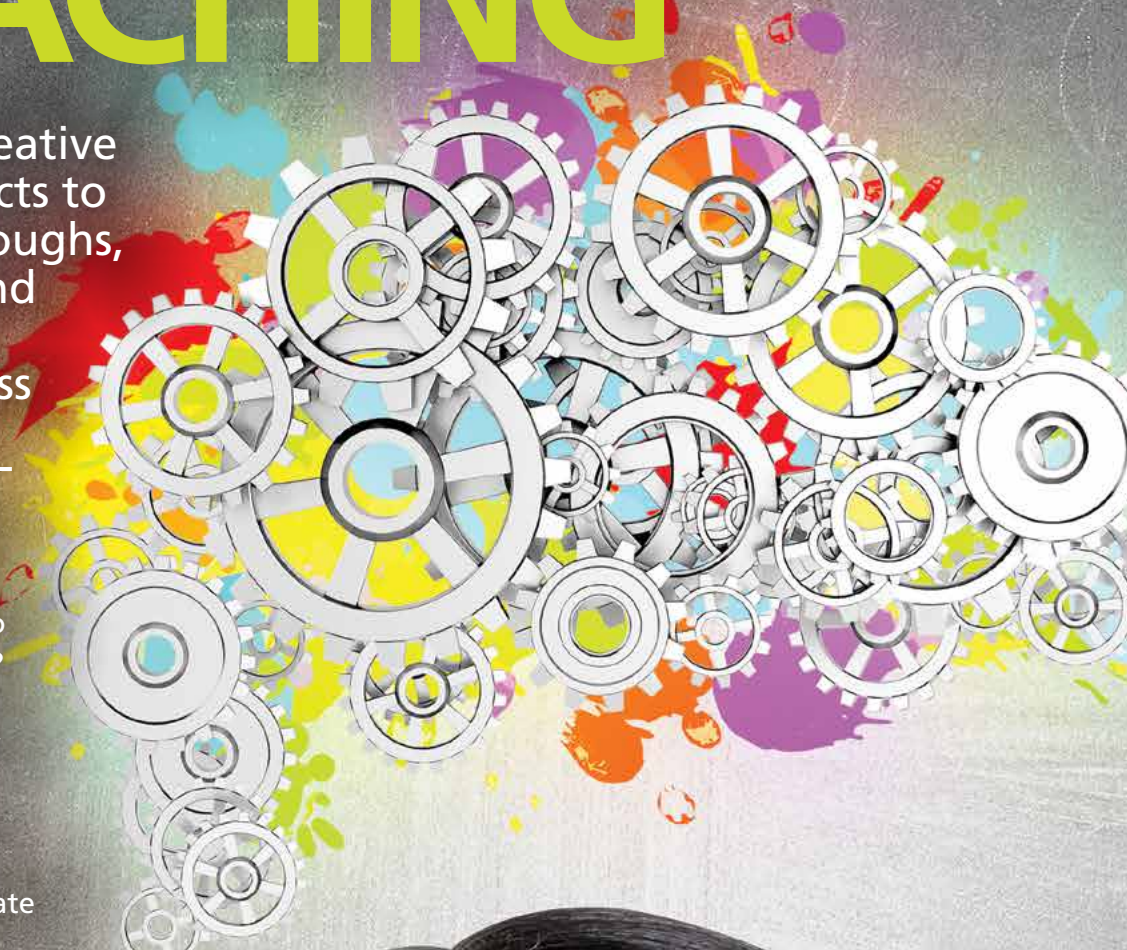
Tools, tips & techniques



CREATIVE COACHING

The Power of creative tools and products to create breakthroughs, attract clients and transform your coaching business

What creative tools and techniques do you use to make the work you do stand out as memorable? What results are possible when you introduce new stimuli into your work? How do you “break the ice,” get out of a rut, shift perspective and create aha moments? This issue discusses coaching tools, tips and creative processes to help you become a better coach.





WRITE YOUR PATH!

7 best practices for integrating journal
writing into coaching

By Lynda Monk, MSW, RSW, CPCC

I was eight years old when I started writing in a small pink diary, three by five inches in size with a little loop, lock and key on the front of it. Writing my private thoughts and feelings down felt very top-secret and somehow important. I don't remember where I got my first journal or who, if anyone, suggested I write in it.

The instinct to write and get our lives down on paper is a natural impulse for many individuals. Journals can fill with thoughts, feelings and stories that express our wildest dreams, broken hearts, life decisions, favourite memories, biggest losses, celebrations of success and more. Journal writing can be therapeutic, healing and a nourishing life practice that can help us engage in self-directed change, as well as deepen feelings of optimism, resilience, joy, hope, clarity and possibility. I have used journal writing as a key transformational coaching tool for helping clients to gain clarity, get out of ruts, shift perspective and create many new “aha moments” in their lives.

Expressive writing transforms lives. Perhaps that is why so many coaches recommend it to their clients. Some coaches suggest clients write in a journal between coaching sessions, others might integrate journaling and expressive writing into a session or provide guided writing exercises to help clients with specific areas of exploration and growth. What new coaching results are possible through inte-

grating journal writing into your transformational work with clients and perhaps in your own life too?

Here are seven tips and best practices to keep in mind when integrating journal writing to help your clients cultivate new insight, growth, change and success while keeping in mind structure and process:

1 ENCOURAGE AWARENESS TO ACTION

Two key elements of coaching include helping our clients to deepen their learning and forward their action. Journal writing helps cultivate new self-awareness and insights from within. From that awareness we want to support clients into inspired and informed action. After journaling, we might ask: “So what, now what?” or you might offer this further writing prompt: The action I want to take from this new awareness is (fill in the blank).

2 PROVIDE TIPS & GUIDELINES

The blank page can be a daunting place. People often benefit from some basic tips, guidelines, structures and ideas on how to journal. For example, you can invite them to engage in some free writing that is time-limited, where the instructions are to: keep their pen moving; avoid the tendency to censor their writing; write about both thoughts and feelings not just events; get curious and ask questions on the page.

While time-limited free writing can help someone go to the page and write, it is important to keep in mind that free flowing writing with whatever comes to mind can be too unstructured for some clients. With journal coaching, in part, we are helping to awaken curiosity within our clients.

I love this quote from Anatole France: “Awaken curiosity. It is enough to open minds. Do not overload them. Put there just a spark. If there is some good inflammable stuff, it will catch fire.”

3 CONSIDER WHO BENEFITS

Journaling is not for everyone, no more than any other tool, technique or approach is a one-size-fits-all. According to James Pennebaker, PhD. and John Evans, Ed.D., co-authors of *Expressive Writing: Words that Heal – Using expressive writing to overcome traumas and emotional upheavals, resolve issues, improve health, and build resilience* (2014): “In any given study, some – but not all – people benefit from writing.”

Research shows that certain people will benefit from the healing power of writing more than others. For example, people who tend to be naturally out of touch with their own emotions show more health improvements after writing compared with their more easygoing, self-reflective and open counterparts (p.14). This might be because in the writing itself this may be one

Journal writing helps cultivate new self-awareness and insights from within.



of the few places they are attempting to open up and express themselves. Consider your clients, who they are, and give some thought to whether or not expressive journal writing is the best fit for them.

4 ACKNOWLEDGE RESISTANCE & FEAR

People can have many fears when it comes to journal writing. They might fear being criticized or judged for what they write. Perhaps they fear someone will read their writing and innermost thoughts without their permission. Many people have had an experience like this in their past (think of a parent reading a teenager’s journal) and a previous betrayal of trust can block an individual from writing now.

A person can fear they have nothing to write about or fear what they might discover if they do write. What if an inner truth rises up from below the surface of awareness and tumbles out on the page? Such moments can be scary, exhilarating and life-changing.

In my own life I have made large life decisions as a result of my journal writing practice including, for instance, getting divorced,

quitting my job as a medical social worker, moving to an island, starting my own business and training to become a coach.

5 PROVIDE PROMPTS, TOOLS & EXERCISES

It can be helpful and fun to make journaling tools, prompts and exercises specific to your work with clients to guide and support them on the page. For a sample of a journal coaching tool I created for fellow coaches, you can access my Explore Your Coaching Niche Journaling Tool at creative-wellnessworks.com/niche (no sign-up required).

6 JOURNAL YOURSELF!

Research in a Clinician’s Guide to Teaching Mindfulness by Christiane Wolf and J. Greg Serpa, shows that mindfulness and personal growth practices that are suggested and taught to others are most likely to benefit clients when offered by coaches/practitioners who engage in these practices themselves. There is a direct relationship between client outcomes and the coach’s own mindfulness practice, in this case journaling.

7 INVITE SELF-CARE

Sometimes expressive writing can surface emotional pain or trigger traumatic memories depending on a person’s situation and history. If the writing is hurting, encourage people to stop and emotionally take care of themselves. While expressive writing can help heal trauma, anxiety, depression and reframe painful life experiences to generate greater resilience and healing, that process should ideally be supported by a skilled and trained therapeutic writing coach or other helping professional.

Journaling is more than a creative and expressive art; it is a powerful tool for transformation, growth and inspired action in our own and our clients’ lives. Like any tool or technique that we might introduce in our coaching work with individuals and/or groups, we should know how to use it in the most ethical and effective way, ideally have some first-hand experience with it including knowledge about it’s benefits and application, and offer some tips for helping clients get the most out of it. These can be considered part of our journal coaching competencies.

While there are many best practices, tools and activities that can bring new learning, insights, healing and more as benefits of journaling, it is also a practice that coaches and clients alike can make their own. As Christina Baldwin, author of *Life’s Companion: Journal Writing as a Spiritual Quest*, points out: “There is a Spanish proverb which says: ‘there is no road, we make the road as we walk.’ I would say the same thing about journal writing: we make the path as we write.” •

Journaling is more than a creative and expressive art; it is a powerful tool for transformation, growth and inspired action in our clients’ lives.

