



Soul Meets Purpose

Are your client's goals driven by ego or soul?

By Tim Kelley

Coaching, as a relatively new profession, is still defining itself. A definition I favor is this, as a coach — I help my clients achieve goals. This contrasts with psychotherapy, which helps clients to fix personal problems. Goal setting is a key component of a coaching relationship, and it is a rich topic. I will address only one aspect of it — How do we know whether our clients' goals will serve them?

“An ego goal or desire that is not related to a person's life purpose will go nowhere.”

Most coaches have had a client set a goal the coach did not believe was healthy. Many of us have coached a client towards a reasonable-sounding goal, only to encounter ongoing resistance from the client. Most telling, it is often the case that a client's experience

of achieving a goal does not live up to their expectations. I contend that these are symptoms of poor goal setting, not necessarily poor coaching or bad faith on the part of the client. The distinction here is between goal *setting* and goal *clarification*.

More sophisticated coaching techniques establish a purpose (or mission) for the client first, then to set goals consistent with the purpose. There are two basic schools of thought about how to do this:

1. It is the coach's role to help the client create a purpose. Creating a purpose is much like setting a goal. It is the client's decision which purpose to pursue.
2. The client already has a purpose — they just don't know it. It is the coach's role to help the client to discover their purpose.

The first approach, while much simpler, has the same flaw as goal setting. How do we know whether the purpose a client creates will serve them? I submit that we have no choice but to assume that our clients already have a purpose and our role is to help them find it. Repeated experience with my clients has borne this

“A goal that serves a client is one that is consistent with his or her purpose.”

out. Discovering their purpose has been a deep and enriching experience for them, and for me.

Without delving too deeply into psychology, allow me to make a basic distinction: the part of us that we know about, think about, and make decisions from I will call the *ego* (also termed the *conscious* in Jungian psychology). Our purpose is invisible to our everyday mind (in what Jung calls the *unconscious*). It lives in the dark, until the client (or a talented coach) finds it. For want of a better term, I will call the part of us that sets our purpose our *soul*. How much religious or spiritual significance you attach to this term depends on your own beliefs. I use it because my clients understand immediately what I am talking about. An equally applicable term is “entelechy,” a principle within an organism that guides its development.

Using this terminology, I would say that all goals are set by the ego, with varying degrees of influence from the soul. A goal that serves my client is one that

Ego Values

- Health
- Wealth
- Happiness
- Avoiding fear, pain, and struggle
- Particular life circumstances like: owning a home, a fast car, living in a specific place, or having a great relationship
- Acceptance, approval, admiration, and respect from others
- Divides experiences into good and bad, like and don't like

Soul Values

- Concerned with being, not doing
- A long-term view, sometimes beyond a single lifetime
- No attachment to what form the manifestation of the purpose takes (“it’s all good”)
- No preference for what experience the ego is having; doesn’t divide experiences into good and bad
- Sees a person’s life as a “work of art” or journey
- Sees all experiences as teachings along a path (no matter how the ego experiences them)

is consistent with his or her purpose, and the soul is the keeper of the purpose, not the ego.

How can you determine whether what your client is saying is based in his or her soul? Many coaches use intuition, and this is a fine tool. I offer an additional structure to assist you. The ego has distinct values, which cause it to choose certain things over others. The soul operates by completely different principles. By being aware of the differences, you may be able to hear or sense which part of your client is driving an interaction.

The ego is entirely responsible for setting goals. Don’t take what I am saying to mean that the ego is bad in some sense, or that its values don’t serve. My point is simply this: *an ego goal or desire that is not related to a person’s life purpose will go nowhere*. It is our responsibility as coaches to help our clients ground their goals in something deeper than simple ego desire. ●

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