

Challenging Coaching

Going beyond traditional coaching to face the FACTS



Heron's Six Categories of Intervention

A couple of weeks ago sparked by [this article in the Sunday Times](#), we had a lively dialogue on the LinkedIn coaching groups about whether it is the coach's role to give the CEO 'a kick up the pants'. A couple of times people referred to Heron's six categories of intervention and how this had helped them in their coaching. This is a model I had not come across before so I checked it out and here is my summary of it in the context of challenging coaching.

John Heron's framework provides a model for analysing how you deliver help. Heron's model has two basic styles – "authoritative" and "facilitative" which further breakdown into six categories to describe how people intervene when helping. If a helping intervention is "authoritative", it means that the person "helping" is giving information, challenging the other person or suggesting what the other person should do. If a helping intervention is "facilitative", it means that the person "helping" is drawing out ideas, solutions, self-confidence, and so on, from the other person, helping him or her to reach his or her own solutions or decisions.

Authoritative Interventions

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"Prescriptive" – You explicitly direct the person you are helping by giving advice and direction.

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"Informative" – You provide information to instruct and guide the other person.

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“Confronting” – You challenge the other person’s behaviour or attitude. Not to be confused with aggressive confrontation, “confronting” is positive and constructive. It helps the other person consider behaviour and attitudes of which they would otherwise be unaware.

Facilitative Interventions

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- “Cathartic” – You help the other person to express and overcome thoughts or emotions that they have not previously confronted.
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- “Catalytic” – You help the other person reflect, discover and learn for him or herself. This helps him or her become more self-directed in making decisions, solving problems and so on.
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- “Supportive” – You build up the confidence of the other person by focusing on their competences, qualities and achievements.



From this brief overview, we can see that traditional coaching techniques have focussed upon interventions that Heron would have termed facilitative. Challenging coaching and more specifically the FACTS coaching model that Ian and I detail in our book focusses upon the authoritative intervention of ‘confronting’. To self-assess your own coaching style using Heron’s model please download the following questionnaire – [Heron Six Styles of Intervention Self-Assessment Questionnaire](#)

Whilst it is understandable that coaches reject the ‘prescriptive’ and ‘informative’ interventions as inappropriate, we ‘throw the baby out with the bathwater’ if we reject all authoritative interventions. You could say that by doing this we undermine our own authority 😊 After all, real authority is not just about ‘the right to control or command’ or ‘an accepted source of information’ but also ‘a testimony or witness’. As challenging coaches we act as witness to our clients and we provide testimony, we speak our truth and we face the FACTS. John Heron went on to write some wacko stuff on spirituality – top man, take a bow.

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John Heron – Founder of Herons Model



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