

Sir John Whitmore

By Eve Menezes Cunningham

A pioneer in the field of coaching, Sir John Whitmore started his career as a professional racing driver. After winning British and European Saloon Car Championships in the 1960s and driving on Ford's team at Le Mans, he became interested in sports psychology.

Through coaching sports people and co-founding Inner Game Ltd with tennis player turned coaching pioneer, Timothy Gallwey, they found themselves being sought out by businesses and created the field we now recognise as business and executive coaching.

The International Coaching Federation gave Whitmore their President's Award to honour his work in the coaching field and he continues to speak around the world - I interviewed him for this feature at a psychosynthesis conference he was speaking at in Italy.

Sir John Whitmore is Chairman of Performance Consultants International. He and his colleagues at Performance Consultants created the GROW model (see box 'The GROW model') and his book, *Coaching for Performance: GROWing People, Performance and Purpose*, is a core text on many university coaching courses.

'At the beginning,' says Whitmore, 'coaching to me was all about sport because I came from sport. The other person, Timothy Gallwey, was a tennis player. He was captain of the Harvard tennis team and I was a professional racing driver so when we started to study psychology we began to see that psychology could be used to help people in sports. So we were playing with sport and the word coaching is a word in sport.'

'Some business people said, "We know you're doing a tennis course but can we come on the tennis course?" We said, "Yes" and they would say, "We would like to do this in the workplace". So people began to pull us into the workplace away from sport but the word coaching is still a sport word. That's the difficulty, it still confuses some people. And I have to say, sports coaching is very old fashioned compared with what we now have in the workplace.'

'I think it's to do with the relationship, in the workplace or in sport, the people who know tell the others what to do. I was uncomfortable with that. I wanted to do things my way so I was very happy when psychology began to pull us in that direction anyway because it felt right to do it our way. I found myself, even while still playing sport, learning a lot from being more willing to do things my way rather than doing it in the way they tell you to do it.'

'It might be how to hold a tennis racket in the beginning but really it's how you do anything. So we began to think, well, if

“The word coaching is still a sport word”



somebody wants me to help them with a problem they have, I have to do that in a way that works well for *them*, not just say, "I know how to fix it" but to do it in a way that's suitable for *them*.

'If coaching has any weakness now, it's that it's become a little too academic and it needs to be more personal. In 20 years or so, I would hope that coaching would be completely adopted by the way we relate to people in the workplace and that people would be friendly in the workplace. Now we still have hierarchy. We have less hierarchy than they did 500 years ago with the king on top and everyone doing what he told them but I hope that the relationships in the workplace will continue to change.'

'The most important thing about coaching is that every single human being is different. We are different in what we do individually as coaches and the people we are working with are also different. So there is not one right way to coach and there is not one right way to be coached. We have got to understand people and I think that will come in the future. We are moving in that direction.' ■

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The GROW model

GROW has become one of the best known models in coaching:

- G** Goal setting both for the session and short and long term goals outside the session.
- R** Reality check to explore the client's situation.
- O** Options and exploring alternative strategies.
- W** What needs to be done, by Whom, When and the Will to achieve it.

In *Coaching for Performance*, Whitmore stresses the need to go beyond GROW and to include Awareness and Responsibility.



Transpersonal Coaching

Transpersonal Coaching draws on transpersonal psychology (including psychosynthesis) and goes beyond the person to include their spiritual and emotional intelligence.

Sir John Whitmore's marriage to Diane Whitmore meant that he was steeped in this approach as they learned about psychosynthesis from its creator, Roberto Assagioli. By changing the language, he and others, have brought a different level to executive and business coaching.

'When I think about the Logical Levels in NLP, the Purpose/Beyond Identity step sits firmly in the transpersonal. After connecting with that as I (or clients) step back into each of the previous stages, the shift is palpable.

Transpersonal coaching also offers clients who may be averse to the idea of religion or spirituality a way to access the wisest part of themselves (for example, during Parts work, the part that is healthy and whole and which has a positive intention no matter how unhealthy the habit appears to be).'

John Whitmore and Hetty Einzig now train coaches

in this approach. They define transpersonal coaching as a style that 'recognises and works with the yearning, ingrained in the human psyche, for something *beyond the personal*, beyond the material and the everyday. This may be expressed in many different ways, through spiritual and ethical practice, through creativity within and outside the workplace, through volunteering, community work and other forms of service.'

If you feel that there's something missing in any area of your life, you might want to just think about what that part of you (soul, higher self, wise part, whatever feels comfortable for you to potentially dialogue with) needs for a few moments.

Do you have a spiritual and/or ethical practice that fulfils you?

Are you able to express your creativity in your work and in your life?

Do you volunteer or serve your community in other ways?

What small changes can you make in your life in order to meet these needs?