



How to coach a

woman

a practitioner's manual

A refreshingly different guide to becoming
an ethical and responsible coach

Lynette Allen & Meg Reid

Foreword by Dr Stephen Palmer

How to Coach a Woman – A Practitioner’s Manual

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an ethical and responsible coach

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Introduction

When ... someone listens to you, when another person has the time to sit opposite you, take in and concentrate on what you're saying without agenda or judgement. When someone has no advice to give and won't make any up. When someone doesn't presume they know what's best for you, won't publicise your affairs around the office or gossip about you to your friends. When the person listening to you believes you can juggle what you do, rearrange what you have, reprioritise what you need and change your mind – if you want to. When someone doesn't mind that you're confused, won't be emotionally scarred by seeing you cross, disappointed, upset or irritated. When for that hour, it's absolutely, entirely, completely and totally OK just to be you.

You can't tell us there isn't a woman alive who would love an hour in that place! Well, if you are a professional life coach, a business or executive coach or use your coaching skills at work, as a manager, the skills you have provide that place; coaching is needed and valued by its female coachees because it provides that place. The coaching skills you have, and want to build on, will be of more use to a woman than any invention, gadget or technological progress could ever be. This book will show you how to communicate with women using a coaching approach.

It will also teach you how to talk to women about coaching and what to expect from your female coachees. It will give you tips, techniques and proven coaching models to take your coachees through so that you get to the heart of the matter and deal with issues swiftly. In short, it will not only describe all the skills you need to coach successfully but will teach you the primary differences between coaching a woman and coaching a man.

Are there really differences we hear you ask? Surely coaching is coaching, no matter what gender your coachee is? Well, it may surprise you to learn that there are huge differences between coaching men and women. Coaching, as you will find out, can be quite different when you focus on one gender and become an expert in that field.

For centuries we've been trying to work out the core differences between men and women. Sociologists and psychologists have argued about whether the differences between the genders thrown up by their research are caused by biology or by society and the way we are brought up – in other words, the nature or nurture debate. Some assert that how we behave has evolved from the work we do: that the ancestral hunter/gatherer roles and the more modern division of work into paid work outside the home and unpaid work in the home has resulted in gender differences in personality and behaviour (Archer and Lloyd, 2002).

The neurobiological differences between the genders may have an effect on male and female behaviour. Some studies for instance, suggest that women have a higher percentage of grey matter in comparison to men, and that men have a higher percentage of white matter and cerebrospinal fluid. These physical differences may affect the way men and women think. Late twentieth-century studies have shown the effects of hormones on the human brain and our behaviour.

Other researchers look to the way we are brought up to explain the often puzzling or irritating mismatches in the ways that men and women think and communicate. One could argue that the way we are socialised as children has a significant effect on the way we communicate as adults, that we take that in-built initial socialisation into our adult lives – that it's ingrained in us, so it's no surprise that it affects the way we communicate as adults. (For more information on this particular issue, we found some very interesting research at www.iteslj.org)

Research presented in John Archer and Barbara Lloyd's *Sex and Gender* (2002) suggests that, even today, boys and girls are brought up differently. They refer to studies which show that the traditions of giving boys cars and girls dolls continues. They cite 'numerous North American studies [in which] there was clear indication that both parents encouraged "gender typed" activities'. Even the way their bedrooms are decorated will be very different for a brother and sister (cited in Archer and Lloyd, 2002: 62–63). Parents we've interviewed who had actively encouraged their sons in the first 36 months of their lives to watch less violent, traditionally 'girl' oriented cartoons soon found that their sons started denouncing them (and the fluffy toys they'd been given) as 'for girls'. They seemed entirely uninterested in the miniature ironing boards and vacuum cleaners they had been specifically given to play with – seeking out instead anything vaguely resembling a stick, which they then used to throw at each other, fight with and express themselves in competitive war type

activities. They were just playing, of course, but they seem to have picked up on the boy/girl expectations of society even at this tender age.

As adults, it seems that there is no getting away from the traditional roles of women as the main caretakers in society. In her book *Committed*, Elizabeth Gilbert seeks to understand the value of marriage and the effect it has on women. She says:

I do not entirely understand why the women to whom I am related give over so much of themselves to the care of others, or why I've inherited such a big dose of that impulse myself – the impulse to always mend and tend, to weave elaborate nets of care for others, even sometimes to my own detriment. Is such behaviour learned? Inherited? Expected? Biology predetermined? Conventional wisdom gives us only two explanations for this female tendency towards self-sacrifice, and neither satisfies me. We are either told that women are genetically hardwired to be caretakers, or we are told that women have been duped by an unjustly patriarchal world into *believing* that they're generally hardwired to be caretakers. These two opposing views mean that we are always either glorifying or pathologizing women's selflessness. Women who give up everything for others are seen as either paragons or suckers, saints or fools. (Gilbert, 2010: 172)

Later on, Gilbert also highlights how women are traditionally the ones who adapt and move emotionally and physically around their families to willingly accommodate and put first everyone else's whims and expectations. She says:

[Women have] it has always seemed to me, a sort of talent for changing form, enabling them to dissolve and then flow around the needs of their partners, or the needs of their children, or the needs of mere quotidian reality. They adjust, adapt, glide, accept. They are mighty in their malleability, almost to the point of a superhuman power. I grew up watching a mother who became with every new day whatever that day required of her. She produced gills when she needed gills, grew wings when the gills became obsolete, manifested ferocious speed when speed was required, and demonstrated epic patience in more subtle circumstances. My father had none of that elasticity. He was

a man, an engineer, fixed and steady. He was always the same. He was *Dad*. He was the rock in the stream. We all moved around him, but my mother most of all. She was mercury, the tide. (Gilbert, 2010: 183)

It seems that for all our twenty-first century challenging of traditional gender roles at work and in the home, the basic principle remains that women and men, despite our common humanity, experience life differently. That difference has been the stuff of literature, music, politics and the workplace for generations. That difference will naturally inform and influence the way you coach your female coachees.

In Jane Austen's *Persuasion* the then current male/female social roles are described in this way:

The Mr. Musgroves had their game to guard, and to destroy, their horses, dogs, and newspapers to engage them; and the females were fully occupied in all the other common subjects of housekeeping, neighbours, dress, dancing, and music.

In the famous musical *My Fair Lady*, when a frustrated Professor Higgins can't understand why Eliza has run away, he sings in 'A Hymn to Him':

Women are irrational, that's all there is to that! ...
They're nothing but exasperating, irritating, vacillating, calculating,
Agitating, maddening, infuriating hags! ...
Why can't a woman be more like a man?

And much more recently, in David Lynch's cult 1990's TV series *Twin Peaks*, Agent Cooper remarks: 'In the grand design women were drawn from a different set of blueprints' (quoted in Archer and Lloyd, 2002: 2).

How can we interpret these studies from a coaching perspective? Regardless of where your loyalties lie in the nature/nurture debate, wouldn't it be refreshing to acknowledge that men and women do in fact behave differently? Instead of trying to suppress those differences and pretending they don't exist, it would be infinitely more advantageous at this stage in our development to recognise those differences and work with them within the coaching framework. Within the coaching fraternity there is simply a need for coaches who are expert in understanding the detail

of those differences, so they can become super-effective at supporting their female coachees when traditional 'male' perspectives don't work for them. Women, after all, have been mistresses of adaption and change where required over the centuries; now it is time for the coaching system to rejuvenate and breathe fresh life into its processes, inspiring the women of tomorrow by supporting and recognising the needs of women today.

A woman wouldn't expect to walk into a man's clothes shop and find a perfect fit. She wouldn't expect to walk into a man's shoe shop and find a perfect fit. So why on earth would a woman expect to go to a coach who isn't an expert in coaching women and find her perfect fit? Masculinity and femininity are complex issues and most people will have what we label 'masculine' and 'feminine' aspects to their personality and behaviour. But we would like you to benefit from our experiences in coaching women so that you can hone your skills to work with your female coachees (whether you're a manager coaching at work or a professional coach) more successfully.

This book will give insights into how women think and therefore how a coach can be trained to use his or her approaches, terminology, questions and rapport building skills to find that perfect fit. Notice that we said 'his or her' approaches. To our minds, it is entirely appropriate for a man to become an expert in coaching women, just as it would be for a female coach to coach male clientele. This book is about helping you get a perfect 'fit' with how a woman thinks – the types of issues that run through her mind, the speed at which her mind works, how a woman communicates and much more. What it is *not* about is diminishing the importance of men and how men think.

Coaching a man and coaching a woman is simply different – very different. This shows up clearly in the linguistic styles of the sexes at home, work, in meetings, on social occasions and in personal, casual and formal contacts. According to Deborah Tannen, 'communication isn't as simple as saying what you mean. How you say what you mean is crucial, ... using language is a learned behaviour: how we talk and listen are deeply influenced by cultural expectations. Women and men are like people who have grown up in two subcultures' (1995: 138). Women and men tend to have different ways of saying what they mean, which is why we feel this book is so important.

The TGROW model (which we cover in Chapter 3) is traditionally taught as a one-stop shop for the perfect coaching scenario – to coach anyone on any topic. However,

we will go one step further and show you how to sculpt this model, and your thinking, to fit your female coachee perfectly.

We will do this by concentrating on our six key principles to coaching a woman. They are:

Key Principle Number 1

Women want to feel their relationship with their coach is unique and different from the coach's relationship with other coachees

Anson Dorrance, from the University of North Carolina, in his article 'Coaching Women: Going against the Instincts of My Gender', says:

Although I was young, when I was first asked to coach the University of North Carolina (UNC) men's soccer team in 1974, I was prepared. Being male, and a devoted athlete and scrappy soccer player myself, I understood training men. The shock came in 1979, when I was asked to coach the women. The feminist literature at the time was telling me there were no differences between men and women; however, I have spent nearly my entire career discovering, and appreciating, those differences ... Women relate through an interconnected web of personal connections, as opposed to a more traditional male hierarchical style. To that end, what is critical in coaching women is that all players on the team have to feel like they have a personal connection with their coach, and it has to be unique.

Although Dorrance is talking about coaching football here, the same goes for coaching women throughout their lives. Each of your female coachees need to develop a unique relationship with you. One whiff of thinking she's 'just another coachee' or that you are working to a formula which is the same for all your coachees and she will be off, in search of a coach who really 'gets her'. Women foster their own unique relationships all the time. They have one friend who 'listens', one friend who 'gives advice', one who does 'sympathy', one who does 'straight talk', and they value each and every one of those friends – just as they will value their coach and the unique relationship they build with him or her. Men just don't seem to make that distinction between their buddies. We will teach you how to make that unique connection

by getting to know the ‘world’ women live in – understanding how their children and partners fit into their lives, understanding what their responsibilities are, what is important to them and what their priorities are.

Key Principle Number 2

Women learn best through discussion and have highly developed verbal skills

In cognitive tests and tasks which highlight sex differences, women obtain higher scores in verbal fluency. In coaching sessions, the fact that your female coachee will do most of the talking is paramount; it is how she learns about herself and how she solves her problems.

We know that women love talking and so coaching would appear to be a brilliant fit, but if the coach misses the key principle that, for women, talking is more than just streaming words and careless nattering, they will be missing a vital female preference and the coaching relationship just won't be as satisfying to either coach or coachee.

In our experience, we have found that our female coachees use talking to find things out about themselves – things they didn't realise were true until the moment the words left their lips. Women use talking to connect to others and to solve problems. Talking gives women access, in a unique way, to the information they hold in their unconscious minds.

Key Principle Number 3

Women have the ability to fix several problems at the same time, even when they are only talking to you about one issue

Women are renowned for their ability to multitask in everyday situations and we've noticed this when our female coachees are problem solving in a coaching session. Some research has suggested that while men use only one hemisphere of the brain to perform a function, women will use both (Jäncke and Steinmetz, 1994). In *Brain-sex*, about the biology of gender and the biological differences between men and women, Anne Moir and David Jessel (1998) suggest that women generally distribute processing across diverse regions of the brain. Male brains (testosterone modified

versions of the female brain) are notably more ‘compartmentalized’ and ‘focused’ in their processing.

This is the science behind the popular language of women having a natural aptitude for ‘multitasking’, and men seeming to generally adopt ‘single minded’ behavioural strategies. Discussing theories behind both men and women’s ability to multitask, Karen Pine, Professor of Developmental Psychology at the University of Hertfordshire said that in experiments where men and women worked on a series of simple tasks at the same time, such as searching for a key while doing easy maths problems, the women significantly outperformed the men, concluding from this that women are better able to multitask than men.

This may be why your female coachee might be telling you one story but her mind will already be fixing another problem simultaneously. It is why it is important to let her stream vocally – without judging that streaming as inconsequential chatter – and it is also why letting silence happen in the right place at the right time will be crucial to her.

A woman’s mind, when she is being coached, will flit all over the place and you need to be ready for that. An expert in coaching a woman will understand when is the right place to give your female coachee time to fix solutions in her mind that she won’t even have told you about. Because that is what women do: their minds race at 100 miles an hour even when they are silent or apparently daydreaming. One of our coachees described to us how her husband had noticed that she had been deep in thought when she was driving them to town. They were sitting in comfortable silence: her husband was enjoying being driven for a change and our coachee was consciously aware of where she was driving and what she was doing. She began, however, to tap the steering wheel with her thumb – an action she hadn’t noticed but her husband had. After looking at her for a few seconds, he smiled and said ‘What are you thinking about?’ She explained that she had just driven past a block of industrial units and wondered what it would be like to run her business from there and whether she would walk to work. She wondered how much the business rates would be and what the business community in that block was like, whether it was welcoming and engaging. All of those thoughts had been running through her mind as she had driven the short length of the block and been concentrating on dealing with heavy traffic and a roundabout. She had been thinking on multilevels. Your coachee will do that while being coached by you.

Key Principle Number 4

Women are emotionally literate and so are willing to acknowledge, explore and express emotions

In our experience, corroborated by research highlighting that ‘women show greater emotional sensitivity and responsiveness than men’ (Grossman and Wood, 1993), women are far more likely to feel comfortable talking about and expressing emotion during a coaching session. In fact Kuebli, Butler and Fivush (1995) have shown that girls’ propensity to talk about emotion shows up early in childhood.

Women seem to have an enhanced awareness of ‘emotionally relevant details, visual cues, verbal nuances, and hidden meanings’, writes Robert Nadeau, the author of *S/He Brain: Science, Sexual Politics, and the Myths of Feminism* (1996). In an essay on this subject in *The World & I* (1 November 1997), a personal attributes questionnaire lists female-valued attributes including, ‘does not hide emotions’, ‘aware of other’s feelings’ and ‘expresses tender feelings’ (quoted in Archer and Lloyd, 2002: 23).

Of course, there are many men who aren’t afraid to show their emotions, as Alexander McCall Smith says in his novel *Corduroy Mansions*: ‘We all weep, the only difference being that men often suppress their tears.’ It is your female coachee though who, in our experience, is most likely to talk openly about how she feels and even to cry during the session.

Sociologist Deborah Tannen, author of *You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (1995) studied the differences between how men and women use conversation. It would seem that for males, conversation is the way they negotiate their status in a group and keep people from pushing them around, whereas women use conversation to negotiate closeness and intimacy.

When your female coachee has established this closeness and trust with you as her coach, you will be able to react differently from her friends. Crying on a best friend’s shoulder is a comfort, but to be in a place where you feel safe enough to talk openly about what you feel, what you want and how to make the changes you need, is a real gift. We will show you how to create that space for your coachees.

Key Principle Number 5

Women are able to use visualisation very effectively

According to research referred to in *Psychology* (Carlson and Buskist, 1996: 471–472) women have been found to be consistently superior to men in tests involving visual recognition. Ecuver-Dab and Roberts (2004) cite evidence to show that when giving map directions women are more likely than men to give landmarks – women picture the route as though they are seeing it – whereas men describe the distance or the direction to take. Understanding how to work with a highly visual woman will give you greater depth and insight into coaching her.

Our female coachees often use visual metaphors to explain what they are thinking about. For example, one coachee described her confusion about her work–life balance as ‘having my thoughts in a tumble drier’; another visualised her life choices as boats going in different directions. Using visualisation techniques to picture the results of doing something differently is immensely motivational for a woman. We will teach you how to harness this visual ability to help your coachee see her future success.

Key Principle Number 6

Women are more self-critical

When involved in tests relating to spatial awareness, more women than men reported feeling confused but the researchers attributed this to women believing that they are less capable and competent than they really are.

A major study conducted by researchers at the University of Wales Institute (UWIC), Cardiff (Sanders, Sander and Mercer, 2009), which explored self-esteem in 112 psychology undergraduates, found that, compared with their female contemporaries, male respondents had higher self esteem, expected higher marks in exams and anticipated performing better than their fellow students. However, across the UK university sector female students continue to achieve more ‘good’ degrees (firsts and 2:1) than male students.

This self doubt seems to start in childhood. Teachers tell us that boys are quick to answer questions in class without worrying if they are right or wrong; girls on the

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- Coachee contact form
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- Goal setting using FEMALE and SMART
- Negative and positive circles
- Simple coachee terms and conditions
- Stress decision path
- Telephone confirmation letter
- The kind of values your coachee may think of
- The six key principles of coaching a woman
- The wheel of life and A values table
- Tips on blending TGROW with how a woman's mind works

Can you keep a secret?

What if a woman took you into her confidence and told you how she really felt about her life, her ambitions, her expectations of herself, her disappointments, her successes, would you know what to say?

What if she told you life wasn't quite what she'd planned, that cracks were starting to appear, or that she was unsure of her next move ... how would you answer?

This handbook is your answer. Lynette Allen and Meg Reid between them have more than 20 years experience of coaching women from every walk of life, on just about every topic you can imagine. They've been successfully training Coaches too and have poured everything they know into this unique book. Discover their secrets, tips, techniques, exercises and tools. Dispel the myths of coaching, understand the ethics and responsibility of taking on this vital role and you'll find a refreshingly different way to connect with your female employees or clients.

Includes a CD-ROM of practical coaching resources

A fantastic coaching handbook for women, *How to Coach a Woman* is a practical guide on how to work best with brilliant women.

Suzy Greaves, Founder of the Big Leap Coaching company

If you're already a life coach, interested in becoming one, or a manager who wants to connect with the women you work with, then this book is for you. I'm none of the above but I still found it fascinating just to learn about the psychological differences between men and women, and it was comforting to know that some of my innermost thoughts are quite universal!

Janey Lee Grace, author of *Imperfectly Natural Woman* and founder of 'The Home of Natural Alternatives' at www.janeyleegrace.com

How to Coach a Woman is unique in that it really goes into depth in not just the differences when coaching women, but in varying scenarios – undoubtedly a comprehensive, insightful and practical piece of work that is a great contribution to the coaching profession.

Katherine Tulpa, CEO, Association for Coaching



Lynette Allen has been referred to as one of the most prominent coaches for women this decade, she runs The Womens Coaching Company Ltd which specialises in coaching, mentoring and training Corporate and Entrepreneurial women and she co-founded the UK Coaching Partnership Ltd with business partner Meg Reid in 2005. She has written 3 self help books for women, and is a sought after speaker and broadcaster.



Meg Reid is the UK's leading specialist at coaching with women who want to bridge a gap in their lives. She works with American women re-locating to England, women in mid-life and women in supportive organisational roles in Universities. Meg co-founded the UK Coaching Partnership Ltd with Lynette with the express purpose of training ethical and responsible coaches. Meg wrote the first coaching book for the Arabic world.


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