



# Psychedelic-assisted Coaching, Part II

Having power to control your environment is necessary, but power to control yourself is not.

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“Psychedelics prove to you that there’s more than one way of seeing the world”

— **Jesse Lawler**, host of *SmartDrugSmarts* podcast

In Part I of this series, I considered the history of therapy and how coaching has emerged as a cross between psychology and consulting. Here, I’ll consider how psychedelic work appears in the contexts of therapy and coaching. In the third installment, I’ll propose forms for psychedelic-assisted coaching.

# Administration

Psychedelics are now being legalized for their commercial value and their psychological potential. They are being seen as agents in a pharmaceutical armamentarium and being presented as drugs and advertised by those empowered to prescribe drugs.

Here is the first conflict: those empowered to prescribe psychedelics are doctors or psychiatrists, and it is this faction that sees psychedelics as agents whose effect is chemical. But the salutary effect of psychedelics is not chemical and no doctor and few psychiatrists have training, experience, or competence in the altered reality where psychedelics prevail. It is fair to say that no one is fully experienced in another person's altered reality.

This is a conflict to the entire authoritarian model. Allopathic medicine forms the basis of mainstream healthcare. The allopathic approach has been disconnected from a person's own intelligent agency since its inception. That is, allopathic medicine both presumes and requires that it understands and controls the invasive methods that it employs. Whether it's surgery, blood pressure, or diet these are all mechanical systems even though they're complex.

In truth, the body's mechanical systems are not entirely reducible to separate parts. Their interaction creates feedback loops and from these emerge new structures beyond those that are seen and controlled at the mechanistic level. These higher structures, such as the mind, are considered as separate and subject to their own rules and standards.

The reductive approach continues to work as long as the structures in the mind behave mechanically and respond in isolation. If a chemical makes a depressed person happy or a manic person calm, then that's considered a cure. But when the object of one's ministrations disappears upon treatment and reappears in another form, the reductive model fails. This has always been the problem with mind-body medicine because in mind-body medicine the issues are capable of changing form.



## **Do No Harm**

The Hippocratic oath that doctors take to “first, do no harm” is a stumbling block to change. In truth, the oath is really a requirement that practitioners know what they’re doing because if you don’t know what you’re doing, then you can’t know the result. In this context, to know means to predict, and to predict means knowing cause and effect.

It is increasingly evident that most mental and physical illnesses are rooted in imbalance rather than defect. The difference between being maladjusted and being defective is that maladjustment is remedied by adjustment while defect requires replacement. This is further confused by the often specious dichotomy between symptom and cause, and between active and placebo effects.

Both dichotomies are false when applied to the interaction of separate structures that regulate interactively. For example, the cardiac condition of high blood pressure can be resolved by the placebo effect of relaxing the mind. Or the mental condition of post traumatic stress can be resolved by the placebo effect of energetic release. Healing is largely the result of restored balance, not the removal of symptoms or the resolution of cause.

Psychedelics operate in the world of adjustment while allopathic medicine operates in the world of replacement. To complicate matters, allopathic practitioners misunderstand adjustment as something that’s triggered by replacement when, in fact, it’s triggered by release.

To any maladjusted system release is seen as harmful. Consequently, the allopathic credo to “do no harm” effectively means “do not undermine the existing structure,” which is exactly what psychedelics do and what maladjusted systems need. Pain is supposed to alert us to harm, but once harm has occurred almost any cure is painful. The prescription remains clear to the expert who can see beyond the pain, but if there is no such expert then who knows whether the pain barrier is protective or obstructive?



## Coaching

The big attraction of cognitive therapy is that the expert, who is an outsider, can see the logical contradictions that are causing their clients' pains and problems. The expert can lead the client through their cognitive minefield and maybe even avoid the pain. On the other side, which is to say in the realm of better reasoning, the problems and the pains are less and, it is hoped, self-regulation is restored.

Coaching takes the cognitive approach. In addition, to meet the demand for coaching, coaches are admonished to stay out of therapeutic territory. Therapeutic territories are those areas that lead out of the cognitive into emotional, habitual, and pathological terrain.

In these areas the problems are not reasonable and reason is not effective, in fact in areas of mental illness, reason can trigger strong reactions and greater negative symptoms. To stay out of these areas the coach is trained to follow two rules: first, don't coach the mentally ill, and second, don't deal with the past.

Many coaches pride themselves on these exclusions on the dubious basis that their success depends on neither. That is, coaching will enhance your future regardless of your past. In this regard coaching moves into the area of consulting.

Notwithstanding that the future-orientation of coaching is contrived, the use of psychedelics in coaching lends itself to a greater orientation toward the future. This does not mean being exclusively future-oriented, but rather being more involved with seeing and navigating the future than restoring balance that was disturbed in the past.

# Consulting

I was a software systems consultant for 20 years. The joke in consulting is that a consultant is someone who's hired so that everyone can prove them wrong. The consultant plays the role of an irritant that gets the system working again. In my case, my clients were automating and their employees were being replaced by computers. The employees would have loved to prove me wrong but, as in the tales of John Henry versus the machines and Paul Bunyan versus the machines, the machines won.

Drawing coaches toward consulting is the attraction to business and the repulsion from therapy. Business pays more with lower risks than therapy, and therapists don't want consultants on their turf. Consultants, on the other hand, generally avoid the personal issues that fall within the purview of coaching, leaving coaches an open market. Consultants focus primarily on organizations; coaches focus on a person.

Organizations are designed to operate strategically, but strategic advice is rarely sufficient for a person. We'll be better off when we recognize the unbalanced nature of corporations. Organizations that operate dynamically are better able to structure themselves organically.

Consultants usually play a tactical role, they're called in to optimize a goal, not to change the organization's means. They're asked to solve a problem such as rearranging the pieces. They're not expected to change the pieces or the game. Changes in management are rare.



# Psychedelics

Psychedelics focus on a person, although the future of psychedelics will include organizations. We know that because in the past psychedelics have enhanced the effect of collective gatherings. We don't

know much about how psychedelics affect a person and we know even less about their effect on groups, but we'll get there with time.

LSD will not be used in the boardroom because boardrooms deal with rational issues although, perhaps, it would be better for everyone if the boards of directors started dealing with issues more consequential than the bottom line. Psychedelics are more likely to restructure the board than to refocus them. Psychedelics work in the area of awareness which is below the level of management.

Psychedelics used in coaching open new awareness, pushing the boundary toward therapy. In this way psychedelics used in coaching challenge the artificial, market-defined boundary of only dealing with strategy. In the context of coaching, psychedelics will lead you to re appraise your goals.

Everyone's future is linked to their past and their mental health. It's just as well that coaches who cannot navigate these waters should make their limitations clear. Clients who think their problems are purely rational and strategic would be well served by someone who supplies that need until the client finds that they need otherwise.

In a changing environment the notion of a well-balanced person cannot be defined. Balance is only defined at a given moment. In a changing culture people need to be dynamic. Being able to reorganize which is what organizations don't like to do.

While it's comfortable to remain in balance, being balanced means you don't change. It is often good to sense imbalance if your environment is unbalanced because your change can have a greater positive effect than your lack of change. The question of how groups of people direct culture is an important question. In considering psychedelic coaching we are moving in the direction of finding an answer.

In analogy with a boat, the ballast is stationary but when the boat is listing too far the ballast is insufficient and you need to move your weight as an additional counterweight. Your attention to the horizon remains fixed but you move your weight to rebalance the boat.

A sailboat is caused to list when it travels further across the wind. If the list is extreme you can remedy it by shifting the weight, letting out the sail, or turning into the wind. These are cures for the present situation but they are due to past situations and they will affect your destination.

Coaching that focuses only on the future is like sailing that ignores the past. You may regain your trim, but your past decisions have not been addressed. Coaching that ignores your mental health is like management consulting that ignores honesty.

It may be fine to teach general sailing technique, but in the present real world there is a consequential past and there are future opportunities that may not come again. If coaching only optimizes the present, then it won't show you how to avoid your past mistakes. These mistakes will come again as that is our nature.

To say that coaching should only deal with the future is an impotent approach. Coaching needs to support our whole person and bring all of us forward.

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