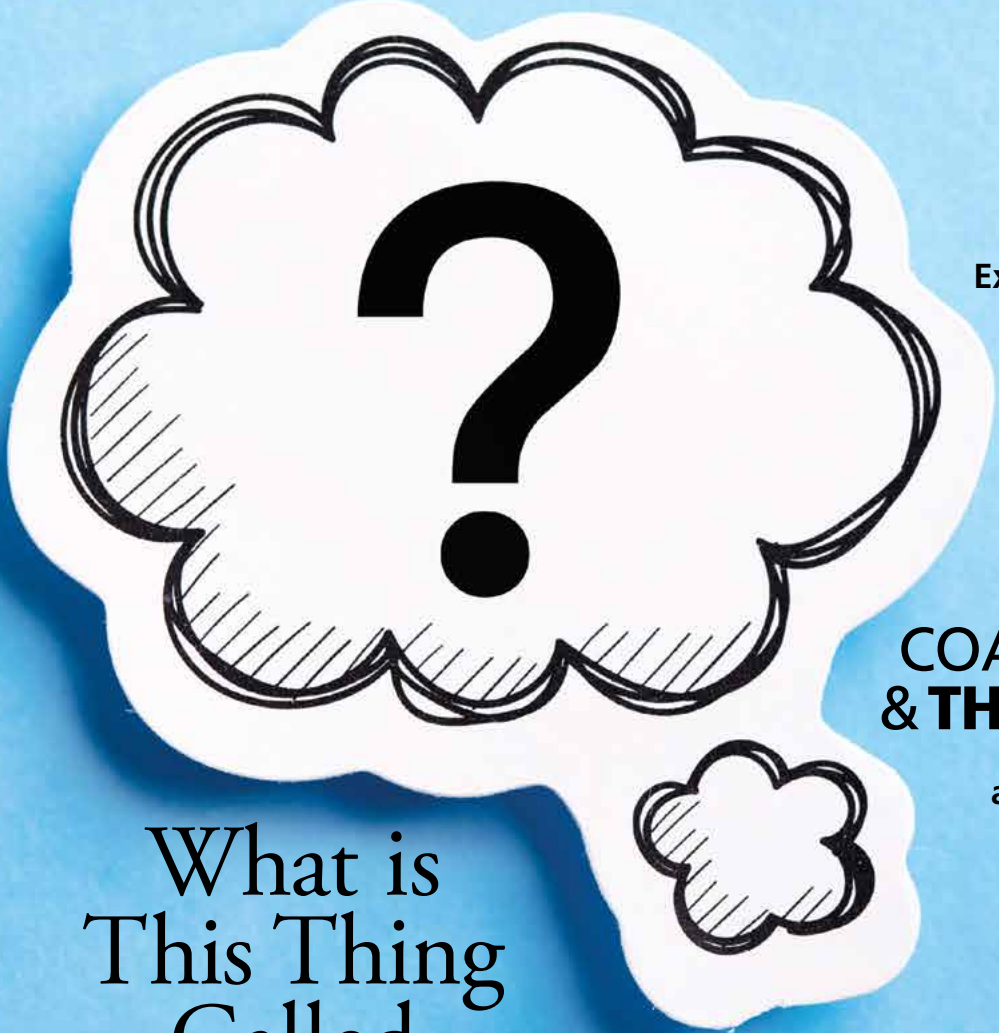


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**DON'T
BOX
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Expanding the
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coaching

**COACHING
& THERAPY**

Correlations
and contrasts

What is
This Thing
Called
Coaching?
What sets us apart

CAN WE TRULY CHANGE PERSONALITY?

Understanding four patterns of insecure attachment
that can change everything

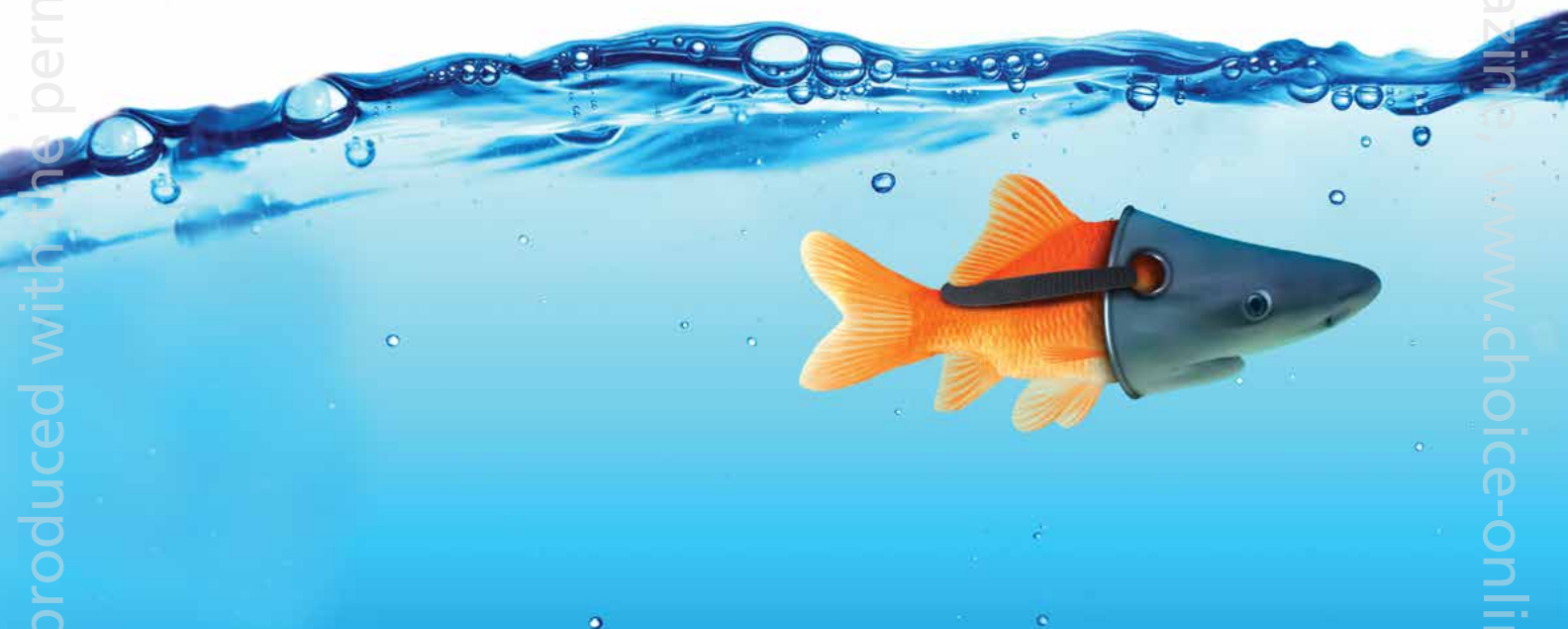
By Pam Boney, MA, PCC

“Does your personality have you? Or do you have it?” These are two important questions I ponder when I meet a new client. I don’t say them out loud, of course. But I’ve learned after coaching for some 20 years that the answer will guide the direction of our work for months to come.

The answers are never a simple yes or no. There’s a range on a spectrum I’m discerning in the discovery

phase. If their personality is less obvious and simply pops up subtly here and there, then I know I will be working with the client’s true self. In this case, we can get right to work on their goals and accelerate effort toward them. This client won’t be stuck or distracted by repeating patterns that are an obstacle to success.

But more often than not, clients seek coaching because someone thought they should get feedback and need to change. In such cases we’re dealing with



something entirely different. Depending on how strong the personality pattern is, the goal shifts to internal work and will be about giving voice to the true self that is over-protected by a strong complex of personality parts that make up an internal defense team. The work is then less about external goals and more about understanding the mechanisms in their personality pattern and adjusting imbalances through character strength development.

Can we truly change personality? Absolutely. Is it easy? Not if we don't understand its purpose and natural evolution. This requires studying beyond basic coaching skills and competencies. The evolution of personality requires shedding the scripts of our young personalities in favor of discovering the voice of the true self. Most assessments don't explain this and simply tell people *what* they do, but not *why*. Or that it will naturally change with development.

I first discovered this skills gap after graduating from my coaching education and facing a client who was plagued with an extreme case of procrastination. No matter what we talked about, the pattern was always there. And it felt like she expected me, as her coach, to fix it. I used my coaching competencies and kept asking questions, pushing responsibility back where it belonged. But I could never quite forget that I was lacking something in my skills. The quest for answers fueled years of personal inquiry and even caused me to get a post-graduate degree.

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Today, after 20 years of coaching, I can confidently handle pretty much anything that shows up in my clients. But without ancillary studies I am not sure I would feel that way today.

One of the most important theories I've learned and expanded on in my coaching methodology is about how secure attachment is required to actualize the true self and purpose.

ATTACHMENT, SELF-ESTEEM & THE TRUE SELF

As coaches, we must be aware of the distinction between personality and character. Personality is the mask we show to the world. In healthy balance, our personality is an asset to the true self, not a fortress that must protect a fragile inner self at all costs. The more we perceive we need to suppress painful emotions, the more pronounced and rigid the personality must be to provide protection.



While these patterns serve us in some important ways, they may not serve others around us quite as much. Contrast that with mature character and the result is a more expansive positive influence and contribution to the betterment of society that is sustainable over time.

Now that I see how simple it can be to work with the most common patterns that trouble our otherwise thriving clients, I see a greater vision for our burgeoning profession.

THE PATTERNS TO LOOK FOR AND HOW TO HELP CLIENTS LET GO OF THEM

If we, as coaches, can learn to discern this fine distinction between personality and character, and how to work *with* it instead of triggering even more fear with subjective feedback analysis, then we can provide what our clients truly need from us: a safe place to explore and heal those ego-sensitivities that hold them back from their full potential.

We can reassure them that it is a natural process to let go of old patterns that no longer work in the current context, while appreciating them for how they helped us in our past.

After decades of research, I've identified four patterns of insecure attachment to look for:

1 Approval + Status Seeking

This pattern comes from an **anxious-preoccupied** form of insecure attachment.

This results in paralysis-analysis, excessive preparation, resistance and procrastination of any risk-taking action. This happens when the ego-fears are "I am not lovable" plus "I am not enough."

This combination of unmet needs results in overstriving to be seen as "nice" or "important" so the overcompensation is to be patronizing. As coach, our role is to help them surface evidence that they are lovable and enough in their own view. Actions are about taking the risk to identify and assert what they want.

2 Approval + Attention Seeking

This pattern comes from an anxious-adaptive form of insecure attachment. This results in a lack of boundaries, taking responsibility for the emotions of others, manic enthusiasm, superficial cheerfulness and excessive communication. The ego-fears are "I am not lovable" plus "I am not special".

This combination of unmet needs results in overstriving to be seen as "good" and "unique" so the overcompensation is self-promotion. As coach, our role is to help them surface evidence of their uniqueness and worth in their own view. Actions are about identification of their own convictions and the discipline to follow through with integrity.

3 Attention + Power Seeking

This pattern comes from a **dismissive-avoidant** form of insecure attachment. This results in dominating and heroic action that dismisses input from others in favor of overly simplistic ideas and urgency that justifies impulsiveness.

The ego-fears are "I am not special" plus "I am not powerful" so the overcompensation is to be invincible. As coach, we can help surface evidence that they are truly powerful and unique deep down inside. Actions are about slowing down, tuning in to inner wisdom and knowledge to become their own hero instead of needing to be omnipotent.

4 Power + Status Seeking

This pattern comes from a **fearful-avoidant** form of insecure attachment. This results in extraordinary self-reliance, perfectionism and obsession to fix what is flawed or broken with rules-based solutions that are concise, precise and accurate.

The ego-fears are "I am not powerful" and "I am not enough" so the overcompensation is a need to control and be right. As coach, we can help surface evidence of their credibility and power in their own view. Actions are about noticing the grey in between the black and white, embracing being human and imperfect, and letting go of what is uncontrollable.

Perhaps coaching has arisen to serve those who are highly functioning members of society, experiencing milder versions of these insecurities on the spectrum and giving them just what they need to claim their own voice, focus forward and find answers to existential questions more intentionally.

Now that I see how simple it can be to work with the most common patterns that trouble our otherwise thriving clients, I see a greater vision for our burgeoning profession. I believe that every problem we experience as people, every challenge we have at work and every complex problem that concerns us in the world, can be improved by the work of helping us "grow up" and operate more from an ethos of good character that arises only from the true self.

If we can do that one thing, then coaching can be part of the solution of all that concerns us in the world. We serve the maturation of those who are seekers and, as such, we serve hope. •