

# COACHING ON THE COUCH

**Erik de Haan gets up close and personal with Carl Rogers**

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## Why it's in the library

When it came to selecting a book from the founding fathers of psychotherapy for this series, there were many that seemed relevant to coaches.

After some thought, I finally decided on a seminal book by Carl Rogers because I believe his 'person-centred' ideas can be translated directly into coaching practice. *On Becoming a Person* was written 'to share something of me, Carl Rogers', which is typical of Rogers' very personal style of counselling and his general attitude towards the profession.

## Introducing the work

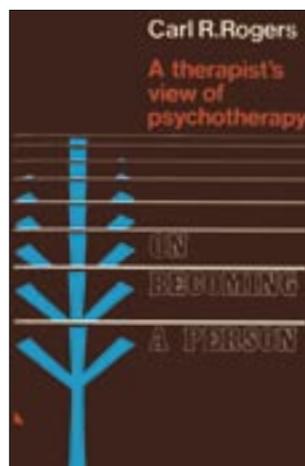
Rogers believed that if we share our most private and intimate selves, we will discover that we all have similarities. He describes counselling as relating to those personal aspects: if the counsellor allows clients to express their most intimate feelings and thoughts, they will become more fully 'themselves' and thus more fully functioning people.

From the videos we still have of Rogers at work, it's moving to see how warmly he welcomed, and listened to, his patients, and how freely he shared his own feelings.

Rogers' philosophy of counselling is one of fully accepting and welcoming the client; allowing the client to express himself. In his view, most counsellors and coaches can do a lot less than they are doing now: they don't *have* to add to the conversation or offer feedback, nor do they have to interpret, assess or evaluate what the client brings.

## A personal reading

In *On Becoming a Person*, Rogers concludes that fully welcoming the client into the relationship is more about attitude than behaviour. He



identified four 'core conditions' vital to a successful counselling relationship:

- empathy: understanding the client from within;
- warmth: a positive regard, or caring, for the client;
- acceptance: unconditionally of everything the client brings to the conversation;
- congruence: what you see is what you get.

Often he combined warmth and acceptance as 'unconditional positive regard'. This implies that

the counsellor welcomes herself into the relationship first, in order to welcome the client, or, as Rogers put it: 'Can I fully enter, so I lose all desire to evaluate or judge?'

Research shows that Rogers' core conditions constitute about 30 per cent of measurable improvement in therapy – double the amount stemming from technique-related factors – and his hypothesis is now part of accepted lore.

Rogers said that an evaluative attitude is *not* good for therapeutic relationships. He stressed that counselling should bring about an internal 'locus' of evaluation, avoiding any external evaluation by the counsellor.

## Why I think it's inspirational

I will try to do what Rogers does so well in *On Becoming a Person*: speak personally. I think I became stronger and more autonomous, on reading his work, by becoming aware of the 'locus' of evaluation.

I have applied this awareness to my coaching, encouraging my clients to think for themselves and follow their own judgments. And I notice that I am now less interested in my own internal evaluations, which I tend to trust more than before, and have become more curious about what others have to say – and what that tells me about them. ■

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