How are holistic nursing and professional coaching complementary? I see three related elements, each pertaining to the relationship between holistic nurse and client, and coach and client:

1. Nurses and coaches partner with those they serve
2. Nurses and coaches use intuition
3. Nurses and coaches listen

Coaches and holistic nurses work with clients through a process of change in accordance with the client’s principles and desired outcomes. In both models, it is the client’s agenda driving the course of action, whether the hope is healing or the objective is personal or professional growth.

The hallmark of coaching is work that helps others enhance some aspect of their lives. The coaching client wants to increase awareness, examine possibilities, and achieve outcomes. Coaches ask powerful questions to help clients understand, decide and act. We ask because we want clients to discover their own roadmaps for change. The International Coach Federation (2010), a world-wide professional coaching organization, states the following about coaching’s benefits: “Individuals who engage in a coaching relationship can expect to experience fresh perspectives on personal challenges and opportunities, enhanced thinking and decision-making skills, enhanced interpersonal effectiveness, and increased confidence in carrying out their chosen work and life roles.”
Both nurses and coaches, I believe, come to their work wanting better lives for those they serve.

**Nurses and Coaches Partner with Those They Serve**

Together, with clients, coaches co-create plans for change. The client is in the driver’s seat, with the coach alongside, asking questions to help the client decide which direction to follow. For example, if a client wishes to increase her self-confidence, a coach may ask: “What will be different in your life when you are more self-confident?” and “What is the next step toward this?” Similarly, although nurses are often seen as “treating” someone in an effort to promote healing, rather than acting as a co-pilot, I believe that nurses in a holistic framework mirror this partnership between client and coach, allowing both client and nurse to steer together in the direction of expressed change.

**Nurses and Coaches Use Intuition**

Professional coaches—whether they are executive coaches, business coaches, wellness coaches, spiritual coaches or life coaches—employ intuitive skills to understand and listen. Clients may believe their own intuition is latent, yet in a coaching relationship, intuition can blossom. Nurses are taught to pay attention to intuition—it is often a clinician’s most powerful tool. In coaching, our instincts or perceptions may lead us to ask about our clients’ beliefs about themselves or their abilities—what might be holding them back from achieving their goals. As coaches, we may ask:

- “What belief may serve you better?”
- “What’s the next step to living that new belief?”
- “Would you like to shift that now?”

**Nurses and Coaches Listen**

Remember years ago, in nursing school, when we were taught reflective listening? As nurses with a holistic stance, and as professional coaches, we listen on a mind, body and spirit level in order to discern what a person is communicating. In coaching, a holistic view provides a broad menu to help clients learn to listen to themselves. A coach may ask: “What is your body saying?”

The subject of change remains central. The coaching client comes to your door wanting something to be different and is ready to take action. The client may not know yet how she wants to be different, but she desires change. The client may be clear about the change, and want help with a plan. Nurses are often faced with conflicts in which the client’s health is out of balance, but the client may not be psychologically, physically or spiritually ready to make a shift. This is where coaching skills may benefit nurses. I believe it’s not my responsibility as a nurse, and definitely not as a coach, to convince someone that change will benefit them. Don’t humans ultimately change according to our own timeline? I believe that the coach’s role is to empower clients to decide what they want to change and what that change will look like—not if to change at all. Coaching clients have already made that decision. In her role, a holistic nurse may help the client determine health choices, as well as advantages and disadvantages of these choices, instead of trying to persuade a client that change is necessary. Of course, in either role as coach or nurse, providing appropriate referral resources is a valuable service and often an ethical or legal responsibility.

Both nurses and coaches, I believe, come to their work wanting better lives for those they serve. What’s around the bend, I wonder, with the possibility of a deliberate, holistic partnering between coaching and nursing? How can these two professions learn from each other and provide engaging, integrated and empowering avenues to health, healing, and a complete life? The two crafts seem complementary—not only in the elements of partnering, listening and intuition, but also in their philosophy of what it means to be human and what it means to want to become our best selves. Because coaching underlines, celebrates and facilitates individuals’ personal and professional aspirations, I believe coaching holds opportunities for holistic nurses to become better clinicians, healers, leaders and human beings.

**References**


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**See the Winter 2011 issue of Beginnings, Vol 31 No. 1, for more articles on holistic nursing and health coaching.**