

Cognitive scientists tell us we make 95 percent of our decisions subconsciously. While the Birkman Method identifies our major personality traits, this book makes conscious those subconscious decision processes. It is particularly useful to the certified Birkman practitioner who wants to develop a professional coaching practice.

On Coaching with The Birkman Method

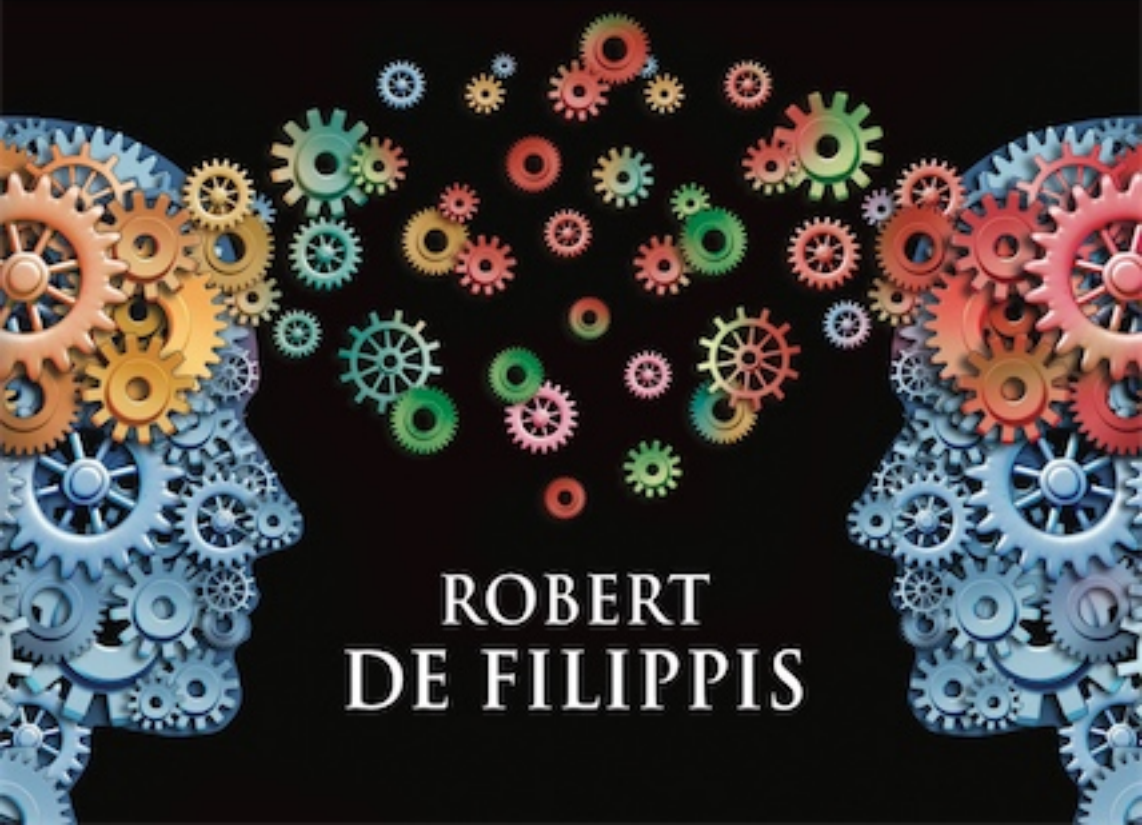
by Robert T. De Filippis

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On Coaching with The Birkman Method[®]

UNDERSTANDING
THE CREATION AND EVOLUTION
OF HUMAN PERSONALITY



ROBERT
DE FILIPPIS

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Introduction

“The reality of life is that your perceptions—right or wrong—influence everything you do. When you get a proper perspective of your perceptions, you may be surprised how many other things fall into place.”

Dr. Roger Birkman
1919-2014

This book is designed to help the professional Birkman practitioner use the Birkman Method ®, in Dr. Birkman’s terms, to “get a proper perspective on their own perceptions” while assisting their clients to do the same.

“What is the proper perspective?” It starts with balancing the authentic and social selves of our personalities. It finishes with an operational awareness of our subconscious decision processes. The goal is to learn how to make more effective life decisions and enjoy “how many other things fall into place.”

Why psychometrics?

Ninety five percent of our decision processing happens below our level of awareness. The other five is *conscious* and is only called on when there’s a conflict in our *subconscious* decision making. This is like what German philosopher Martin Heidegger called a “breakdown in the transparency of living.” He meant that much of life, like the subconscious decision processes are transparent to us and become apparent when they need a conscious overriding decision. Properly designed,

psychometrics help us become conscious of our unconscious decision processes.

Although psychometrics concerns many areas of human psychology, in this book, our attention will focus on personality traits. The Birkman Method® is such an assessment technique. It focuses explicitly on personality traits and not personality types. This distinction is essential because personality types have fallen out of favor in modern psychological research as too reductive. They're still used by some to help crystallize people's understanding of themselves but would leave out too much vital information for the professional coach.

Even well-defined personality traits are not enough info.

The German American psychologist, Kurt Lewin, offered this formula referring to human behavior, $B=f(P, E)$, meaning Behavior is a function of the interaction of Personality and Environment. While his formula gives us a basic understanding of human behavior, it leaves out the variables at work internal to the person doing the behaving. As coaches, we need to know so much more about these internal variables if we are to offer maximum value to our clients.

To that end, we go a bit deeper, $P=f(AS, PS) + E$, where Personality is a function of the Authentic Self and Public Self plus Environment. Of course, this begs the question, what is the Authentic Self and how does it function. Which brings us to needs and temperament, and then expectations, genetics, and our central nervous system. Very soon the whole scope of human personality, including our historical, cultural, and familial backgrounds, beg for consideration.

Human behavior is an emergent property, the observable action, resulting from an unobservable set of variables interacting in complex biological organisms—us. It is not a simple stimulus-response process.

What to expect in this book.

We will explore how the private, or authentic self, is shaped by our needs and how our temperament, influenced by our genetics, is structured into our biology. We'll see how needs are shaped by our expectations from early childhood interpretations of our experiences. We'll explore how our public self is shaped by our linguistic interpretations we learn from our native cultures, and how our perceptions are limited by our sensory systems. We'll see how our languaging is molded and shaped by our past experiences to become the cognitive maps we use to create and navigate our external worlds. We will study how our cognitive maps contain the scripts and rules of engagement we use to travel our lives' journeys. We will see how the history of our cultural, familial, and personal experiences shape our behavioral patterns as we keep re-applying what worked for the same or similar circumstances in the past.

Finally, we will see that behavioral patterns are formed by personality traits and how those traits are made up of many characteristics defined and explained by the nine Birkman components.

The Birkman Application.

As a qualified Birkman Method practitioner you know that Usual Behaviors (UBs) and Stress Behaviors (SBs) hinge on the client's needs being satisfied. You also know Needs are not observable or known without

reflection and inquiry. You will learn how to uncover the subconscious scripts and rules hidden in Needs and examine the calculus that creates them in their decision processes (95 percent of which is subconscious).

A simple way of saying this is you will discover how the clients' cognitive maps often take them to the wrong places.

The key to Birkman Method coaching.

This book will provide a method of understanding the unobservable (95 percent) that shapes the observable (5 percent). Thus, it answers the question “why people continue to behave as they do even when they don’t produce the results they say they want?” The Birkman Method® feedback reports lay out the map to this process with unsurpassed clarity. And the goal of this process was defined in Dr. Birkman’s research when he made two crucial observations that apply directly to coaching:

“Behavior is not determined so much by objective facts as by the meanings the individual attaches to those facts.”

and

“The perceptions of some individuals about “most people” and/or “self” may be illusory, irrational, or unreal. Nevertheless, these perceptions are real and reasonable to the individuals, and so, influential on their behaviors.”

Therefore, the role of the coach is to create awareness of the unconscious processes, that is, the potential illusory, irrational, unreal, and erroneous interpretations of facts, that might be shaping the client's ineffective behavior. This way the coach helps clients avoid reflexively taking inferential leaps and wondering why they are not getting the results they want. They can then make the most effective conscious decisions to achieve their objectives.

By the end of this book, the coach will be able to act as another observer of the clients' circumstances thereby assisting them to stop, reflect and inquire into their own choices. And in the process, deconstruct and reconstruct the subconscious mechanisms of their decision processes, if they so choose.

The historical basis of this book.

We are not blank slates at birth. So, the Standard Social Science Model no longer provides a thorough foundation for understanding human behavior. Our behavior is a product of nature as well as nurture. But to understand the deeper foundations of how we are nurtured by our cultures as well as our families, I have provided an abridged overview of the Western Intellectual Tradition from the fundamental questions of the pre-Socratic philosophers to the most recent discoveries of our contemporary cognitive scientists. Their inquiry and research contain the evolution of our understanding of the nature of human experience and the world within which we live. This historical treatment is because to truly appreciate human behavior we need to understand how we have evolved to our current way of being.

Although each of us possesses a unique personal history, we also share a cultural history of intellectual traditions. By understanding these traditions, we can examine nurture as well as nature in the development of our unique personalities. When we explore shared history, we find common meanings. But each of us can interpret meaning to shape and fit our view of the world. So, we need to consider individual experience as well as historical circumstances if we are to understand the human beings with whom we interact. Our collective history is a practical roadmap to that understanding and can be found in our philosophical tradition.

Main premise.

All attempts to coach successfully begin with an understanding of how human beings come to be who they are. In other words, making a sincere and informed effort to understand and accept another's web of beliefs about themselves and the world within which they live. This understanding is the minimal requirement for connecting with others. And there is just no effective coaching without authentic connections to our clients. This connection starts with a need to understand that these webs of beliefs are expressed differently based on unique physiological makeup and culture-based interpretations of the circumstances within which we all find ourselves at any given time. This includes us—the coaches.

From my experience as a coach and consultant, I have come to believe that the inborn goal of all human beings is the full expression of the authentic self. This goal is increasingly more difficult to achieve as the pressures and challenges of postmodern times compound our lives.

In most instances of substantive and lasting human change where I have been privileged to assist, what appears to be change is in fact, the expression of the authentic self.

Finally, as I have learned more about evolutionary psychology, it has become apparent to me that I have begun to understand human behavior in new ways that offer more practical and lasting possibilities for us all.

Presuppositions

Our public identities are the manifestation of both our social and authentic selves. In other words, the persona that we coach, counsel, teach, and manage is made up of behavioral responses created by interactions between and among external social structures and internal cognitive structures.

The external social structures are:

- Historical categorical imperatives carried in our culture as fragments from past cultural norms.
- Familial categorical imperatives taught to us as children as rules.
- Present cultural categorical imperatives shaping the public rules of engagement that determine what is socially acceptable today.
- Common and reoccurring cultural frames of meaning that inform our social interactions (language games)

The internal cognitive structures are:

- Neurophysiological or the central nervous system [CNS] that comes with:
- A universal species cognitive ability [theory of mind] that allows us to recognize that other humans have self's like our own and are intentional agents that are driven by appetites, desires, and motivations to achieve their unique goals.
- Bio-programming of a sort. What some call "mentalese" or a kind of "deep neurological language" that comes with our neurophysiology and gives us the ability to learn a functional language to communicate and coordinate our actions with others.
- A functional language capability to fill our culturally based schema and create scripts.
- Scripts and rules for organizing our experience and actions
- Self and social perceptions upon which we base our rules.
- Personal rules of engagement, which are hypothetical and have been shaped by personal experience as we interact with our native culture's categorical rules.

As we create our identities and interpret our world, we are forming self-perceptions [based on internal structures] and social perceptions [based on our personal experiences] that govern our actions in life. Given how we interpret our self and the world, we form and maintain rules of engagement. These rules provide the basis for how we act in the world. These rules also promote and support

our point of view. And humans, being intentional agents, are never very far from protecting our point of view as though if we allow another, ours will disintegrate.

In this regard, most all my coaching experience has revealed a consistent kind of resistance. This resistance is shaped by a robust effort to maintain our points of view even in the face of undeniable facts and irresistible forces to the contrary. So even when everything is pressuring us to change our perspective, we have a difficult time choosing to see our worlds or ourselves from another angle.

This difficulty is the precise opportunity that presents itself to a professional coach, consultant, manager, teacher, or counselor. It is also the precise challenge.

I attempted to meet the challenges in my coaching practice with a methodology based on an understanding of human behavior grounded in linguistic philosophy. It has been with this understanding that I have been able to assist in the deconstruction of the ineffective and the reconstruction of more effective ways of being with my clients.

It bears repeating.

“During his research, Dr. Roger Birkman found that individual perceptions of others were more critical to the accurate measurement of personality than any series of self-reported statements alone. The hypothesis implicit in this theoretical position is that a close relationship exists between an individual’s motives, attitudes, and behaviors and how that same individual judges the motivations, beliefs, and actions of others.

Specifically, he found that:

Behavior is not determined so much by objective facts as by the personal meanings we attach to those facts.

Our perceptions about “most people” and/or “self” may actually be illusory, irrational, or unreal. Nevertheless, these perceptions are real and reasonable to us as individuals, and so, are influential on shaping our behaviors.

What he didn’t mention.

These personal meanings and interpretations are happening below our level of consciousness. The good news is that The Birkman Method® makes our subconscious perceptions unmistakably clear by identifying Needs within domains of personality traits called the Components.

These Needs will provide a roadmap to the facts your clients consider essential and the meanings they attach to them even if they don’t consciously know what they are.

In this way, you can help them assess if their perceptions are illusory, irrational, or unreal, and causing problems in their lives. And you can do this with a great deal of accuracy.

If their perceptions are relatively valid and grounded and they are still experiencing obstacles they want to address, by being a certified Birkman Method® consultant, you can coach them into the best life decisions guided by their comprehensive Birkman Feedback report showing Interests and Career Preferences.

To sum up this point, your new knowledge will empower you to question and calibrate your client’s perceptions to achieve the kind of lives they want. In the

following chapters, you will learn how we humans interpret facts and create, maintain, and reinforce perceptions, giving you the tools to assist in their deconstruction and reconstruction on a more valid and grounded basis.

The precise opportunity we have as coaches.

“Perception depends not only on the presented stimulus but also on internal hypotheses, expectations, and stored knowledge,” which we can see clearly with Birkman feedback reports. “Thus, perception can be regarded as an inferential process that is much influenced by conceptually driven or top-down processes. It follows then that perception is relatively prone to errors since the inferences made from our sensory input may be mistaken.”ⁱ In fact, most of what we experience is shaped by what we’ve already experienced.

In his book, *The 5th Discipline*, Peter Senge uses the term, mental models, as “the images, assumptions, and stories that we carry in our minds of ourselves, other people, institutions, and every aspect of the world.”ⁱⁱ Without mental models and their subsequent cognitive maps, we couldn’t navigate our complex environment. If our models are not representative of shared reality, we’re likely to wind up in the wrong places.

This clarity is the primary value of the Birkman Method ® to the coach. It shows us the details of our unique cognitive models by revealing our Needs. Our Needs are based on childhood expectations. And as we will see, childhood expectations formed many of our beliefs about ourselves and the world within which we live. Now, as adults, we need the world to meet those expectations.

And they were built on the innocent perceptions of children not fully capable of understanding their external worlds.

No ideal style.

We will encounter many clients with so many ways of interpreting and experiencing their lives that we need to understand there is no model or perfect style for which to strive. There is no ideal personality aside from its efficacy in relation to the external systems, i.e., social norms of the society in which we each live.

In more recent times we see ourselves differently thanks to discoveries in theoretical physics, evolutionary genetics, and the cognitive sciences. As noted earlier, we now see that much of what we ascribed to nurture is nature; that we are not blank slates iii when we are born. We come with genetically conserved core-learning intuitions iv that facilitate experiencing the world, and each of us comes with more or less innate capacity when compared to others.

We now suspect that the mind is more than an epiphenomenon¹ of the brain. We also know that we are shaped by the circumstances into which we are "thrown"v at birth. Regardless of our innate capacities, we will be influenced by the social experiences that make us who we are.

In precise terms, the tension between our individuality and our need for social contact shapes our public identities as we interact with the external world. Our unique neural maps are in constant tension with social

¹ An epiphenomenon (plural: epiphenomena) is a secondary phenomenon that occurs alongside or in parallel to a primary phenomenon.

structures, accepting or rejecting experiences and revising the structures of our internal experience.

Here's the coaching opportunity: We don't always have a realistic grasp of our shared reality because we live in a kind of subjective blindness. Therefore, we could all benefit from having a good coach.

Why is language the basis of an effective coaching methodology?

Because language is a key tool in the creation of complete human consciousness, which gives us the ability to: (1) create, maintain, and interpret our identities (2) establish, manage, and understand the social reality within which we live.

Why is culture a foundation for effective coaching practices?

Culture determines meaning. Without culture we have no context. Without context, we have no way of correctly understanding our language and its use. The meaning of words is based on how they are used in a specific context. Culture determines their use in that context.

“Skillful” language is the basis of this coaching methodology.

It's evident that skillful language is a vital tool in coaching methodology. It may not be apparent what is meant by “skillful.”

Let's start with the recognition that our self and social perceptions are created and sustained in language.

This means that who we think we are and how we think the world is, are accessed by language. Then realize that our direct experience is mediated by language. For instance, we sense and perceive physically, and interpret linguistically. We just cannot experience the raw nature of reality as it is. We experience it as we interpret it linguistically. This means we:

- 1) interpret and create our personal identities through language.
- 2) interpret and create the social reality within which we live through language.
- 3) shift and change the above based on our interpretations and re-interpretations of the ever-changing context.

This linguistic creation and interpretation of our identities, our world, and each specific context forms the self and social perceptions that govern our actions in life. Given how we interpret our self, the world, and the background, we apply “rules” of engaging others. These rules determine how well we function in the world. We will see later that they are not like rules in a rulebook, but more like hypothetical guidelines that we can change from context to context. In fact, a coaching relationship is often the space to examine the rules we use to be sure they’re appropriate within the context they’re used.

Sometimes even skillful language is not enough.

Here’s the problem most of us face when working with our clients: These rules are not consciously accessible to us in normal circumstances. We can’t just ask the client what they are and expect a clear and concise answer. We

usually become aware of them when they are being violated or don't work for us anymore.

And discovering rules is not something we can automatically expect in a coaching situation. Unless we have an instrument that can assist in making them available, we can't know what they are and examine their efficacy. The right professional psychometric test can make the client's subconscious rules available to work with descriptively and prescriptively. As a certified Birkman Method® practitioner you know the assessment is that tool.

The golden moment of coaching.

Most all my experience has revealed a standard theme: We make a robust effort to maintain our points of view even in the face of undeniable facts and irresistible forces to the contrary. So even when life is screaming at us to change our perspective we have a difficult time choosing to see ourselves or our worlds as though with new eyes. This is compounded by the fact that we aren't always aware of precisely what personal rules are being challenged when we resist the new information that might just be what we need.

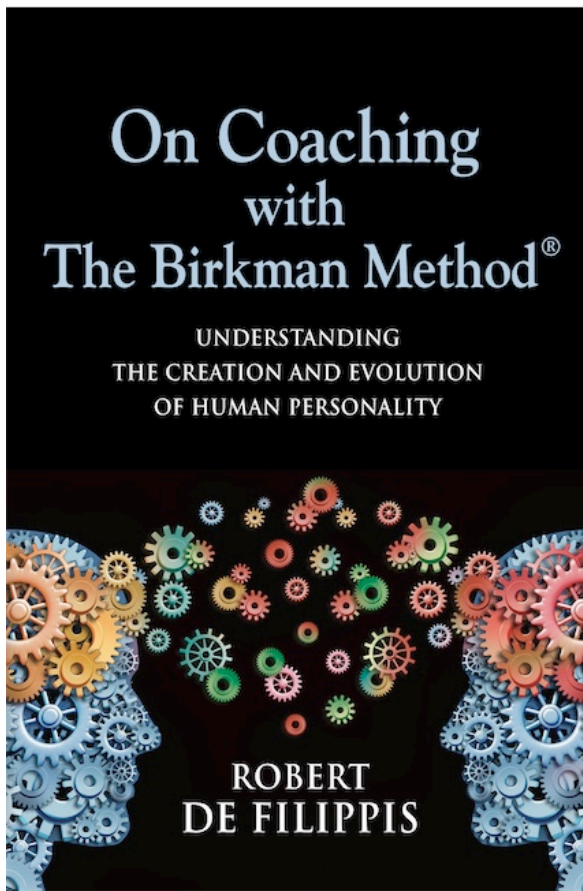
This is the precise opportunity—the golden moment—that presents itself to a professional coach (or anyone who works with other people.) This is also the challenge we all have when we are faced with learning a problematic lesson of our own.

Human personalities are created in language and maintained in neuro-cognitive structures. And the skillful use of words is the best tool the coach has to assist in the deconstruction of the ineffective and the reconstruction of more effective ways of being. To begin, we need to know what to deconstruct. Be clear here. Deconstruction is a

threatening process, and your client will need to trust you. The Birkman feedback will build that trust most efficiently.

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