

Elena Aguilar ([00:01](#)):

Hi everyone. I'm Elena Aguilar, and this is the Bright Morning podcast. So today friends, I have a new kind of episode for you. This is a short episode where I'll be talking about a coaching tool, or two that I have used recently in a coaching conversation that I've shared with you on this podcast. So last week I shared a coaching conversation that I had with an assistant principal named Naomi. I hope that you listened to that. And if not, you might want to listen to that one first or listen to it afterwards, because I'm going to talk about a couple of the coaching tools that I used in that conversation. And that I know would be really helpful for you to use. And even if you are familiar with these resources, I think, or I hope, that hearing my description of them now in connection to the conversation that I had with Naomi last week, will help you more deeply understand them. So that's what I've got for you today.

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All right. So the three tools or concepts that I'm going to talk with you about today are core values and the tool that I call mind the gap and the strength-based coaching approach. I think about that also as a tool, but it's just another way of coaching. If again, these are brand new concepts to you, then I also encourage you to check out our show notes and to read the resources that we're providing for you on these. It'll give you just more than what I'm going to give you right now. So let me talk first about core values. In my conversation with Naomi, one of the first things I asked her about were her core values. And so that conversation I had with her, that was the first time I had ever spoken to her, ever met her. I really knew very, very little, almost nothing about who she was or what she was doing, what she's up against in her work, what she's trying to work on in her leadership development.

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And so asking someone about their core values is always a starting place for me. When I'm working with a new client, I will literally ask them about their core values within the first 15 minutes of working together, because someone's core values gives me an immediate image, really of their compass points of their North Star. There's all kinds of analogies that I use. It tells me what is most important to them. It's a starting place. Now, sometimes I will give folks the core values activity that I use in all of my workshops. And you'll find again, a link to that in the show notes. Sometimes I'll start off by saying, "Look, I've got this activity, it'll take us five, 10 minutes. Can we do that now?" And sometimes I just ask someone, "What are your core values? What are your values?" That's what I did in that conversation with Naomi.

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Now, when I have the resource, the tool, the activity in my hand, when it feels like it would be helpful for us to have that kind of scaffold, then I give them that activity. It's a paper. So I give them something, they work through it. And what was interesting was when I asked Naomi, what are your core values? She said, "Oh, it would be useful, be helpful for me to have some kind of scaffold into this." And so I almost laughed in that moment, or in my head. I was like, "Yeah, I know, I usually do this in that way." However, it's also really interesting to see what happens when you open up that question as broadly as I did with Naomi in the conversation. Because when you give people a scaffold, when I give them that resource, it immediately constricts their thinking, because this document, if you don't have it in front of you, if you've never seen it, it gives people a long list. I don't know how many, maybe 30, 40 values, including things like family, community, faith, spirituality, mindfulness, justice, equity. There's a whole lot on there.

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And that can be really helpful because it narrows our thinking and it can be limiting because it narrows our thinking. So there's an advantage and a disadvantage, always in both ways. So it's challenging

sometimes though, when you say to somebody, "What are your values?" And their mind goes blank. Like, "What are my values? I don't know what are values?" This is a choice you make. Sometimes you can try both. Ideally with Naomi, I might have followed up that conversation with sharing the core values activity with her and saying, "Okay, now let's go through it this way and see what additional insights you get into yourself and into your values." There are a lot of ways to go about this. What is critical is to exercise the kind of observation and judgment that we use at any point in our coaching conversations. At any point, we want to be paying keen attention to how our client responds to a prompt, a question, a piece of advice, a suggestion.

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We want to be ideally looking at their body language. Even if it's just on Zoom. Even if it's just a screen, we can see their facial responses. We can see whether they look away thoughtfully, or whether they seem to reflect some kind of discomfort or confusion. We want to be listening to what they say carefully. We want to be mindful of what comes up in us. So for example, in that conversation with Naomi, when she said, "Oh, it might be useful to have a scaffold." That was a little part of me, I'm going to confess, that felt like, "Ooh, I did a bad job as a coach. I should have given that to her in advance. I do that usually."

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But my self-awareness helped me immediately recognize like, okay, little tiny bit of insecurity coming up. It's not going to hurt you. It's okay, let's go with it. And actually, and as I said to her, it really can be helpful to just open the conversation as broadly as I did. So, whatever you do as a coach, whatever you say, whatever activities you engage your client in, it's what happens that matters. That's what you really want to be paying attention to. What's the impact? You have your intention and what is the impact?

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Okay. Going back to the core values tool for a moment, however. When I ask about core values or when I give someone the activity in the beginning of a relationship or conversation, it's something that then forever is stuck in my mind. I write it in the front of my notebooks. I put it down somewhere that I will always remember about this client, as this is where this person is trying to get to. This is what they're aspiring to. Usually the core values that we state are aspirational. Sometimes, hopefully often, we are fully embodying them, but for most of us, they're aspirational. We aspire to be compassionate. We aspire to center family or justice or community. We aspire to embody those values. And that is exactly what as a coach my sense of my job is, to help someone continue to take strides towards being who they want to be.

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I often go back to helping someone anchor in their core values. I feel like I am the one who will remember what they have declared as their aspiration, and I will lead them back again and again and again. I'll help them make the connections between their actions and their aspirations, when they get overwhelmed with decisions. When they're overwhelmed with exhaustion, with emotions, I will bring them back. I will remind them. And 95% of the time, when I remind people of their values, they experience it as a relief, as an anchor, as a grounding. When you remember your values, it helps you cut through some of the noise, the overwhelm like, "Right. That's what I want to be doing. That's what I'm here to do as a human being on this planet." Bring people back to their values.

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Okay. The second tool that I told you, I'm going to talk about and that I used in the conversation with Naomi, was the one that I call mind the gap. And this is this idea that whatever it is that we want to do,

we need a set of abilities and those abilities can be categorized into six groups. We need to have the skills, the knowledge, the capacity, the will, the emotional intelligence and the cultural competence. Now in the graphic that I created to reflect this, emotional intelligence and cultural competence are depicted in a way that communicates that they are foundational. Now you can also think about emotional intelligence and cultural competence as a knowledge and skill set, they are. But I wanted to pull them out and make them distinct to reflect how critical, how central those skills are. They are foundational. Now there's a lot to say, and to learn and to understand about this concept of the gaps.

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They are not a way to talk about people's deficits. They are a way to talk about areas for growth, very different than talking about deficits. I really encourage you to read or to reread what I've written about. I've written about the gaps in blogs. I've written about them in several of my books, definitely in *Coaching for Equity in Onward*. And so I really want to encourage you to dig into these more. I would say this is the coaching tool that I think through more often than almost any other. I would say hand in hand with the strength-based thinking tool, which is the third thing that I'm going to talk about today. But I almost think about it, like in one hand, I have this concept called mind the gap, which is about areas for growth. And in the other hand, I have this strength-based thinking tool, which allows me to recognize what someone is bringing. The skills, the knowledge, the will, the capacity that they have.

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They sort of go hand in hand. It's critical to use both of them in tandem so that you can see the full complexity of a person that you're coaching. Now, in the conversation with Naomi, I heard a capacity gap. I heard that she needed more time. Capacity gaps can be tricky because they can feel challenging to close. They have a lot to do with prioritization, with making decisions about what is most important, but they can feel a little bit tricky and very worth unpacking. And so in that conversation, again, with Naomi, as I just said to you, the gaps is one of the primary tools that I think through. And so in this conversation, the first conversation I had with somebody where I'm really just getting to know them, I was thinking, it's almost like I have a filter on. I'm scanning, I'm thinking, "What gaps are here? What are her areas for growth? What are her learning areas?" If I was coaching her long term, I'd be almost using this. It's like a scanning. I'm constantly scanning, thinking.

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There was a lot of evidence in her that she has a lot of self-awareness, that she has a lot of emotional intelligence. I heard her reflecting a lot. I heard a lot of cues that she had a lot of self knowledge. I'm like, "Okay, I think she's got a lot of emotional intelligence." I had a sense that she had a lot of cultural competency based on her experience, working in that community, again, when I'm just getting to know someone I'm sort of scanning through these areas, where is there evidence of will? Ah, yes, I hear this and I hear this and I hear this. Where is there evidence of knowledge? I heard that. I heard that. I heard that. Okay. So then that is, in some ways, what I'm engaging is my commitment to finding strengths, which is, again, it's like, I think this analogy works.

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It's like, I'm scanning, I'm listening, I'm listening, "Ooh, there's a strength. There's a strength." And then I'm listening for where might there be areas for us to work on? Where might there be areas for growth. And that was where in that conversation with Naomi, I thought, "Oh, I think there might be some capacity gaps." Which could indicate that we need to unpack how she prioritizes, how she spends time, how she makes those decisions, how she takes into account her own strengths, her own skills, how she delegates, how she empowers others to take on tasks. So that if I was continuing to coach Naomi, I

would probably continue the conversation, digging into those questions I just raised, around what could be contributing to her capacity gap.

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So these three tools or resources are central in transformational coaching. Core values, mind the gap and taking a strength-based approach, because we are, first of all, always looking for what someone has, what they bring, who they are that can be more deeply accessed, leveraged, built upon. How, who they are can continue to grow and blossom and expand. How as a coach, we can help them live more fully into who they are. Draw on those strengths, work more in those areas and less in the like, "Okay, here's a long list of every way that you need to develop and grow. Now, let's get into fixing you. Let's get into making you better."

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I don't work that way as a transformational coach. We can, it's important to identify some of the gaps, some of the areas for growth, but if we only see areas for growth, it's way too close to only seeing deficits. It's exhausting for both of us. It's exhausting for us as a coach, it's exhausting for us as a client, to focus on deficits and areas for growth. We just, as human beings will become depleted by that focus. So, we've got to look at and access and build on our gifts, our strengths, our, who we want to be.

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If you are newer to transformational coaching, check out the resources in the show notes and consider attending an Art of Coaching 101 workshop. We're releasing a calendar for 2021, real soon. We've got a lot of Art of Coaching 101 workshops, because they always are where we encourage people to start or to go back to as a refresher, as a digging deeper into it. I've had so many people attend my Art of Coaching workshop over and over, two or three times. Often they come back with other folks and sometimes they come because they just say, "I know I'll go deeper into this, which is true." Every time I present it, I get deeper understandings of transformational coaching.

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Okay. Folks. I hope you're doing well. I hope you are taking your transformational coaching skills outside of the classroom. Be that virtual or the physical classroom. I hope you're trying them out with family and friends and neighbors because they carry, because they carry. All right, everybody, thanks for listening. And as always, if you're enjoying the podcast, please rate us on Apple podcast, share episodes with your friends, with your colleagues, let us know your feedback. I'd love to hear from you. Thanks for being here. The Bright Morning podcast is produced by LesLee Bickford and Stacey Goodman. And Stacey Goodman does the sound engineering. Take care everyone.