

THE HEART OF COACHING

by: Jaque Banas Shank



Jaque Banas Shank, the founder of Visionwriters International (www.visionwriters.com), was a participant in a bible study, many decades ago, which taught a less personal type of journalizing, and a scaled down method of coaching class participants in their weekly homework assignments. When she branched out into her own ministry, both practices evolved. Instead of instructing a student to read a verse of scripture, and then to write down how they felt the Lord was encouraging them through that verse, Jaque dared her students to believe that the Holy Spirit, as an indwelling reality, would address His people by name, and talk Spirit to spirit, in a conversational manner. Instead of writing what we believed He might be suggesting, students were taught to recognize His inner voice and to enter the practice of written dialogue with God.

Over the years, a more in-depth system for *encouraging* students who participated in Jaque's studies also evolved. Instead of affixing a happy sticker and a surface, "Good job," type of comment, it became a true ministry of seeing each student as they are in Christ, and waiting for the Holy Spirit to direct the coach to the encouragement that will enhance a student's walk with God.

Jaque Banas, Susan Mucklow, and Sara McDaniel were the instruments that the Holy Spirit used to develop the coaching guidelines used in this supplemental resource. Whether you are planning on certification through Visionwriters International, or are just facilitating a study with a few friends, these guidelines will help you understand the heart of coaching one another in the pursuit of Christ in us, our hope of glory.

The Heart of Coaching

(Excerpt taken from the study entitled, "For the Keepers of His Vision.")

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RELATIONSHIP

Intimacy and Coaching

Everything our hearts long for can be summed up in the word *relationship*. Everything is relationship, be it good or bad in design. The target of discipline and accountability is to lead us into good, healthy, wholesome relationships with God, with ourselves, and with others

An intimate relationship with God is the beginning of all prosperity. Our first relationship call is to God's Spirit - to abide in His presence and word, and learn to enjoy Him. The more we follow in obedience to His word, the more we experience His presence. His word and His presence go hand in hand. We do not get the word without presence and we do not get His presence without His word. We have been called into a *living* fellowship with the Lord. So where do we begin?

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Proverbs 9:10 (KJV)

The fear of the Lord includes the kind of humility that leans not to the understanding of men. We *do not* know what we think we know. We are ignorant at best, and must always begin with that assumption. To fear God means to listen to everything He has to say, and do it as though His is the *last* word, because, actually, it *is*.

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

Psalms 19:14 (KJV)

What we think about day and night is crucial to abiding in relationship. The first commandment says in effect, *you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, with all your being, with all your attention, and with all of your meditation*. This does not come easily to us because the mind of the flesh (carnal mind) is still in our members, although Christ has defeated its power. Therefore, the right meditation is something we must be disciplined into, something we need to be accountable for until we experience, as a result, the kind of relationships God intends. There is no lasting fruit in other relationships without an abiding relationship with His Holy Spirit. We cannot handle relationship without His guidance. Only He can keep us rightly related to one another. He can draw us closer, or safeguard us with distance; only He knows the reason for the times and seasons of both.

We know it is a sacrifice to bring our members to the living word of God every day. A sacrifice is not something we *feel* like doing. We are tempted and distracted. We want to do something else; that is why it is called a sacrifice. Cultivating our relationship with God is a labor that requires a sacrifice of time and thoughtfulness. To facilitate others in the body of Christ, students looking for relief and truth, we need to understand this commitment. That is why we take it very seriously.

We are trained disciples who, by continual meditation on God's word, know and experience His love, and go from there to love and minister to others. When it is real to us, it will be real to them.

Together We Can Do This

The Lord is with us; He will guide and lead us and He will transform not only our lives, but the lives of others as well. I cannot do this without you, and you cannot do it without me - without *us*, because Christ in *us* is going to go after even one sheep that wanders off alone. We need to lock arms and keep the wolves out. One sheep in isolation is already in trouble, because there is no safety in isolation. We will never learn to 'live loved' in isolation. Living loved is the goal. We are either living loved, or living condemned. We either hear words of love or hear the accuser of the brethren.

I cannot think of anything more wonderful than to come into a living experience of such a relationship with the living God, and then with one another. One of the strategy pieces in play at Visionwriters is called 'coaching' - it is the practice of written encouragement for each student. It is another layer of mentorship to help foster relationship with one another.

For the remainder of this session, Sara McDaniel, excellent coach and Visionkeeper, will share from her extensive experience.

The Ministry of Coaching

As a Visionkeeper (VK) trainee, you have already experienced, and hopefully enjoyed, the unique feedback of having your heartwork personally coached. You may also have already been part of a coaching team. The ministry of coaching is a privilege and a responsibility. Being invited to share, on paper, in another person's thoughts (mind) and journals (heart), is a joy, an honor, and a sacred trust.

As VK's we are learning to be servants and instruments that God can use. Our goal is to make our class a safe place where people can bloom and grow. You will be the main coach but it is also important to monitor and train up the coaches that are under you by sharing the principles outlined here.

When coaching a student's heartwork, we are to be mindful of their heart and be in reverence before the Spirit in them. Eugene Peterson writes, "Here is a soul, a divinely worked-on soul, whom the Spirit is shaping for eternal habitation. Long before we arrived on the scene, the Spirit was at work." As coaches, we must fit into what is already going on in the student's journey. We endeavor to see with the eyes of our heart, and simply wait and listen to what the Spirit is saying to us about how to encourage them in their walk with God.

The Goal of a Coach

The goal of a coach is to fan a student's desire to know Christ; to encourage them in their daily quest to go after the treasure of Christ within so that they may know Him more intimately and accurately; to exhort them to press in, press on, and press through, and to make a decisive dedication of all their faculties in the working out of their own salvation.

In summary, to encourage them with all that we see of Christ living in them, as them.

What is a Coach?

A coach is a mentor and a motivator who helps a student advance at their fastest possible rate. Coaches are products of the product and do their own inner work.

Being a coach comes more easily to some than to others, but, as a product of the product, you have what it takes! Coaching is not an intellectual exercise; it is equivalent to journalizing over your fellow students with care and love. We know that we can hear God, and so we *can* coach. Availability and willingness are the key requirements, and then God will flow through us.

The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.

Isaiah 50:4 (KJV)

Coaches are NOT: teachers, preachers, or judges, nor are they counselors.

Coaches ARE: guides, encouragers, and mentors. Coaches give hope, steer, prompt, prime, motivate, cheer on, oversee, guard, *encourage, encourage and encourage.*

Coaches Are Not Teachers, But Guides

We do not need to tell our students what to do, and we do not give them the answers to all their questions. Remember that, as the coach, you do not have to know the answers. Your students just need encouragement to keep looking for the answers themselves, and to cultivate an attentive, listening and speaking relationship with God. Sometimes you may want to point in the right direction for them to seek, but then let the Holy Spirit work. The Holy Spirit is their Teacher.

As Jaque always said, “God hid these things for us, not from us.” It is not right to short-circuit the joy that comes to a student as they do their own inner work and make their own discoveries. They have to do the work that changes them *as they seek*; their journey is in *their* answers. Priest and author, Henri Nouwen wrote that to offer answers before there are questions, is equal to spiritual oppression.

Coaches Are Not Preachers, But Encouragers

In this context, I am using the following definition of preaching:

To give earnest advice on religious or moral subjects in an obtrusive or tedious way.

In the context of coaching, nobody wants to be preached at about things the coach has learned from the Lord that don't necessarily fit the student's situation. So, as a coach, be engaged and do not go off on a tangent of your own making. It is mostly about *how* you say it. We do not talk down to them; we are excited *with* them. They have their own walk with the Lord. Just be alongside them where they are right now and follow along with where they are going. Be humble. Be real. Do not preach! A good check is to re-read what you have written to make sure it is relevant and does not sound like preaching.

Coaches Are Not Judges, But Mentors

Your students will all be at different stages, some more, and some less, comfortable with journalizing. Your goal is to fan the student's desire to know

Christ. It is not a case of how far along on their journey they are, we probably have no idea what this person has gone through in their journey so far, or what things God has already taught them. The important thing is to encourage them to stay on the journey and continue to grow and to learn. Their responses may show immaturity or poor wording but this is not a pass or fail course; this is about development. We consider others to be equally as important and precious as we know ourselves to be, in Christ. As coaches, we need to have an attitude that understands that we are *all* learning and growing at different rates. We are at different places in the journey, but we all have so much to learn. If understanding is needed, you have here an opportunity to mentor by gently nudging them in the right direction, to give them food for thought, but not to outright "correct" them. Be aware of the possibility that you may be interpreting their *intent* incorrectly; they may just have used poor wording. No doubt, they will also teach *you* some new things along the way.

Summary

Friendly help is like cold water to a thirsty soul. A coach is a friend! Our fellow students have thirsty souls and we want them to sense that they have a friend. In coaching, we practice written relationship; it is one-on-one, personal, and real.

Above all: let God guide you.

What is Coaching?

The most effective coaching comes simply from conveying to your student *that they have been truly heard by you*. It is not hard to do; we do it *BY* hearing them! Nobody likes a superficial, cheerleading style of encouragement. It has to be genuine, and we trust God to give us those words in season.

A Two-Way Mirror

Coaching accomplishes many things as an integral, unique and very important tool in the VI class structure. It adds dimension to any bible study group utilizing Jaque's material. Coaching helps both the student, and the Visionkeeper. Like a two-way mirror, it gives two-way access to hearts.

As in water face answers to face, so the heart of man to man.

Proverbs 27:19 (AMPC)

Just as water reflects the face, so one human heart reflects another.

Proverbs 27:19 (CJB)

The communication that takes place on paper helps the student to know *your* heart, as well as you seeing theirs. They will trust you, and open up more, when they begin to feel safe with you.

When they see that you are serious about coaching, in turn, they will become more serious about their heartwork. Respond from your heart, and they will too, and will look forward to your feedback. Respond superficially, and they will be less inclined to take their heartwork seriously. Engage, with wisdom!

A Sharpening Iron

As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.

Proverbs 27:17 (NLT)

As a sharpening iron, coaching sharpens the student by erasing doubts, especially those of beginning students. It helps a student to process what they are learning and confirms that they are on the right track.

This same sharpening iron (coaching) sharpens the Visionkeeper by revealing how engaged the student is, and if they have embraced journalizing. Coaching gives a coach a place to sow more directly into the student's journey. As a coach, you will find the joy of seeing others “get it” and learn to value the honor of relationship at the heart level.

Summary

Coaching is a ministry that blesses others, but it is also a discipline for the VK or class facilitator. Like any discipline we put ourselves under, we reap rewards and blessings from doing it.

Jaqueline taught us to seek our own answers from God and to share what we find, but we are not trying to correct or convince anyone else, that's God's job. Coaches come alongside the student to look together at where we are and where we are going. The student may be hurting, but we cannot fix them or advance them, we *accompany* them and help them advance.

How to Coach

Coaching begins with preparation and attitude. You need to plan your time intentionally.

Let God set the pace, then trust Him for the time you need during the week to get the coaching done. Know your own schedule and only take on what God asks of you. Enjoy the tempo of a God-breathed life by letting Him set the

pace. Hold His hand in childlike trust and the way before you will open up step-by-step.

Your own journalizing and coaching are the two big rocks you need to prioritize into your week, and then trust God for the time to do the other things you need to do. When coach and student are both immersed in the same course it makes all insights tie together and be relevant to the subject matter. It is difficult to coach deeply without being immersed in the topic yourself.

Read all the papers through at the beginning of the week. Highlight some things as you read. During the week, be ready and listening for the insights God will give you for your students. Make a note of them; they may be quotes from Scripture, other books, a sermon or even a movie.

Not everyone will have the time or inclination, but it does help to read many bible versions and other books in your own study time. God will use it all; trust him to coach through you. Put it all in the pool and see where it fits to help others as well as yourself.

Put Your Head On

The only way we can coach effectively and adequately is if Christ is doing it through us, so we coach using the mind of Christ. Focus on the Lord, set aside the time. Calm your own heart and mind, and perhaps journalize first. You need to be in the flow of the Spirit. When we coach, we coach in the presence of the Lord, just as we journalize in the presence of the Lord. Listen for His words *in* you on how to coach this student. When coaching, you are actually journalizing over your student; that is the way to do it. Christ in you knows Christ in them. Coaching is the word of the Lord, as you listen for *His* heart and *His* response to their answer. His love for them will flow through you. This is Christ-centered-coaching.

The mind of Christ helps you to have tact, and gives the discipline not to give advice, preach or try to fix them, to encourage not correct, and to show concern, love and empathy.

Look Beyond the Words or the Flesh

Reading the entire paper first helps you get a feel for where the student is as a whole person. Focusing just on one response first may not give you a clear indication of where they are really at for the week.

As you read, pretend you do not know them in the flesh, or at least put aside what you *think* you know about them because flesh camouflages the heart and you do not know what you think you know! How well you think you know them can be an impediment. God knows:

Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.

2 Corinthians 5:16 (KJV)

Or, in an easier to understand translation from J.B. Phillips: "This means that our knowledge of men can no longer be based on their outward lives."

When you have the student's written words, you have time to think, pray, re-read, and to connect with the student's heart. It is called "heartwork" for a reason.

Do not become stuck on the outer, not their lingo, handwriting, spelling and grammar, or any of those kinds of things. We must look beyond, to the cry of their heart.

Value Your Student's Insights

Your students are casting their precious pearls before you; pick them up and value them! Christ in them is as valuable as Christ in you. Encourage students who may feel everyone else is more advanced or spiritual than they are. Being trite and flippant is not smart. Do not use too many clichés; superficial encouragement is not any encouragement at all.

Don't be flip with the sacred. Banter and silliness give no honor to God. Don't reduce holy mysteries to slogans. In trying to be relevant, you're only being cute and inviting sacrilege.

Matthew 7:6 (The Message)

Do not feel the need to always have to say something. Remember: it is not your job to teach them. Do not preach! Guard against judging them in any way. Be humble and do not give advice. However:

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.

Proverbs 25:11 (KJV)

Pull out the good points. Encourage! Immerse to understand where they are coming from and what their excitement is over the things they are learning, and then you can truly be thrilled with them over what God is doing. Be real. Be more than a cheerleader.

Encouragement is Like Sunshine

Encouragement is like sunshine opening a bud. Add encouraging comments after their heartwork answer, throughout their papers as applicable, or in the closing paragraph, but here are some goals:

1. Tie together different parts of the student's heartwork.
2. Encourage them to keep seeking, and keep moving forward. Use words such as, "I'll be praying for you, I know you can meet this challenge."
3. The faithful coach keeps calling the student back to God. Show them with your words that you are aware of the flow of what God is doing in their life. You may see things through the power of the Holy Spirit that they have not even seen yet. It's an unusual gift to have someone invested in you to the point where they are able to see from the outside what God is doing on the inside, and to encourage you in that.
4. Consider a student's growth. Each is at a different level of understanding, but each deserves the same level of applause for what they are learning.
5. Pull out from what they have said, agree with it, add scriptures that confirm it, add quotes that tie in with it, show how it ties in with the lesson with a lesson quote. E.g., "Yes, as Jaque taught in the audio lesson..."
6. Let them know how much what they wrote ministered to you, if it did, or that it also helped you to see in a new way. E.g., "Your answer really speaks to me..."
7. If you see how their heartwork is full of the gentleness of God's love, or full of God's truth, express that, emphasize how you see God is speaking to them.
8. Include a scripture, e.g., "This reminds me of Isaiah..."
9. Include a relevant quote from your own reading, if it fits. This helps confirm that they are onto something.
10. There will be things in their paper that will jump out at you, highlight them.
11. If they are struggling, give them encouragement to continue and remind them of God's promises that He'll be found by them if they seek him, e.g., Jeremiah 33:3.

Problem Issues

If you need help, find and use your resources. We are a team and we need each other. Coaches can ask the head VK for help and the head VK can always talk with other VK's or the VI board. Above all, ask God! Take some time first to lay the matter before Him and listen. Over the years, he has proven to us how faithful He is to lead and guide our VK's in every situation that arises.

Here are a few examples of issues that may arise while coaching:

1. The student is not participating well or handing in heartwork. We request that every student listens to the message, "An Introduction Before You Join" so that they can decide whether or not to make the commitment to the class. The first time they come to class without heartwork or journal or notes, then the VK will need to take them aside and lovingly talk to them about it. Privately ask them to reassess their commitment level, and perhaps consider whether another time would be better for them to attend. Do not do this legalistically, keep their best interests at heart, encourage them, listen to their heart and follow the Holy Spirit.
2. You see something in their paper that you feel needs correcting. Never bluntly point out that they are wrong or correct them! Spiritual discernment and humility are required, after all, you may be wrong yourself. This is a mentoring journey, don't simply ignore it, but by listening to your student in class discussions and in the context of all the other things they have written in their heartwork, you will be able to discern if they are teachable and simply on the journey of discovery and maturity, or are being seriously unscriptural. Give them time to soak in the word, quote a Scripture that states the truth that applies, "Isn't it good to know...(quote Scripture)," and then trust that God will do the talking. Be aware of what teaching is coming up in the days ahead and whether this issue will be addressed in the course materials. If so, that will be a good time for discussion in class. Use your best tool: guide by quoting a relevant Scripture that points in the right direction and continue to monitor the situation. If all else fails, the VK may need to have a private discussion with the student, speaking the truth in love.
3. The student shares compromising or inappropriate personal details. Remember, a coach is not a counselor. Be encouraging, and tell them you

are praying for them, but don't give advice. Talk with your head VK if it's a serious situation.

Summary

Encourage and be on the journey with your student without preaching. Get excited about what God is saying to them, and to you through them. Plan your time wisely and use your resources.

Coaching Standards

The VI structure is reproducible, and it protects us. We have learned to apply some standards over the years that help strengthen that structure, and to keep coaching reproducible and consistent.

Practically:

1. Use a pen or font of an alternate color than the student used.
2. Use at least two or three scriptures per paper. Find scriptures that enhance what the student is saying, or to guide, do not use them to "preach" according to our previous definition of that word. Find promises that help give hope, or confirmations of their thoughts. Use of scripture is important. By pointing students to the Word for practical answers or encouragement, we employ the best coaching available.

Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise. Use His words to teach and counsel each other.

Colossians 3:16 (NLT)

3. Add personalized comments, but not on every answer. Do not always feel the need to comment.
4. Do not let your coaching get too lengthy or too scant. Be warm and personable so the student feels you are taking the time to care for them personally. Stay within our guidelines so that each student experiences uniformity.
5. Use two or three stickers, or clip art per page; the important thing is to be consistent with all your students.
6. Underline or highlight a good thought or response, or neatly draw hearts, happy faces etc around a good phrase.
7. Add quotes from other readings if they are relevant and accurate and from a trusted source.

8. Ask them to share noteworthy responses/journals in class.
9. Write a closing paragraph of between 75-100 words. It becomes the place to summarize and convey how you have engaged with their heartwork.
10. Coaches are anonymous. Sign everything "Your VI Coach" or "Your Visionwriters Coach" so that their eyes stay on the Lord.
11. Assign the same students to the same coach for the duration of the course. As a coach, be careful not to be repetitive. Keep a coaching log of what stickers, verses or quotes you have already used.
12. Although you are honoring your people by *not* correcting their typing, spelling or punctuation errors, *do* proofread your own work. Maintain a standard of excellence for yourself.
13. Give equal passion, counsel and heart to each student you coach. Each deserves the same level of attention; Almighty God is speaking to them.
14. Getting their heartwork papers back on time is an *absolute priority*.
15. Recommendation: Wherever possible have men coach men and women coach women.

Outline of a Closing Paragraph:

Dear (name of student),

1. Open with a statement relevant to the theme of their current responses.
2. Another one to three lines of encouragement with regard to their previous responses or something particular to them.
3. Encourage them to continue since this is a process.
4. Give Scriptures as encouragement.
5. Make a closing statement that is a personal encouragement about Christ in His unique expression through them.

Sample of a Closing Paragraph:

Dear (Student's Name),

I am seeing Christ's love come to full bloom in your heart (*A statement relevant to the "theme" of what you are actually seeing in their work*). I have watched you wrestle and succeed in finding His faithfulness within you (*Again, find a statement that is relevant and particular to their work*). Continue

coming, trusting that He is working out the details of your life (*Encouragement for them to continue in the process*). As you well know, Christ is all the while at work within you causing you to will and work for His good pleasure. (*Scripture encouragement, note the reference*). You are a treasure to us and to me personally. The Lord has used you to minister directly to my heart. He has made Himself known to me through what you said (*example of what they wrote*). Thank you. (*Personal encouragement about Christ in His expression through them*).

Love, Your VI Coach (*Remain anonymous*)

Try to keep your closing paragraph between 8 - 15 sentences and 75 - 100 words. It is important not to “over-coach.” Practice hearing the Spirit of God as He freely gives words of real encouragement for your students and from your students.

Sample Closing Paragraph With Gentle Correction

Dear (name of student).

I know God is doing awesome things in you, (name). He is restoring your sense of self-worth and your worthiness of love (make it personal). He is lifting your countenance, and He has given you a place to “dig in” and a people who believe in you. I believe in you, (name), for I see the seed of Christ that is growing in you. I know you can meet the challenge of giving time with the Father priority each day. I know that, as you answer the heartwork questions, you will discover the joy of His presence there as well. You are learning to tap into *His ability* in you week by week. Let Him be your expectation of more...expect Christ in you, (name). Expect Him to show you a new routine - one that will provide you with the time to meet Him daily and with the self-surrender to respond to these questions weekly. Expect Him to take the “little” and turn it into “much.” Do not let the enemy condemn you; if you feel condemned then you may have unconsciously returned to self-effort, forgetting shortly that the life of Christ is your true power source. I will be hoping, praying, and expecting Him to come through on your behalf, as you continue in your true desires through His grace and divine influence (*make sure this is relevant to their situation, as revealed by the Holy Spirit*).

Love, Your VI Coach (*Remain anonymous*)

Remember to encourage your students to meet God not only in the journals but in their heartwork too. Applying ourselves in our journals and heartwork with full abandon is our part in gleaning all that He intends for us through the VI class structure.

Raising Up Coaches to Help Carry the Load

Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, advised him to appoint intermediary judges over the people, saying:

Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone.e 'good'

Exodus 18:18 (KJV)

No doubt, coaching takes a lot of time and commitment and can lead to burnout. As mentioned above, be obedient to the Lord in how many students you have in your class, or how many you agree to coach. If He is definitely telling you to coach more than you think you are able, He will also provide the time and resources you need. When beginning classes in a new area, you will be the only coach for a while. However, eventually you will find committed students who will also make good coaches.

1. Look for disciplined and accountable students who are really flowing in journalizing and who naturally encourage relationship with others.
2. Train them by giving them these session notes on coaching and let them listen to the VK training audio message on coaching.
3. Have them coach your own paper first. In this way, you can monitor and help them with their coaching. Once you see that they are coaching well, give them another student's papers to coach.
4. If they coach another student, be sure to look over what they have done before returning it to the student. Do not be afraid to give encouragement and suggestions to keep things uniform. In this way, you are protecting all your students. Once you are confident that they are gracefully following our guidelines, you will not need to monitor as strictly, but exhort them to ask you if they have any questions and be accountable to you with any difficult situations.
5. Coach your coaches the way you coach your students, encouraging what is right and gently correcting when necessary.

Sara's Summary

Coaching is all about relationship. Relationship is about listening, caring, and giving good, strong, encouraging feedback. We all need that from one another. Our lives would be so much better if we had that kind of interest from even one other person. Remember this is your ministry, give the portion that you can give and put your *heart* in it, rather than looking at this and saying, oh, that's so much work, or, it's going to take so much time. We exist as family, we are the church and we can survive only by supporting one another. Coaching is one small way in which we assure one another that we are not alone. It accelerates community. If we all give our part, we will not be lacking in the body of Christ.

A Final Example from Jaque for Coaching

Coaching, for all of us, is a process like anything else; we'll get better at listening to students as our own listening improves while hearing God speak personally to us. We need to be patient with the process and, at the same time, start slowing ourselves down enough to show we really care about what our students wrote.

I know that sometimes students, not sensing they are being heard, will not share as deeply from their hearts as they would when they do feel heard. Any Visionkeeper can improve their coaching skills, and should endeavor to do so.

It is easy for a human being to view coaching as just another job that needs to be done. It is almost as if a person moves from mowing the lawn, to doing the dishes, to coaching. It is easy to treat coaching like just another item on a "checklist." As coaches, we need to guard against this like the plague!!! All of us can sense the depth of our listeners, we know whether we are being heard and we tend to respond in kind. Coaching is relationship, very unlike just doing dishes!

With that being said, I would like to give a three-step overview of how we might improve our listening/coaching skills. The example I will use is not an exact template; in other words, you do not need to use this recipe word for word, but the 'whole idea,' if followed, will benefit all coaches.

1. Before you coach, *practice* **S-L-O-W-I-N-G** down to listen. This may be easier for some than others – but we can ALL practice doing it!
2. In a closing paragraph (to a fictitious student named Sally), think along these lines:

Sally, you wrote, "I have too many irons in the fire. I'm married with three children, I'm involved in 'xyz' ministries, I work at a soup kitchen, teach Sunday School, am trying to keep up with my exercise classes, as well as care for my sick grandmother who lives with us. I can barely keep my head above water, and my VK recently encouraged us to follow a plan for reading through the Bible in a year! My situation is so overwhelming; I don't have the time like others do, and I don't think I'm doing anything well. I'm so stressed and anxious about getting the work done for this class that I can hardly sleep!"

Now, after quoting Sally, restate her words in your own words with empathy and concern - let **her** know that **you** heard what she just said. It might read like this:

Wow! Sally, I feel overwhelmed with you! I imagine you must feel separated from God when what you really want is union! It must be quite frustrating to desire a deeper relationship with God and not see a way to get there, or to admire others who seem to have more time when the odds seem to be stacked against you.

Build a bridge (to God) and trust HIM to minister to Sally. Continue with something like this:

Sally, there are two verses on my heart for you today:

But seek (aim at and strive after) first of all His kingdom and His righteousness (His way of doing and being right), and then all these things taken together will be given you besides. So do not worry or be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have worries and anxieties of its own. Sufficient for each day is its own trouble.

Matthew 6:33, 34 (AMPC)

It is vain for you to rise up early, to take rest late, to eat the bread of [anxious] toil—for He gives [blessings] to His beloved in sleep.

Psalm 127:2 (AMPC)

Quote the verse in its entirety and give the reference. If you're using a quote from another source - say Oswald Chambers, always include the reference.

Close with a paragraph of encouragement, such as:

Sally, I encourage you to seek the Lord first thing in your day; if you make Him first priority, He promises to bring order to “all these other things.” He loves you so much Sally, and peace always comes with His answers! I will be praying for you to enjoy fruitful times with Him. I trust Him to give you the grace you need to enter His rest and enjoy His presence. Peace to you Sally, Love from your VI Coach

VK's have asked, “Should I close out my coaching with a prayer?” Follow the Holy Spirit. If it's on your heart for Sally, write it! If not, skip it.

Note: If your closing paragraph shows that you have actually heard Sally, then a closing prayer *will be believable*. Sally can receive a heartfelt prayer once you have shown her that you have *heard* her. Never insert a prayer without a closing paragraph that demonstrates your ability to hear her heart. Also, do not use a closing prayer to deliver unsolicited advice!

Finally, never, never, never follow a stranger's voice that says, “I'm not a good coach,” or “Other coaches are better at this than I am,” or “I just don't know what to say,” or “_____”. Others may currently seem more natural at coaching; however each one of us is who *God* says we are, and we can do what *God* says we can do.

He lives in us, through us, by us, and as us. So, remember who you are. If you practice ‘living loved’, you will be perfectly graced to love Sally in writing (and with relevant stickers, verses and sayings). If you don't remember everything here, at least remember this:

3. S-L-O-W down with your heart and listen before writing or putting a sticker on anything for Sally!

We hope that you have gained a fuller view into the heart of coaching. God's desire for deeper relationship with His people is the core of the coaching strategy. Enjoy the practice, apply the information we have included, and discover the rich rewards of participating in the ministry of coaching.