

# DEVELOPMENTAL ROLES DISTINCTIONS

by Michael Stratford, MCC

---

This document attempts to clarify the different developmental roles one can take with a client, **using learning to ride a bicycle** as the metaphor.

**Consultant:** They have expertise they can impart to you. They study the mechanics of riding the bike. They teach you how a bike is propelled; what is necessary for balance; the laws of momentum and gravity. They tell you where it's best to sit, where to put your feet and when to pedal. The consultant may recommend a program of training for you. They may deliver the program with recommendations for ongoing development. Then he/she leaves and the ongoing implementation is often left up to you.

**Therapist:** They have expertise in helping you come to terms with your past. They will ask about your history with riding a bike. They often listen to hear if your desire to ride a bike is "healthy or unhealthy." They examine the basis for your concerns or fears about riding and potentially falling. They may discuss topics such as, if your parents rode, and why that might be important, or influence your desire and ability to ride. They then explain why it is important for your self-esteem or psyche for you to learn this and to be successful. They encourage you to work through your fears.

**Parent:** They have responsibility for your well-being. They usually buy the bike for you. They may put on training wheels, and take them off when they think you are ready. They run by the bike holding on until you have balance to continue, and then cheer you on as you go riding off into the sunset. They often will threaten to take away riding privileges if you don't comply with the ground rules of the household.

**Mentor:** They share their experience and expertise of bike riding and how they did it successfully. They may give you many tips on 'drafting' and the most effective way to ride. They model the way they think you should ride, based on the way they did it. They give you their strategies about things like changing tires quickly in a race, how to get the most speed for your effort, what the best bike is in their opinion and how to negotiate gravel at the bottom of a hill. They teach you their version of proper bike maintenance and warn you of the dangers of riding in traffic. They offer their 'best practices' about how to avoid pitfalls. They sometimes hold an, "I know better than you since I've been there before, so you'd better listen to me," superior position.

**Coach:** They have expertise in listening to what you really want, asking questions to clarify your thinking, and helping you establish what you want to accomplish. They listen to your desire to try riding. They ask you if you need instructions on how to ride and where you might get them. They inquire if you like the color or kind of bike you're about to ride. They may check in with you to see if you are enjoying the experience and what might make it more fun or more useful. They explore how riding a bike fits with previous and current goals or with what you truly want out of life. They will help you ascertain what you need in order to take care of yourself when or if you fall. When you stop, the coach might ask about your experience, what was valuable about it, and whether or not you want to attain mastery of bike riding. If you do, the coach helps you devise a plan whereby you can attain that mastery. If you don't, then the coach may help you devise a plan to sell the bike.

**Research by Dr. Brenda Wilkins has shown that Coaching is the only co-creative partnership model (let me find out what you know first, and then I'll decide if I add anything), while all others are primarily hierarchical in nature. Basically, they are an, "I know and you don't" relationship.**

---