

# Coaching in the pressure cooker- how does the Israeli culture and events influence the coaching relationships?

By Eran Olenik, PCC

Every nation has its unique and special set of history, culture, and language characteristics that create common narratives and paradigms, which shape the way that coaching is done. As a coach and an Israeli, I will try to go beyond the limits of the paradigm I operate in, and share some of the characteristics of my environment and its influence on the coaching market and the coaching relationships in Israel.

## Israel as a Pressure Cooker:

**Population density** – The state of Israel has a population of 7,746,000 inhabitants on a territory of 22,145 kilometers. According to the United Nations statistics for 2006, Israel is considered one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with 343 people for a square kilometer.

**The Arab–Israeli Conflict** – The state of Israel is in continuous conflict with its neighboring Arab nations. Since it was founded in 1948, Israel has had seven wars, two Palestinian uprisings, and has been engaged in many military confrontations. Israel has peace treaties with two of its neighbors - Egypt and Jordan.

**Life danger** – In addition to re-occurring terror attacks that take life and undermine the Israelis' feeling of personal security, during the years 2001 – 2009 over 10,000 missiles and bomb shells were fired from Gaza on Israel, injuring over 1,000 people.

**Inner tension** – While Israel is a melting pot for many immigrants from all over the world, it is a heterogeneous

society with many inner tensions between: Jews vs. Arabs, Secular vs. Orthodox, "Sabras" (Israeli-born) vs. "Olim" (Jewish immigrants), Olim from Europe and America vs. Olim from Africa.

**Living expenses** – The average Israeli needs to work 11 years to buy an apartment. The ratio of the Israeli median apartment cost vs. the median income in Israel is higher than in the US, Australia, Canada and England. It is not surprising that 39 percent of Israelis claimed that it is difficult or very difficult for them to live on their current salary vs. 25 percent of the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) residents feeling that way.

## The Impact on the Israeli People

**Negative experience** – According to the OECD, Israelis reported more than any other country that they sense very negative emotions, such as pain, concern, stress, anxiety and sadness.

**Hard working** – The Israeli individual works on average 1943 hours a year, 179 hours more than the OECD average.

**Entrepreneurship** – In 2009 Singer and Senor published the book on Israel - "The Start-Up Nation." In their book, they suggest that: "What makes the Israeli character so powerful is a mixture of patriotism passed down from the founding generation, a constant struggle for survival, an ongoing sense of scarcity and restlessness; – all having deep roots in the Jewish and Israeli history.

*continued on page 6*



*continued from page 5*

**Content** – Despite the stressed environment, 72 percent of Israelis are satisfied with their life vs. an average of 59 percent in the OECD nations.

**Connection** – There is a sense of a shared destiny and identity. It is likely driven from: the tiny size of the country, being an island in the Geo-cultural space, the short history of Israel being a young society, the Jewish denominator, the constant threat from external enemies, the shared traumas, the sacrifices and mutual experiences from having served in the Army.

### The Evolution of the Coaching Profession in Israel

Coaching was introduced in Israel in 1988. Up until 2002 there were only a few coaches. The coaching "boom" started in 2002, and is the result of several reasons:

- (1) The need to deal with the recessions of the last decade.
- (2) The Israeli spirit of entrepreneurship.
- (3) Increased public awareness due to airing of two coaching reality shows on Prime Time Television.



**“In general, Israel is a society without masks.”**

Today there are more than 120 coaching schools and programs, over 7,000 graduates, and about 5,000 coaches registered in four coaching organizations.

On the one hand, the high number of coaches increased the awareness of the profession. On the other hand, it has lowered the image of it. Lack of one obligatory standard hasn't help (despite the good work of the coaching organizations on this matter). Coaching is most popular among secular Jews. Lately it is also gaining presence in the Orthodox and Arab sectors.

The Israeli coaching market is becoming more professional. Some of the coaching schools represent international ICF Accredited Coach Training certification Programs others schools meet's the standards set by local coaching organizations. I believe that only professionalism will assist coaches to differentiate themselves and be successful over time.

### The Effect on the "Coaching Relationship"

**Trust is preliminary for coaching** – The trust of the client in the coach can't be taken for granted, especially with the skeptical Israeli who doesn't want to be deceived. Trust-building starts with the choice of the coach and evolves as the client gains more value, perceiving the coach as a worthy partner for their journey.

**Direct and open communication** – In general, Israel is a society without masks. Most often, Israelis connect with each other in a blink of an eye, favor non-formal relationships, and try to reduce the distance and authority. The openness creates rapport that generates an effective coaching environment. It also allows a direct feedback. The depth of the feedback is aligned with the depth of the relationships.

**The Coaching Agenda** – When Israelis choose to be coached, they ask to focus on big issues or concerns, so that when they achieve results they feel that they are getting the best value for their money. When you live in an expensive, unsafe, stressed and intense environment, you don't waste time on gaining just "nice" results.

**Spiritualism vs. pragmatism** – The secular sector in Israel regards spiritualism with caution, possibly due to the connection some make between spiritualism and the Jewish religion, and the anger towards the Orthodox who has "claimed" the religion as their own. Some people don't relate to big words such as vision or purpose, which seem irrelevant to the current situation. They are relevant to the 'big issues' like the vision of the Jewish State. Nevertheless, secular Jews do connect with spirit. Perhaps believing in something bigger than yourself, gives you the strength to

*continued on page 10*

*continued from page 9*

This very valuable discussion was entitled 'The Good, the Bad & the Ugly of Coaching'. What a brilliant idea to help us get raw insights into the perception of coaching from the insiders' view; as well as to understand their view of the way forward if coaching is to have maximum, investment-effective impact within organizations. If you want to know what those insights were, then you should have been there!

Then we split into a two tracks again. The first group attended Stephanie Vermeulen's session asking the powerful question 'Who would want to be led by you anyway?' Stephanie is an international speaker specializing in EQ. Her humorous yet challenging talk led us to answering some difficult questions of ourselves and how we allocate our energy during the working day.

The second group went to Mary-Joe Emde's fascinating and inspirational talk entitled 'The Latest Neuroscience Insights', leaving us wanting to delve further into this intriguing world of neuroscience.

The challenging end-of-day spot was no disappointment. Chris Gibbons, a business coach and radio talk show host, helped us to imagine what it would have been like to coach Napoleon. The question was; could you have coached one of history's most charismatic and controversial leaders? Chris played out several scenarios from Napoleon's life and role-played how difficult it is to coach a person who has total confidence in himself and is unwilling to listen to others. The resounding question was 'How true to your values are you (the coach) during a coaching session?'

The perfect ending was to share a glass of wine, watch the sun set on a beautiful spring day and ruminate with fellow coaches about the highlights of the day.



**I Care For...**

**What do you care for ?**

**I Care For...**  
"the flowering of human potential. I think that coaching is the best vehicle that has yet arisen in the world to stimulate and support the thriving of individuals for the good of the world."  
**-Philip Brew, MCC (United Kingdom)**

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move forward in spite of the current situation. Some indicators are the development of Jewish coaching in accordance to the Bible and the Jewish tradition, Zen Buddhism Coaching, and more.

Hopefully, this article has shed some light on the unique components of the Israeli environment and its effect on the blooming Israeli coaching market and the unique coaching relationships We know that effective coaching makes all the difference between surviving life vs. living with a sense of deep meaning while realizing one's aspirations.



*Eran Olenik, PCC, is a business coach, life coach, coach trainer, supervisor, and leader of various coaching and leadership courses. He is also Co-representative of the International ACTP Coaching School - "Success Unlimited Network" in Israel.*