

# Fearless Birthing™

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What exactly is a (Beginning of) Life Coach?

It's a "Life Coach" for expectant parents, of course!

The idea first grew from concepts I developed while working on *Mother's Intention: How Belief Shapes Birth*.<sup>1</sup>

Then, just as *Mother's Intention* was being released, Dee Nipper, host of *The Real Side of Birth*<sup>2</sup>, a San Diego radio show told me about a new program she was launching called *San Diego Birth Planners*<sup>3</sup>. Just as a wedding planner guides a bride through the many decisions involved in a wedding, and party planners help clients mind the details of planning parties...including exposing them to ideas they might not have thought about themselves...so does a birth planner guide expectant parents to their own best birth.

As a doula, Dee recognized that many times the reason that parents don't end up with their intended birth is because they don't surround themselves with a supportive environment...often choosing care providers that don't share their own vision of birth.

After talking with Dee, I wondered how those of us not living in metro, networking-rich areas might provide a similar service. It had been sitting in front of me all along, but until I met Dee I didn't see it!

In the years it took to write *Mother's Intention*, much of my research material had been self-help books on reaching one's goals<sup>4</sup>, as well as books

on teaching critical thinking skills.<sup>5</sup> There were common themes running through all of them...I simply applied them to the childbirth education arena that is my passion. The childbirth information in *Mother's Intention* is nothing new...it's what I used to create my own safe and empowering birth 12 years ago and it had been around 20 years before that. What I did was change the way it was presented on the premise that, based on results, what we *had* been doing wasn't working.

On a hunch, I bought some books on Life Coaching.<sup>6</sup> Lo and behold! There it was! All of the ideas that had been in my head for two years compiled into a set of skills that translated into Life Coaching.

There are Life Coaches for every area of life that a person could want to improve or goal a person might want to achieve. Why not a 'coach' to attain the safest, most empowering birth? Basically, the book I had written was a life coaching textbook for parents...though I didn't connect the dots until I read a book about coaching. What I also didn't realize is that it could be very helpful for birthing practitioners like doulas and CBEs in their interactions with clients.

I know in my own practice I have had clients who outline exactly the type of birth and early parenting experience they intend to have...and then I watch helplessly as they make decision after bad decision that ensures that they will certainly NOT have that experience. Every other practitioner I've talked to nods knowingly as I ask if they have ever seen a client like that! It took me years to figure out that the reason their actions were contrary to their words is because their underlying core assumptions about birth were so flawed. They spoke of safety, but made fear-based, dangerous decisions.

As doulas and childbirth educators, we often don't meet our clients until the middle or end of their pregnancy. Some very motivated clients call as soon as they're pregnant, but in my

<sup>1</sup> *Mother's Intention: How Belief Shapes Birth*, Kim Wildner, [www.womanswisdom.info](http://www.womanswisdom.info)

<sup>2</sup> *The Real Side of Birth*, [www.realsideofbirth.com](http://www.realsideofbirth.com)

<sup>3</sup> *San Diego Birth Planners*, [www.sandiegobirthplanners.com](http://www.sandiegobirthplanners.com)

<sup>4</sup> *Life Strategies*, Phillip C. McGraw, Ph.D.

*Your Heart's Desire*, Choquette

*You'll See It When You Believe It*, Wayne W. Dyer

*The For Agreements*, Don Miguel Ruiz

<sup>5</sup> *Developing Critical Thinkers*, Stephen D. Brookfield

*Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, Brookfield

<sup>6</sup> *Coach Anyone About Anything*, Germaine Porche' and Jed Niederer

*The Portable Coach*, Thomas J. Leonard

*Co-Active Coaching*, Laura Whitworth, Henry Kimsy-

House, Phil Sandahl

experience, it hasn't been easy to convince many women that early pregnancy classes are of value.

By the time they come to us, they have an emotional investment in whoever they may have chosen as a caregiver early in their pregnancy...good or bad. Even if parents make the shift to better birth in their minds in late pregnancy, they still don't act on the new ideas because (how often do you hear this)... "there's nothing I can do now".

The fear they've internalized has been reinforced by an entire pregnancy full of 'tests' that tell them they can't trust their body. It's also not uncommon for them to 'fail' many of these tests, not because they are actually at risk, but because of false-positive results or the non-reproducibility of a test. Based on the 'high risk' mentality that's been cultivated throughout their pregnancy, 'just in case' decisions seem justified. Later, when they find out they are actually fine (and were all along) the predominate emotion is relief, which is inappropriately associated with the use of the technology that caused them needless worry, instead of indignation at pointless suffering.

In other words, we get to them too late to help them and up until now we haven't had a way to access the client base early.

Even if parents do realize the provider/client fit isn't right and switch, they may be jumping from the frying pan into the fire...yet now they don't have months to figure this out. If the new caregiver has said all the things they want to hear, which is quite plausible knowing why the first provider was fired, these poor parents may get ambushed at the birth with colliding paradigms.

Taking a page from the burgeoning self-help/life coach book industry, we can reach them earlier. We can empower them to make better decisions using the same tools and techniques. We can combine the best of what we already offer, put it together with a few new skills and tap into what people are already buying.

What do Life Coaches do?

Not being a life coach myself, I had to go find out for myself when these epiphanies struck. A life coach...

- empowers others to reach their goals
- facilitates a journey from the current point to an intended result
- helps the client identify and navigate obstacles
- helps the client understand how they help (or hinder) their own progress
- helps people realize their potential by helping them see choices and options they might not have considered on their own

How do they do these things, and more importantly, how can we?

- They build rapport. Like attracts like. The self-selected populations that become our success stories come with rapport built in. They already hear what we say because they are 'like us'. The rapport building I'm talking about here is a learned skill that works best in one-on-one interactions and is hard to establish in a class setting.<sup>7</sup>
- They establish a reasonable timeline. Again, this is built in during pregnancy.
- They teach people how to assess their relationships with people in the area of concern, and negotiate their needs.
- They identify areas of self-sabotage and share ideas for removing that obstacle.
- They map progress by results.
- They ask questions that help the client clearly define the issue and their role in the resolution (especially what, why, how, who and when questions).
- They listen, listen, listen...to both words and actions...and then reflect back what they hear. Often what they client is saying is not what they *think* they are saying.
- They foster confidence.
- They motivate.
- They help the client to create a supportive environment.
- They assist in problem solving/critical thinking skills.
- They nurture the client's intuition recognition.
- They help clients find ways to attain some balance in their energy output

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<sup>7</sup> Changing Belief Systems with NLP, Robert Dilts  
Instant Rapport, Brooks

- They help the client see their situation from many perspectives.
- They require accountability, helping the client to reclaim their power.

I know that some doulas and childbirth educators try to do one or all of these things already. I think that one reason we may not always have the ‘success’ we would like (i.e. fewer unintended outcomes that can be directly linked to poor decision-making) is that our expectations differ from the parent’s expectations.

This was pointed out to me by a very wise childbirth educator who mentored me during my time teaching in-hospital.

I had been having a hard time figuring out why I wasn’t connecting with the parents in my first few classes the same way I had with parents in my independent classes. She suggested I hand out a ‘goals and expectations’ sheet at the beginning of the first class. I did so. The question “What do you expect to learn from this class” was invariably answered with, “breathing” or “to get through it”. Here I was trying to teach them to have wonderful births, but they didn’t believe birth could be wonderful or that they had any control in creating their experience purposely. If it was joyous and gentle, they believed, it must have been an accident...surely not something over which they had control.

That began my search for how belief shapes the birth experience, but later, I realized that they did not expect ‘coaching’. They expected short, sweet answers like the magical breath that would deliver them from evil. (pun intended)

However, if options like San Diego Birth Planners or (Beginning of) Life Coaching are offered, and books like *Mother’s Intention* can help parents understand that very often, unintended outcomes are created, not encountered, perhaps we can turn the tide.

Another aspect to this change I envision has to do with *where* we have been trying to affect change. Most of us teach a wide range of people...most of which are very uncomfortable with the idea of change, even if it’s for the better. Marketing books like *The Tipping Point*<sup>8</sup> and

*Purple Cow*<sup>9</sup> illustrate nicely why trying to appeal to the masses doesn’t work. They point out that most folks are quite happy with the status quo, even when it is unacceptable. There are very few people willing to look at new ideas. Of the ones that will even look at a novel concept, few will allow it to change their pre-conceived ideas. Those that do must be influential enough to convince the “early and late majority” of the veracity of the idea. Sadly, in childbirth trends, this is seen as the young, the less educated, and the poor, follow what celebrities and the affluent do...regardless of whether it is good for them or not. Artificial baby milk use is a good example, and the epidural craze another.

Self-help books and Life Coaching already have a successful client base. The people buying these books and hiring these professionals are professionals themselves. They are the influential. Reach these people and others will follow.

Not only that, but it is this market that shapes what is acceptable in maternity care. Women themselves are the only ones that can change the system by taking back their power. Their power lies in their purse.

Please notice that all of the books footnoted have nothing to do with childbirth education. We have the information to make birth better. We’ve had it for a long time. The problem is not that we don’t have the scientific support to make birth safer, it’s that the information isn’t reaching the women who need it because a.) they won’t hear what may challenge their beliefs about themselves or about birth b.) childbirth education classes are too late to make the sort of changes required and c.) we are trying to reach the masses, not the innovators who have the ability to change the minds of the resisters.

What we need to do is change how we present the information, asking the questions that will result in the ahHa! moment needed for a paradigm shift. Providing information is a waste of breath if it isn’t allowed into their consciousness. As with anything, they have to do the work if they want the reward. However, by guiding them through the process, they find their own answers, manifest their own intention.

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<sup>8</sup> *Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell

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<sup>9</sup> *Purple Cow: Transform Your Business by Being Remarkable*, Seth Godin

Then when unintended outcomes naturalize, the few mothers that do experience them can be assured that they did everything they could. By

managing what we can manage, we can better accept that which we cannot control.

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