

# About Belonging and Equality of Opportunity at SeattleCoach

*All men are created equal. Some work harder in the pre-season. — Emmitt Smith*

*When you break the big laws, you do not get liberty; you do not even get anarchy.  
You get the small laws. — G.K. Chesterton, English writer, dramatist, journalist, and theologian*

Everyone I've known or worked with is deeply interested in their belonging, in their worth, and in their competence. And as a coach I try to never lose sight of that.

Recently I was contacted by a leader in an organization of 25,000 people. He was interested in hiring us at SeattleCoach to bring a coach certification program to their internal leaders. One part of their request got me thinking about whether or not we could grant their wish:

*He wrote, "How much flexibility is there in our influencing the curriculum so that it explicitly includes/enhances racially just components?"*

*I wrote back, "Even with all of the recent awfulness, I have continued to believe that if great coaching is happening, open communication and challenge and support are happening too—with coach and coachee collaborating on outcomes. And you should know that as a coach who is both lesbian and Christian, I will always follow what my coachees are ready to work on rather than asking them to work on the personal or social agenda that I care deeply about. (I know that my values will show up powerfully in my behavior and presence anyway.)"*

I went on to share a few of the beliefs that have guided me since before I started coaching and developing coaches and coaching leaders at SeattleCoach:

1. Almost anyone can become an exemplary person with a compelling story and a service that the world needs.
2. In a free society with fair laws, good behavior is non-negotiable to the process (this is where the content of your character and the quality of your colleagues matter).
3. The marketplace is very discerning and competitive. The honorable people with the best stuff get discovered. And they never stop listening for how to make their stuff even better.
4. When you face systemic barriers, you must overwhelm them with excellence. And, as a coach, this means that I am far more interested in equality of opportunity than I am in trying to ensure that everyone gets the same outcome (this is sometimes called "equity" so I prefer to talk about "equality of opportunity").
5. Governments that have faith in at least half of all citizens practicing #1, #2, #3, and #4 figure out how to trust them and to limit the weight of rules and regulations. And mastery, purpose, and freedom grow.

Then I continued, *"I totally get it if our decision to not include explicit curriculum modules on diversity, equity, and inclusion in our coach training and development takes us out of the running. No worries. (But I'd still love to work with you.)"*

This was his response a few days later:

*“All of your answers are great. I’ve been pushing back for others to get specific on the equity content they’re looking for and have also floated the idea of supplementing the specifics they want to see. I see coaching as a means to individual self-empowerment, so there’s an existing element already built-in.*

As I’ve continued to think about my response to this leader, to my responsibilities as a professional coach, and to this moment in the life of my country, I’ve now added a few more guiding beliefs:

1. As coaches, we stay open to our blind spots and to our opportunities for improvement.
2. In our decisions, we consider belonging and equality of opportunity. This means that we look for ways to serve organizations and coachees who stand at a challenging starting point. [Click here](#) to see the growing list of organizations to which we have offered support and training through the years—and the coaches we’ve trained could add scores more individuals and organizations.
3. As allies, we build trust and respect with our coachees. This sets the stage for them to be continuously clear about what they most deeply need and want to talk about.
4. This means that, even as allies, we don’t over function in an attempt to protect them. As always, our coachee chooses the agenda, and we challenge and we support. But we don’t drive or evangelize or seize the agenda for our own deeply held purposes—even if those purposes have merit in a different kind of conversation.

Note: I know this puts me a little at odds with a prescriptive trend in coach training. One promoted presenter for the 2021 Association for Coach Training Organizations (ACTO) Conference, Ibram X. Kendi, author of *How to Be an Antiracist*, states, *“Saying you are not racist is not enough. Instead, to effect (sic) social change, coaches and clients must engage in antiracist thinking and actions.”*

5. We protect the container. We know from neuroscience what happens with violent, abusive or dehumanizing language. Or when only one point of view is permitted and others are either banned or shamed. We know from history that language is where atrocities begin. Plus, with angrily raised voices, human brains simply go offline and take at least thirty minutes to come back on even once the threat is mitigated.
6. We beat systemic bias with overwhelming excellence. I speak here from my experience of coming out as a gay Christian in the 1990s.
7. And when it comes to building healthy families, organizations, and cultures, we believe our work as coaches fosters relationships in which care and support, along with challenge and course correction can flourish.

So. Back to my conversation that that good man and his organization. Even if their invitation to us goes no further, I’ve been grateful for this chance to think a few things through.

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In the meantime . . .

<https://www.seattlecoach.com/causes--effects.html>