

## Hey! What's New? 2025-92

### Why AI Won't Replace Human Coaches

An article in *INSEAD Knowledge*, written by Graham Ward, says that, while AI may offer the “correct” answer, it’s coaching that helps a person discover the needed answer – the one they’re ready for.

As AI systems evolve in speed and capability, he writes, “many are asking: can they replace coaching? After all, they synthesise data, offer well-structured frameworks, pose powerful questions and even simulate emotional responses – often very accurately, almost scarily so. Many people report having a ‘relationship’ with their AI tool of choice. For learning, productivity and even aspects of decision-making, AI is truly a formidable companion.”

But coaching, he explains, “at its core, is not about an answer. Coaching is relational. It unfolds in the subtle interplay between two humans, marked by trust, emotional attunement and presence. The real value of coaching often arises not from what is said, but how it is heard, and by whom. AI may offer the ‘right’ answer. But coaching helps a person discover the answer they’re ready for. The difference is everything.”

He adds that, “in coaching, the distinction between the correct answer and the needed answer is often misunderstood. The ‘correct’ answer might be a strategic insight, a behavioural model or a psychological concept. These are, of course, helpful, but rarely transformational, mainly because they come from the coach.”

What the client needs, in each moment, he says, might be:

- Permission to “not know” or what John Keats called “negative capability.”
- The courage to feel something they have avoided.
- Recognition of an emotional truth they have long suppressed.
- A mirror held up not to fix them, but to see them.

“AI can deliver insight. But only a human coach can discern which insight is timely, bearable or transformative in the context of a client’s emotional and psychological readiness.”

He goes on to write that coaching “being a relational craft makes it dependent on subtle attunement: tone, gesture, micro-expressions and the shared emotional field between two people. This attunement is often the very vehicle, or the container, of transformation.” In-person coaching allows for:

- Co-regulation of nervous systems: The felt presence of another calm, grounded human can bring someone out of emotional overwhelm and into safety.
- Embodied empathy: Physical presence amplifies the empathic connection. Holding silence, a nod or leaning in can communicate safety or challenge more powerfully than words. It beckons or invites the other person, without a word needing to be spoken.
- Somatic awareness: A coach can notice body-language shifts in real-time and integrate these into the coaching process. Breathing patterns, posture and tension all become part of the inquiry. Moreover, a coach might invite the coachee into a breathwork exercise if they sense stress.

- Spontaneity and intuition: In my experience, the most powerful coaching moves arise from intuition: an emergent, unrepeatable moment that requires deep human sensitivity and practice.

Ward believes that AI, “however advanced, does not inhabit a body. It cannot join a client in that mystery of unfolding awareness. Its outputs, while impressive, are not relational.”

There’s no question that AI can and already does support coaching, Ward says. “It can certainly assist with transcribing and summarising sessions, tracking goals and nudging behaviour, providing frameworks and learning resources, or even simulating practice environments for coaching students. In these ways, AI augments or even amplifies coaching, but it does not replace it.”

AI may one day become a “master of simulation,” Ward concludes, “but coaching is not simulation. It is real-time co-creation. It is the dance of trust, vulnerability, challenge and compassion. The impact is not limited to the cognitive. It is emotional, existential and, when well done, even spiritual. To lose that, to mistake intelligence for intimacy, or algorithms for attunement, is to strip coaching of its soul.”

Learn more at [Why AI Won't Replace Human Coaches | INSEAD Knowledge](#).