**Humanistic Heart: Coaching with Bipolar Disorder, by Chris Cole**

The growing field of coaching, particularly life coaching and recovery coaching, brings a significant amount of confusion to the table for treatment teams regarding the prevention, intervention, and maintenance of bipolar disorder. As a person living with bipolar disorder, I know very well the magnitude of misinformation, and I also have an intimate understanding of the healing power of humanistic principles, specifically Carl Rogers’ concepts of empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard. As a coach, I have the opportunity to provide a relationship that may encourage a “humanistic heart,” one more capable of change, action, and treatment compliance while recognizing everyone’s innate worth.

With the coaching boom, there has been an enormous elephant in the room of bipolar treatment. Mania in and of itself has the power to distort reality, trending toward the minimization of unmanageability, difficulty coming to acceptance, and the dangerous gravitation toward alternative methods of treatment. Despite the many nuanced challenges of coaching individuals living with bipolar disorder or other mental illnesses, coaches, especially those that have endured their own recovery, can offer a refreshing relationship where the client is taken at face value.

So much deep emotional processing and trauma work has been involved in my own treatment of bipolar disorder. Justifiably and necessarily, clinicians have needed to have their diagnostic tools nearby as they try to decipher what pain to touch, which to prioritize, and how to maintain safety. Those mentors, educators, and coaches along my path that simply saw me as a person going through difficulty were bright lights along my path out of pathology. Coaching may provide this gift, the acknowledgment that everyone is capable of success regardless of the struggle.

As a coach, I am 100% behind clinical and psychiatric support for my clients, and I see my value as a humanistic force forever gently nudging my clients toward a better life and more complete action. I make sure that my clients know I see them, that their struggle is validated, and that I fully understand the difficulty at hand. My own journey easily provides this assurance and lets them know I am authentic in my desire to aid. Inherent in the coaching process is the belief that clients are fully capable, healthy, and whole. This may seem like a confusing concept for them, but it is incredibly healing. Maybe for the first time in their entire lives, clients hear that someone believes in their brilliance, their genius, and their ability to thrive.

The partnership of coaching and clinical treatment has profound power. The processing is more potent, the treatment is more effective, and self-esteem is buoyed throughout it all. Bipolar patients and clients need both. We live in a bipolar universe where there are always two sides. My experience of bipolar disorder has been the tendency to pick one perspective and go toward extremes without searching for balance. For someone living with bipolar disorder, seeing a coach without a clinician could be irreparably dangerous, but to see a clinician without a coach may mean one merely gets to survive when he or she has the power to thrive.

"Chris Cole has authored a memoir of his journey with mental illness

and recovery. Pre-order his book at thebodyofchris.com. For coaching

services, visit colecoaching.com."