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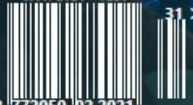
**QUARTERLY
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**Create Learning
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 (USA)

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The ARC of Coaching: Authentic, Responsible, Courageous

by Richard Boston (UK)

What if three seemingly-simple words could open new doors in your coaching – not just for your clients, but for you as a coach?

ARC has come full circle for me. It started as three words that summed up my own coaching approach. Then I realised those same three words summarised the challenges most leaders were bringing to our coaching sessions, action learning sets and leadership programmes.

Think about it: what coaching challenge isn't, at its heart, a difficulty relating to one of these three things?

- Being Authentic – e.g. living up to our values, being our 'true' selves at work
- Being Responsible – taking on too much or too little, handing it to others, competing priorities, etc.
- Being Courageous – overcoming our doubts and fears to do what needs to be done

And then there are the challenges that involve more than one of these ARC Qualities, or the tensions between them. For example:

- 'Do I take bold, entrepreneurial risks or tread the responsible path that protects what we already have?' – Courage vs Responsibility

- 'Do I tell the boss what I really think or keep quiet so I don't risk the job I rely on to feed my family?' – Authenticity vs Responsibility

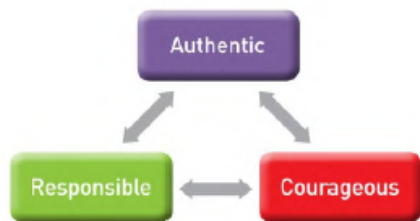
The more 'VUCA'* the world gets, the more relevant these three ARC Qualities have become. In 2020, when the world was first reeling from the spread of Covid-19, I ran a session on ARC for members of the European Coaching and Mentoring Council. They cited a whole range of reasons why Authenticity, Responsibility and Courage are particularly relevant in such challenging times.

One key reason, they said, was because of the role these three ARC Qualities play in building and maintaining trust and psychological safety – particularly important in a world where so many people are working from home, juggling competing professional and personal Responsibilities, and feeling anxious and vulnerable.

We need Courage to weather uncertainty, the coaches said, and to adapt to new ways of working and come up with new business models. And it's when we are at our most Authentic, Responsible and Courageous that we and our clients stand up for what we feel is morally right in the face of opposition or callousness at work.

It's that same blend of Authenticity, Responsibility and Courage that prompts clients and coaches alike to ask themselves tough questions about the ways they have been living their lives, and make some big choices about the way they want to live in the future.

ARC as a coaching tool



Not one of these three ARC Qualities is new. What's new and critically important, is using all three together. Place them in a triangle and you have a simple, intuitive tool that helps clients see quickly to the heart of any challenge and find a constructive way forward.

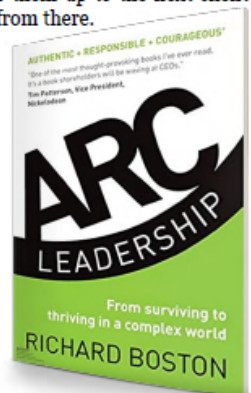
Take Nicola Masters, head of the Grand Appeal, a charity in the UK that raises money to treat sick children. When her coach asked her, quite simply, what the ARC triangle meant to her, she realised she and her team were deeply Authentic and overwhelmed by their sense of Responsibility. What was lacking, she said, was Courage.

That one 'aha moment' prompted a change in the whole team's approach that not only helped them out of a rut but transformed the charity forever. They challenged themselves to be bolder. The first sign of that was Gromit Unleashed, an event that changed a whole city, was voted Tourist Event of the Year and raised more than £2.3 million (US\$3m) – far more than they would raised in the whole of any previous year. They followed that with other events, too, both in the UK and overseas, and even attracted members of the royal family. Not bad for a tiny charity and a simple triangle!

Digging deeper

Often the three words or the triangle above will take on a life of their own, seeding a rich shift in the conversation between the client and their coach. Sometimes, it helps to dig deeper.

In my book ARC Leadership, I have explored these three qualities in depth. I have looked at what stops us being as Authentic, Responsible and Courageous as we would like to be, and I have offered tools, techniques and coaching-style questions to help the reader move forward in all three areas. But, as a coach, you don't necessarily need that extra depth to use these three ARC Qualities with your clients. For Nicola Masters, the words themselves were enough. She decided what each of them meant to her. So, you could simply offer them up to the next client you see and take it from there.



You will find you already have plenty of tools in your toolkit that you are already using to help your clients be more Authentic, Responsible and/or Courageous. You will find ARC-inspired coaching questions flow easily, too. Here are just some of the questions my team and I have come up with that other coaches have found useful:

- **Authentic:** What do your values say you should do? How might your values be working against you? What would the best version of you do? What feels true to you? If you're really honest with yourself, what's really going on here? Where do your reactions to this situation really come from?



- **Responsible:** What's the 'Responsible' thing to do here? What are your responsibilities in this situation (formal, informal, felt, etc.)? Which responsibilities are in conflict here? To whom, or what, are you and the other people involved ultimately Responsible? What responsibilities could you let go of in order to resolve this situation? What's the most sustainable way forward for everyone concerned?

- **Courageous:** What's the most Courageous thing to do here? What are you afraid might happen? What evidence do you have that those fears are not justified? What do you need to grasp or let go of in order to move things forward? If you swallowed a Courage pill, what would you choose to do differently?

The coach's ARC

I said at the start of this article that ARC has come full circle for me. What started as a summary of my own coaching philosophy became a tool for helping others. Then I started teaching it to other coaches. The circle is only complete, though, when we as coaches turn ARC upon ourselves. So, as I bring this article to a close, I would encourage you to ask yourself:

'What would it mean for me, as coach, to be even more Authentic, Responsible and Courageous?'

FOOTNOTE

* VUCA: Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous

