

'When you're coaching somebody who knows everything, you need to expand their knowledge'

Psychologist Dr. Anthony Grant dives into Middle East mentalities

• By BEN HARTMAN

Israelis might be an opinionated people, but they can be motivated to effect positive change as well as anyone, according to Dr. Anthony Grant, one of the world's foremost coaching psychologists.

The International Coaching Federation defines coaching as "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential."

Asked on Wednesday to explain the differences between coaching Israelis and coaching British or Australian clients, Grant responded, "Israelis are renowned for their directness, and every Israeli has strong opinions. So there are obviously some cultural differences, but the notion that we can use behavioral sciences or theoretical programs to bring positive change is a cross-cultural idea. We can all find more satisfying lives, more satisfying ways to do things; these are universal concepts, not Australian, European or Israeli."

Grant – a UK native who has spent many years as an educator in Australia – has developed an approach to coaching that seeks to address those who, like many in our region, are dead-set in their preferred method of doing things.

He was brought to Israel at the initiative of the Israel Coaching Chamber, to attend workshops with Israeli coaching specialists and help the research

branch of the coaching bureau devise means of shifting coaching to a profession based on information and academic research.

"When you're coaching somebody who knows everything, you need to find a way to expand their knowledge," said Grant. "Good coaching is not about telling people what to do, its about helping them develop their life solutions and have ownership of those solutions."

While he said he didn't think coaching psychology could play a role in solving the Middle East conflict, Grant did relate some aspects of the field that could be helpful in a region of ironclad narratives.

"The first thing you do [in coaching someone] is that you don't get into an argument, you help them look at things with a different perspective. It's not about imposing change from outside, rather about facilitating it from within," he said.

"The coach needs to be able to work with people who are resistant to change," he added. "You do this by highlighting the benefits of change and the costs of not changing; you can't force people to change."

Grant's approach to coaching could be a welcome change of pace if applied to mediating in this region, where pounding on tables and impassioned yelling often passes for debate.

"I've found that yelling doesn't work," he said. "In my experience, it's about finding [people's] strengths and not impos-

ing your beliefs."

The Israel Coaching Chamber – a nonprofit group that numbers 2,100 members and an executive committee headed by seven experts – was founded in 2006 to bring greater professional and academic standards to the field of coaching.

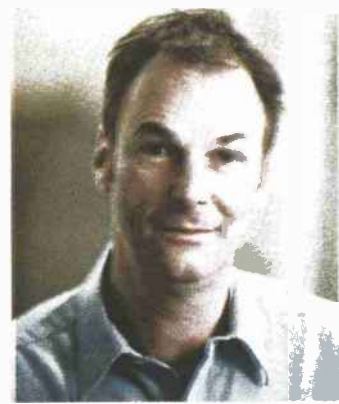
As part of its operations, the chamber runs volunteer coaching programs, including ones devoted to lone soldiers, new immigrants and youth leaders.

Grant said he would give talks at Tel Aviv University and the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, and hold workshops with the country's coaching specialists.

Israel has an surprising number of such professionals for a country its size, he said: "I was amazed to find out there are about 60 or 80 coaching training schools in Israel; that's about one for every 100,000 or so citizens. In Australia there are about 14 training schools, of those only about five or six main ones."

In 2000, Grant, who has a bachelor's degree in psychology, a master's in behavioral science and a doctorate in psychology, founded the world's first department for the study of coaching psychology, at the University of Sydney.

He has garnered a number of awards, including a Vision of Excellence award from Harvard University in 2009 for his work in helping to develop a scientific foundation to coaching, and a British Psychology Society Award in 2007 for "outstanding professional and scientific contribution



TONY GRANT

to coaching psychology." He has co-written and co-edited five books on evidence-based coaching, which have been translated into eight languages.

Grant says the public has a rather flawed view of coaching psychology, and one of his goals is to advance the professionalism, and the scientific and academic basis of the field, as well as its public image – often one of self-help gurus and fly-by-night motivational speakers.

"People often see it [coaching] as self-help, pop psychology, but at the University of Sydney we link coaching to behavioral science, and we do a lot of research on the process and impact of coaching and work to bring this research base to the field," he said.

Grant also has personal reasons for his trip to Israel: He is visiting his father, who made aliya 10 years ago from the UK and lives in Ra'anana.

"This is my second time out here. I live in Australia, so it's a bit of a long visit to get out here, but I love it here, it's great," he said.