

Coaching Women through the Roller Coaster of First-Time Motherhood

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Most first-time moms are aware they need knowledge, understanding, and support from others especially another experienced woman to coach them to achieve their goals. A life coach or doula who understands the aspects that are most important to new moms can be an effective influence as they are challenged with the unknown of motherhood.

The Ride Ahead

Coaching first-time moms through pregnancy, labor and delivery, and postpartum can be similar to explaining the effects of a roller coaster ride to someone who has never experienced it. At the crest of the coaster the excitement and fear are almost parallel, and can be likened to the feeling of a first-time mother approaching labor and delivery. Like passengers of the amusement park ride, new moms anticipate thrilling experiences but are unsure and concerned about their child's wellbeing and their role. How a woman endures the passage through the early stages of motherhood can be positively affected by effective coaching. In a study done in Australia examining the need for support to women who had just given birth, it was found, "Mothers reassurance was an important aspect of the coaching work ...particularly having the assurance that all was normal or correct. During the process, the women described being encouraged by the staff, having questions answered, and being helped to 'meet goals'" (Rowe, Barnes & Sutherns, 2013, p. 150).

Who Coached Mary the Mother of Jesus?

Even Mary the mother of Jesus had someone to walk alongside her during her pregnancy, her cousin Elizabeth, who was there to share in the experience of the unknown and unfamiliar. These two women were at opposite ends of the birthing seasons, Elizabeth old and desperately desiring a child, while Mary young and most likely not ready to be an adult much less a mother. However both of these first-time moms experienced the miraculous incarnation of new life, the

ridicule of others, and confusion from their spouse. What supernatural impartation and preparation coaching did the God the Father provide? How did they have peace in so much unknown? The exultation of Elizabeth (Luke 1:42-45) and Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55) confirm the joy and peace they experienced during their pregnancies. Both these biblical characters trusted the Lord to guide and lead them to complete the path He had prepared for them; can a life coach or doula act in a similar role?

Life Coaches to New Moms

Most women would admit they are in need of relationships and encouragement and would welcome a guide through the twists and turns of the rickety coaster track leading towards the birth of their first child. Mary had Elizabeth who most likely experienced similar emotions, just as many new moms may have the benefit of well-meaning family members. However professionals called doulas (from the Greek word meaning "to serve") or birth coaches, have the occupation to give emotional support to women before, after, and during the birth process. Hye-Kyung quotes Gentry, Nolte, Gonzalez, Pearson and Ivey, "Doulas are trained experienced women who provide continuous physical, emotional, and informational support to mothers before, during and after birth. Researchers have found that doula support influenced positive birth outcomes including decreased need for medical technological interventions or pain medications" (2014, p. 25).

The doula's main role is the gentle caring encouragement, warmth and affection towards a woman during the most vulnerable experience of birth (Klaus & Kennell, 1994). Doulas, also act as coaches to assist the birthing woman to help her reach her goals, expectations, and dreams. "Ultimately the role of the doula is whatever the mother and doula decide together the role should be" (Chee, 2012, p. 21). Chris Goldman of Doulas of Central New York understands, her role is "to support the mother in her birth goals, whatever they may be" (Chee, 2012, p. 22). Similar to other life coaches, doulas are most effective when trust, credibility and empathy are combined with feedback, information and the experience of a coach. Kimberly Campbell-Voytal, Judith Fry McComish, Joan M. Visger, Carolyn A. Rowland, and Jacqueline Kelleher, cite Lundgren "birth doulas are mediators of the unknown, and postpartum doulas view themselves as helping families traverse the uncertain landscape of new parenthood" (2011, p. 220).

What is Most Important?

In order to provide the best achievement of goals a coach needs to consider what is most important to their client. In an attempt to define some trends with new mothers, an informal survey of six first-time mothers who had given birth within the last year was done. They were asked what they thought was most important to them before and after their child was born in regard to the birth experience, newborn care and life balance. Surprisingly the responses showed 66% were concerned about the pain of childbirth as compared to their body's ability to give birth and their satisfaction of the birth experience. Five out of 6 mothers responded either most important or very important regarding feeding their newborn. Their responses remained the same after the birth of their baby (See Tables 1 and 2). Also the results showed an equal division regarding the importance of childcare, body changes and relationship with spouse before the baby was born, but the importance of body changes dropped to 50% after birth (See Tables 3 and 4).

Importance of feeding to first-time mothers (before and after birth)

Table 1

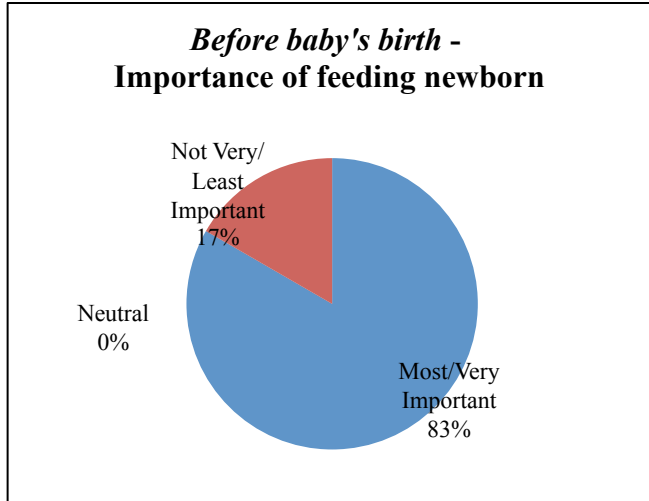
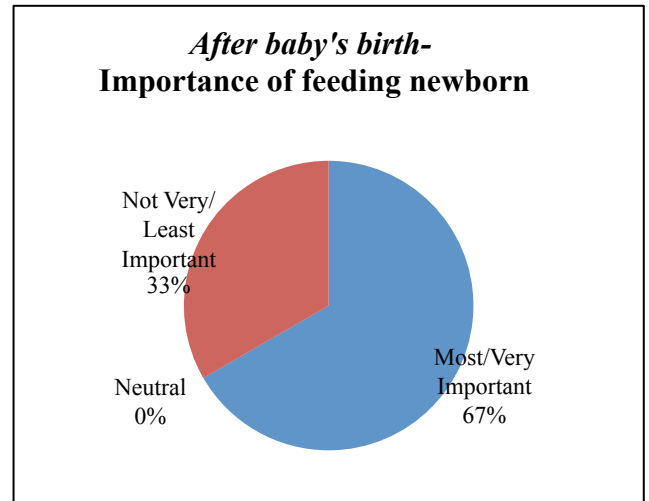


Table 2



Importance of body changes to first-time mothers (before and after birth)

Table 3

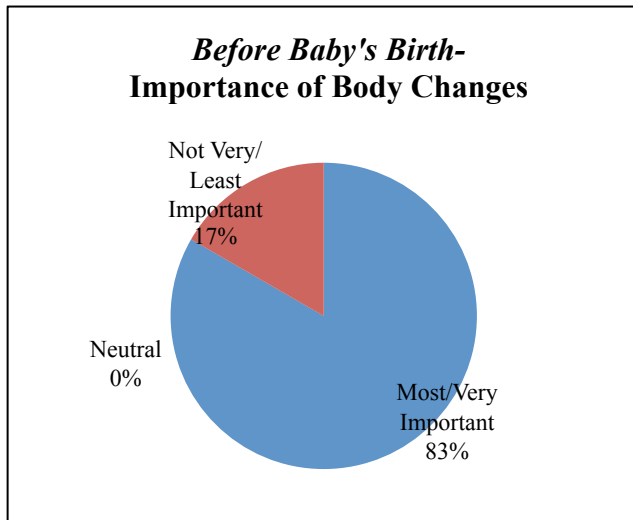
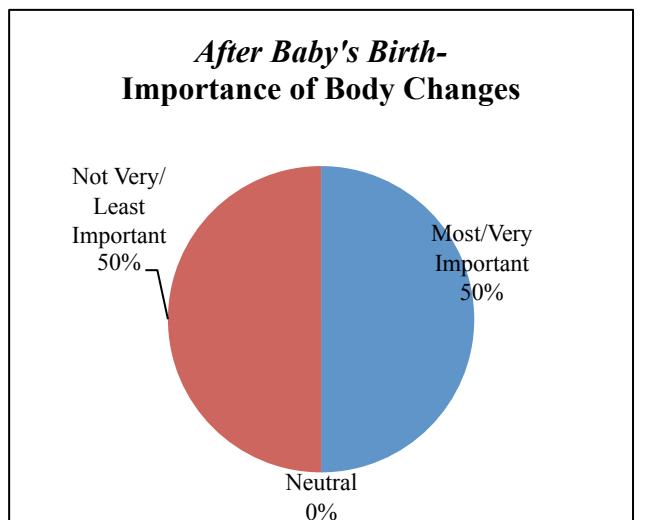


Table 4



Therefore it can be proposed, through the experience of childbirth there is much unknown and change for new mothers, yet what was important before the birth of their child may remain important after delivery.

The Track to Convergence

For coaches, the track to the convergence of the new mother's reality and dreams can be achieved through riding the coaster through ups and downs of new motherhood. Stoltzfus suggests, "when circumstances put us under pressure, that we are most receptive to radical change. And when you combine a teachable moment with a transparent, growth-oriented coaching relationship, the potential for transformation is enormous" (2005, p. 35). Using the tools of self-assessment and questioning to uncover the clients self-awareness the coach may be able to guide, direct and bridge the gap towards their goal.

Transformation Through Coaching

It is understandable that all new mothers seem to want to end with positive results, a healthy happy baby and a healthy happy self. However each may not know what that exactly looks like nor do they have enough personal experience to make the transition and transformation in their thoughts. When a trusted coach provides feedback, support and a plan for change, transformation can result. For example, a post-partum doula (a woman who is particularly trained in emotional support after birth) may suggest specific feeding approaches and sleeping schedules to help the new mom over the hill of those first weeks.

Conclusion

For first-time mothers doulas or birth coaches can specifically fill the need the Lord created within humans to benefit from a relationship with others. In Titus 2:3-5 scripture also speaks of this support when admonishing older women to help the younger with loving their husbands and children. Coaches of new moms can be influential in guiding them through the extreme emotions to their dreams, desires and goals for themselves and their new baby. Effective coaching should include a trusting relationship combined with emotional support and tested experience. Just as a new mom looks into the face of her newborn, it could be likened to the faces of the coaster riders when the ride comes to a stop back in the station; exhilarated by the experience. Some may be ready to go again, others may want to wait, but all would say whatever they had to go through for that child was worth the effort. And with the support of a coach, first-time mothers may also add they were able to reach their goals.

About the Author

Laurie Ann Finn is the manager of enrollment events at Regent University. She is completing her master's studies in organizational leadership. She plans on developing a birth coach/or doula business to serve women in their journey through the beginning stages of motherhood, specifically by providing emotional and mentoring support. Inquiries regarding this article can be directed to the author at: lfinn@regent.edu.

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