

Virtual Coach Accelerator

Inner Game of Coaching

Intro to Spiral Dynamics

Spiral Dynamics

Spiral Dynamics a framework that explores the evolution of human consciousness and values. It helps us understand why people see the world the way they do, and how that shapes their behavior.

- Inspired by Dr. Clare W. Graves, later expanded by Don Beck & Christopher Cowan (1996 book Spiral Dynamics).
- It's called a spiral because growth isn't linear. You can move forward, regress, or live in multiple stages at once.
- Used in psychology, sociology, leadership, and coaching to decode human motivations and communication styles.

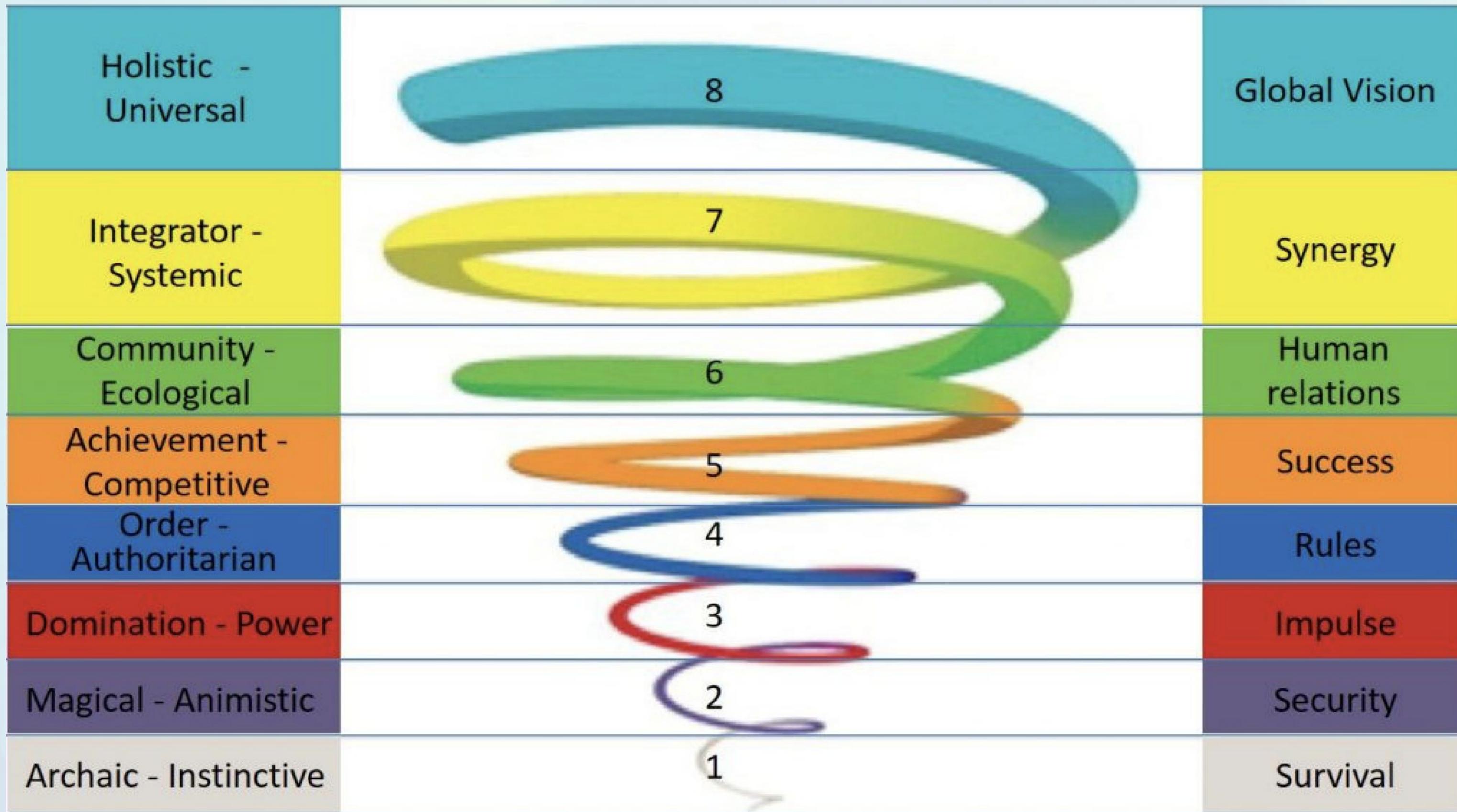
As coaches, this is not about labeling or ranking. Each stage is necessary and valuable—like chapters in the story of human and personal development.

Spiral Dynamics

Think of Spiral Dynamics as a story of how humans (and clients) evolve:

Survival → Safety → Power → Order → Success → Community → Integration
→ Global Service

- Each stage is like a lens through which people view life.
- Clients often live in multiple stages at once, shifting depending on context.
- By understanding the stages of Spiral Dynamics, we can better understand the motivations and perspectives of those around us, allowing us to communicate and interact more effectively.



Spiral Dynamics



Beige (Instinctive/Survival Sense)

This first level is focused on basic survival, similar to animal instincts.

Individuals are in survival mode due to trauma or extreme poverty.

They struggle with finding the next meal and/or seeking shelter..

- Worldview: Life is about staying alive.
- Snapshot: A client in crisis—worried about food, money, or health.

Everything is focused on the next 24 hours.

- Coaching Lens: Help establish stability and safety before deeper work. Often appears in free/pro bono work.

(As coaches, we don't often encounter this stage. But it's essential to understand that it's there- It can tend to show up in free sessions or pro bono work)

Purple (Tribal Order)

The Purple stage is driven by tribal or family loyalty, traditions, and rituals.

At this level the person seeks security (small tribal communities, fraternal organizations, family systems, etc)

They struggle with balancing the needs of the tribe versus the individual. Fear of the unknown or outsiders.

- Worldview: Safety comes from the tribe/family of origin/culture
- Snapshot: “But in my family, we always...” Reliant on tradition, rituals, and belonging, family, or cultural norms. Notice if they frequently reference “how things have always been done.”
- Coaching Lens: Honor their need for security and belonging. Introduce change gradually while respecting traditions.

Red (Power & Dominance)

The Red stage is characterized by ego, power, and assertiveness. (Teenagers testing boundaries, dictatorial leaders). They struggle with asserting power and control. Navigating ego-driven conflicts and impulsiveness.

- Worldview: The world is a jungle where only the strongest survive. Power is the ultimate goal.
- Snapshot: A rebellious teen, or a client with a “win-at-all-costs” mentality. Assertive, impulsive, competitive and sometimes aggressive.
- Coaching Lens: Channel their drive into leadership and healthy expression of power. Encourage empathy and collaboration.

(For clients stuck in the Red stage, coaching can focus on empathy, collaboration, and the effects of their actions on others.)

Blue (Authority/Order/Structure)

The Blue stage values order, discipline, and a sense of right and wrong. (Religious believers, those in strict corporate or military structures)

They struggle with conforming to strict societal rules, have a fear of punishment for wrongdoings and can be resistance to change.

- Worldview: Life works when we follow the rules and operates based on a predetermined, universal order that must be followed.
- Snapshot: Religious devotion, military precision, or corporate rule-following. Stability through discipline and morality. A client who values order, rules, and clear structures. Look for those who seek stability and often reference rules or ethical standards.
- Coaching Lens: Provide step-by-step structure and help them see flexibility within their framework. Respect their need for rules while gently inviting open-mindedness.

Orange (Success/ Achievement)

The Orange stage is achievement-oriented, valuing success, innovation, and independence (Entrepreneurs, competitive athletes)

They struggle with balancing personal ambitions with interpersonal relationships and have a higher risk of burnout due to excessive drive.

- Worldview: The world is a marketplace of opportunities. Success is defined by achievements and wealth.
- Snapshot: Entrepreneurs, athletes, executives. Driven, ambitious, innovative. Success is defined by achievement. A client focused on personal success, innovation, recognition and material gain. They likely set goals, value productivity, and are competitive but in a more constructive way.
- Coaching Lens: Support their ambitions while introducing concepts of work-life balance and the value of relationships.

Green (Community/Harmony)

The Green stage is community-focused, values fairness, and strives for inner peace. (Social activists, therapists, counselors).

They struggle with over-empathizing to the point of burnout. Struggling with feelings of hypocrisy in a world that does not universally share their values.

- Worldview: The world is a global village where every human is connected. Fairness, equality, and inner peace are crucial. Everyone's voice matters.
- Snapshot: Social activists, therapists, peacemakers. Value equality, fairness, and connection. A client who values connection, community, and inclusivity. They may emphasize fairness, emotional well-being, and collaborative decision-making.
- Coaching Lens: Encourage their compassion but support healthy boundaries. Help them avoid burnout and decision paralysis.

Yellow (Flexibility/Integration)

The Yellow stage values knowledge, competence, and spontaneity. They see systems and structures as fluid & interconnected (Innovative scientists, philosophers)

They struggle with dealing with the complexity of systems thinking. Difficulty connecting with others who do not share the same perspective.

- Worldview: The world is a system of interconnected realities that can be understood
- Snapshot: Systems thinkers, philosophers, innovators (see multiple perspectives at once)

A client who is independent, adaptable, and seeks holistic solutions. Notice if they view problems from multiple perspectives and are open to learning from all levels.

- Coaching Lens: Provide resources for continued growth and encourage them to mentor others. Yellow stage clients might need support in channeling their ideas into action and connecting with others on an emotional level.

Turquoise (Global View/Service)

The Turquoise stage is holistic, sees the interconnectedness of all things, and values global consciousness. (Spiritual leaders, visionary global thinkers)

They struggle with feeling isolated due to high-level perspectives. Difficulty translating abstract ideas into actionable steps.

- Worldview: The planet is one living, interconnected organism.
- Snapshot: Visionaries, spiritual leaders, global activists. Focused on interconnectedness and universal truths.

A client focused on global concerns and integrated thinking, seeing the interconnectedness of all life. They might speak about universal truths, sustainability, or holistic approaches to life.

- Coaching Lens: Support them in grounding big visions into practical steps. Help them build community so they don't feel isolated. They may struggle to feel understood.

Quick Cheat Sheet

Beige: Stay alive.

Purple: Belong to the tribe.

Red: Power wins.

Blue: Follow the rules.

Orange: Achieve success.

Green: Everyone matters.

Yellow: Systems connect.

Turquoise: All is one.



Why Spiral Dynamics Matters

- Gives a map of client values and worldviews.
- Helps us speak their language, thus meeting them where they are.
- Reminds us growth is not about pushing clients up the spiral but integrating each stage.
- Builds compassion and flexibility in how we coach, lead, and relate.

Spiral Dynamics isn't just a theory—it's a lens of empathy.

The more we understand the stages, the better we serve our clients, not by dragging them forward, but by walking with them where they are.

Exercise

You are going to look through your life and identify where or when you have been in each of these stages.

1. Reflect on times in your life you've been in each stage. (Current or past.)
2. Share examples without judgment, just as an observer.
3. Switch with your partner and notice patterns.
4. If time allows, try identifying which stages clients, famous people or family members may inhabit. (Not to judge, but to practice awareness.)

Bonus reflection: Which stages do you resist in yourself or judge in others? That resistance often reveals blind spots in your coaching.

Worldview- Stages Examples (1-3)

Beige (Survival Sense): Picture early humans huddled around a fire, their entire existence centered around survival. Life was about finding food, seeking shelter, and staying safe from predators. It's life at its most basic, where every day is a fight for survival.

Purple (Security): Now, imagine ancient tribes where rituals, superstitions, and communal bonds ruled. Where everyone knows everyone, and traditions are the bedrock of life. It's all about kinship, togetherness, and the safety found in following long-standing rituals. There's a deep respect for the elders and the spirits. Life revolves around the tribe, with everyone working together to ensure the group's survival and prosperity.

Red (Power/Gods): Think about the mighty empires of old, like the Romans or the Mongols. There's a single ruler at the top, wielding absolute power. Life here is all about dominance and power, where might makes right and the strong rule over the weak.

Also imagine a rebellious teenager, who is all about breaking rules and asserting their independence. That's the Red stage, where power and autonomy are highly valued, even if it means stepping on a few toes.

Worldview- Stages Examples (4-6)

Blue (Truth/Order): Imagine life in the Middle Ages under the rule of the Church. Everyone has a place in the societal hierarchy and rules are followed strictly. Life here is guided by a "divine" order, with moral codes and laws dictating actions.

Think of a highly disciplined military officer or a devoted religious follower. That's the Blue stage—there's a strong focus on order, rules, and a clear sense of right and wrong.

Orange (Success/Achievement): Picture the Renaissance or the Age of Enlightenment, where individuals begin to seek out personal success and scientific understanding. Life at this stage is about individual achievement, progress, and rationality. The world becomes a place of opportunities to be seized.

Picture a Wall Street executive or an ambitious Silicon Valley entrepreneur. The Orange stage is all about striving for success, valuing innovation, competition, and achievement.

Green (Harmony/Connection): Think of the social revolutions of the 1960s, with the rise of civil rights, environmental movements, and communal living. Life here is all about equality, community, and inner peace. The world becomes a place where every voice should be heard and respected. Now, think of a passionate social worker or environmental activist where community, equality, and social harmony take center stage.

Worldview- Stages Examples (7 & 8)

Yellow (Synergy/Integration): Imagine a wise philosopher or scientist who can see the world's interconnected systems and wants to understand them better. Life at this stage becomes about acknowledging complexity, embracing change, and seeking knowledge. The world becomes a dynamic system to be navigated and understood.

Picture a renowned scientist working on a groundbreaking theory that could alter our understanding of the universe. In the Yellow stage, it's all about seeing the bigger picture and understanding the complex interconnections of systems.

Turquoise (Support/Service): Picture a visionary leader who sees the entire Earth from space, understanding that everything is interconnected on a global scale. Life here is about achieving holistic understanding and fostering global consciousness. The world becomes a single, interconnected organism in need of care and understanding.

Imagine the Buddha or Dalai Lama. The Turquoise stage is all about holistic, global thinking and a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of all things.