

# Coaching for Professional Development

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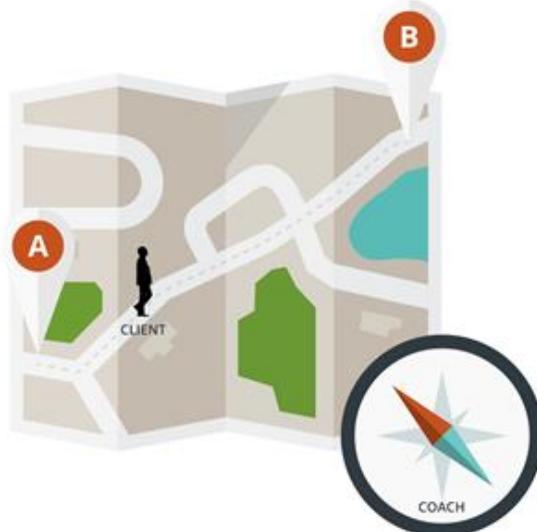
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## ABSTRACT

Coaching can be an effective and integral component of leadership development programs. Popular among human resource professionals and clients, coaching facilitates leaders' professional growth and helps to build a powerful team—from executives to first-line managers and team leaders. Coaching has a proven track record of success, and many studies have shown how coaching enhances decision-making skills, improves interpersonal effectiveness and increases confidence. The maturing workforce necessitates thoughtful succession planning, and coaching is often a strategic element of this effort. Integrating coaching into an organization's culture will ensure the longevity and sustained value of the program.

## What Is Coaching?

Coaching is a unique endeavor. Coaches partner with clients in a transformative process that empowers and inspires them to reach their maximum potential. The coaching process is about moving forward, working with the client to stretch and reach goals he or she desires. Figure 1 illustrates this concept. The coach provides a stable reference while supporting the client in his or her journey from place or attitude A to B. Fundamentally, it is about facilitating a change or transformation within the client. Coaching is frequently used to assist individuals as they prepare for or move into new assignments, improve work habits, adapt to a changing environment or overcome specific obstacles.



**Figure 1. Client Journey**

Coaching is often confused with other personal or organizational support modalities, such as mentoring, consulting and psychotherapy. In a mentoring relationship, an expert provides advice and counsel based on his or her wisdom or experience. A consultant gives advice (usually of a business or technical nature), diagnoses problems and designs solutions. Psychotherapy involves healing pain, dysfunction and conflict, often with a focus on resolving past difficulties or healing old wounds.

## **Making the Case for Coaching**

Academic research and organizational evaluations have demonstrated the effectiveness of professional coaching. A meta-analysis of 18 quantitative studies of organizational coaching showed that coaching has a significant effect on performance, skills, well-being, coping, attitudes and self-regulation (Theeboom, Beersma, & van Vianen, 2013). Meanwhile, managers and leaders at organizations where coaching is used have reported a host of positive effects, including improved team functioning, increased engagement, improved employee relation and increased commitment (Human Capital Institute & International Coach Federation, 2014).

Decisions on how to measure coaching effectiveness are sometimes contentious and often difficult. Return on investment (ROI) calculations are sometimes used to achieve a hard number illustrating money saved through measures such as increased productivity and reduced turnover. In a 2009 global study commissioned by the International Coach Federation (ICF), of 2,165 respondents 40% indicated that their

organization had experienced financial changes as a result of coaching. Based upon a sample of respondents who provided detailed results, it is likely that more than half of these changes were positive (International Coach Federation, 2009).

Usually, 360-degree surveys administered before coaching begins and again several months after the coaching engagement ends provide a clear picture of the progress made. These assessments, however, can be tedious to arrange and expensive to administer.

Measuring the nonmonetary benefits of coaching is even more difficult. Many organizations use return on expectations (ROE) measurements to quantify these benefits. An organization might measure ROE by assessing changes in clients' self-reported ability to achieve their goals. Examples of goals might include increasing self-confidence, improving interpersonal relationships or enhancing work performance. Some organizations prefer even simpler measures, such as asking clients if they felt the coaching was worth their time, whether it made a positive change and if they would recommend it to a colleague. Depending on the need, such simple measures may be sufficient justification to continue a coaching program.

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## Elements of Coaching

Coaching is generally considered a recent phenomenon in the business realm; however, as Figure 2 illustrates, it can trace its roots to many fields, including the Human Potential Movement (HPM) of the 1960s, philosophy, business and humanistic psychology, among other traditions (Stein, 2003; Brock, 2008). The HPM and associated Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT) programs attempt to enhance individual self-awareness, facilitate growth and inspire individuals to seek their full potential (Finkelstein, Wenegrat, & Yalom, 1982). The HPM and, subsequently, coaching were influenced by humanistic psychology pioneers, including Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow (DeCarvalho, 1991; Brock, 2008) and influential business writers such as Dale Carnegie and Napoleon Hill (Brock, 2008).

Carl Rogers was one of the founders of the field of humanistic psychology. He emphasized the need to focus on and maintain a presence with the client (Rogers, 1957). Albert Bandura, a social psychologist, provided a significant contribution to



Figure 2. Influences on Coaching

coaching with his theory that behavioral change may be a result of conscious, or cognitive, thought rather than an immediate reaction to present circumstances (Bandura, 1982). The self-motivation to change and develop a life that fulfills and brings happiness to the individual was theorized by Abraham Maslow (Maslow, 1943) and heavily influenced the HPM (Brock, 2008).

More recently, the field of positive psychology has moved away from the focus on mentally unhealthy behaviors to mentally healthy behaviors. This field, promoted by Martin Seligman and others, concentrates on happiness and how to flourish in life, bringing greater satisfaction to individuals in all aspects of their lives (Seligman & Csíkszentmihályi, 2000).

Self-improvement professionals Dale Carnegie and Napoleon Hill promoted behavioral changes in order to achieve success in both business and personal aspects of life (Carnegie, 1936; Hill, 1937). The essence of the books and programs by Carnegie and Hill—that one can be successful by envisioning and persisting toward goals—was adopted by the HPM and coaching in general (Brock, 2008).

Philosophy has also played a role in the development of coaching. Eastern philosophy promotes the need to look at the big picture and search for balance and harmony; Western philosophy seeks to understand contradictions, reality and ways to master it (Brock, 2008). Many of these philosophical approaches have influenced or become integral to different types of coaching.

Theories or models of human behavior frequently provide frameworks within which coaches can engage with clients. Diving deeper into the engagements, coaching tools and techniques can be observed (Herd & Russell, 2011).

Coaches will frequently use one of these frameworks or models. Experienced coaches often have many frameworks and models at their disposal and either choose one or integrate elements from multiple frameworks to provide an effective structure for each specific engagement. Coaches may also use tools such as objective assessments and techniques such as role-playing and journaling within their chosen framework.

### **Frameworks**

The framework or conceptual model a coach uses can be a guide for discussions and may lead to specific activities. A framework provides structure and focus for the coaching engagement.

The client-centered, or people-centered, approach is one of the earliest and most significant approaches. Pioneered in the 1940s and 1950s by psychologist Carl Rogers, the approach is based on the belief that all people have the ability and tendency toward growth and optimal function. Rogers wrote that it was necessary for the individual assisting the client to fully understand the client's situation from an emotionally centered place and communicate this back to the client for him or her to process and develop (1957). A client-centered approach to coaching entails supporting clients to develop goals they are passionate about and continually guiding the dialog and process

toward meeting those goals. Client-centered coaching engages the internal drive or motivation of the client, which is almost always more powerful and long-lasting than external motivation (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999; Bénabou & Tirole, 2003).

The strengths-based approach began in the field of management thanks to business guru Peter Drucker (1966) and subsequently Donald Clifton of Gallup (Clifton & Nelson, 1992). This framework emphasizes the identification and use of psychological strengths. Drucker believed that building on strengths is one of the five essential practices of an effective executive. Clifton's idea was to create a classification for strengths and positive behaviors, rather than for psychological issues as described in the *Diagnostic and*

No matter what framework or model is used, it is important that coaches are allowed flexibility to adapt to whatever comes up in coaching sessions.

*Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Building on strengths feels intuitive, promotes confidence and enhances the idea of continuously moving forward. A few key strengths can overcome a plethora of weaknesses. The inherent difficulty in this approach becomes evident when the strengths are insufficient to be effective or when the weaknesses overwhelm the strengths. Objective assessments such as the Values-in-Action (VIA) Strengths Finder ([www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org)) are useful in identifying strengths. In addition, a proficient coach will be able to detect strengths through overt client statements and actions as well as nuances in emotion and body language.

The GROW model was popularized in the coaching industry by Sir John Whitmore in his 1992 book *Coaching for Performance: GROWing Human Potential and Purpose*.

Several versions of the GROW model exist; however, Whitmore's acronym stands for:

- Goals.
- Reality, or current reality.
- Options.
- Way forward, or what you will do.

The GROW model is popular in organizations because it standardizes the coaching framework while allowing leeway for creativity and exploration. Research has shown that development of appropriate goals can significantly enhance job performance (Locke & Latham, 1990). This model may prove effective in a goal-oriented organizational setting but may not be helpful in situations when discovery or exploration is required.

No matter what framework or model is used, it is important that coaches are allowed flexibility to adapt to whatever comes up in coaching sessions. Upon noticing that the current model or technique is not working, an effective coach will internally reflect, evaluate, allow for silence and openly explore new or alternate paths forward.

### ***Tools and Techniques***

Coaches frequently use tools such as assessments to bring a measure of objectivity and structure to the coaching engagement. A 360-degree survey is a popular

assessment to accompany coaching. These surveys gather input on the client from superiors, subordinates, peers, and sometimes customers, suppliers and family members. Because 360-degree surveys provide a wide variety of perceptions, they generally offer many angles from which to approach the work. Given that the surveys report opinions and perceptions but not facts, they can also bring out the ramifications of a client's behaviors—the effects he or she has on others.

Personality assessments provide insight into factors promoting an individual's behaviors. Well-validated instruments based upon the Five-Factor Model (McCrae & Costa, 1987) are especially detailed. A personality report combined with a 360-degree report can provide a significant amount of analytic data to guide the dialog in pursuit of the client's goals.

Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS) (Spence, 2007) is a method in which goals are developed with rating scales for each goal to enhance motivation and provide a measure of progress. Other tools coaches use frequently include emotional intelligence assessments and leadership inventories.

It is important to ensure that the person interpreting an assessment report is properly trained and also to determine to what extent assessment results will be shared with the client's management team and human resources department.

Academic research and organizational evaluations have demonstrated the effectiveness of professional coaching.

Coaches will often use techniques such as role-playing, simulations, case studies or journaling. These techniques promote awareness or provide skill practice in a specific area. Role-playing and simulations can provide good practice and may help a client in a new position or prepare a client for a future role. Case studies are also effective methods of practicing for scenarios that may play out in the future. Journaling can help clients gain awareness of emotions and behaviors, observe events throughout the day, and track progress toward goals.

## **Coaching Within Organizations**

Just as each coaching relationship is unique, no two organizational coaching initiatives look alike. Table 1, which summarizes key findings from HCI and ICF's 2014 research on coaching within organizations, illustrates some of the factors affecting an organization's decision to employ external coach practitioners, internal coach practitioners, managers or leaders who use coaching skills in interactions with their subordinates and peers, or some combination thereof.

Organizations use coaching primarily as a component of their leadership development strategy. They also use coaching to improve communication skills and teamwork, and to increase employee engagement and productivity.

Coaching sessions with an external coach tend to be less frequent, usually once a month. External coach practitioners are perceived to have a higher level of training and experience than internal coaches, a more objective view of circumstances, and a better

ability to coach executives and maintain confidentiality. External coach practitioners are also seen as having a higher price tag than internal coaches.

Coaching sessions with an internal coach tend to be more frequent than those with an external coach. Internal coaches are perceived to be more familiar with the organizational culture and operations, have more access to corporate resources, and be more able to enhance the development of a coaching culture.

Occasionally coaching will be encouraged for an individual struggling with low performance. In these instances, all parties involved—the client, his or her supervisor and HR—must have a clear understanding of what information will be shared amongst them. This should be described in the written coaching agreement between the client and the coach.

Team leaders and first-line managers use coaching skills as frequently as daily. Although their primary role is that of a leader or a manager, they must possess sufficient coaching skills to be successful in developing their subordinates professionally to help them achieve maximum potential.

Teaching managers and leaders effective coaching skills can go a long way toward improving the overall performance of an entire organization. Because these individuals have a more intimate working relationship with their clients, they may use coaching skills on a more informal basis than a professional coach practitioner would.

Team leaders, managers and those higher up the corporate ladder will often engage with a professional external or internal coach practitioner to focus on specific goal

areas, such as overall job performance, communication skills, interpersonal relationships or engagement.

**Table 1. Coaching Modalities**

Type of Coach	% of Organizations That Offer	Top Three Reasons for Using	Top Three Perceived Advantages	Top Three Perceived Disadvantages
<b>External Coach Practitioner</b>	53%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership development strategy</li> <li>• Improve communication skills</li> <li>• Improve teamwork</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of coach training or experience</li> <li>• Ability to coach executives</li> <li>• Maintaining confidentiality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost</li> <li>• Knowledge of company culture</li> <li>• Knowledge of company politics</li> </ul>
<b>Internal Coach Practitioner</b>	50%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership development strategy</li> <li>• Increase employee engagement</li> <li>• Improve teamwork</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of company culture</li> <li>• Accessible resource to the organization</li> <li>• Development of coaching culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of coach training or experience</li> <li>• Role clarity</li> <li>• Maintaining confidentiality</li> </ul>
<b>Managers or Leaders Using Coaching Skills</b>	82%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership development strategy</li> <li>• Increase employee engagement</li> <li>• Increase productivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of company culture</li> <li>• Development of company culture</li> <li>• Knowledge of company personnel and operations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of coach training or experience</li> <li>• Maintaining confidentiality</li> <li>• Role clarity</li> </ul>

Note. Adapted from *Building a Coaching Culture* by Human Capital Institute & International Coach Federation, 2014, p. 8, 9, 12. Copyright 2014 by the Human Capital Institute.

## Coaching Competencies

Many coaching organizations, including the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) and the ICF, have developed coaching competency models. Applying

these competencies ensures effective coaching on a basic level. While the models differ in detail, they frequently contain the following core components:

- Ethics.
- Developing a coaching agreement.
- Creating a relationship.
- Presence, effective communication and questioning skills.
- Setting goals.
- Promoting growth.
- Action.

A set of competencies provides a structure for learning how to become an effective coach and is also useful in developing assessments. Some coaches set goals to earn credentials from coaching organizations, and defined competencies aid in creating valid reliable assessments. For example, ICF has developed a set of markers based upon its set of competencies that is used to assess coach performance (International Coach Federation, 2014).

### ***Ethics***

A coach should understand the ethical issues related to the coaching profession and vow to follow a comprehensive set of ethical standards. Organizations using coaching should remain steadfast in their quest for all parties to maintain those high ethical

standards. A lapse in ethics by a coach can not only harm the coach and the client, but also sully the reputation of the coaching industry.

While ethics in the coaching field certainly includes maintaining confidentiality and a professional relationship with the client, on a broader scale, it is also important for a coach to represent the function and himself or herself accurately and honestly. As in any field, disparaging fellow professionals is ill-advised.

### ***Coaching Agreement***

It is very important for coaches and clients to have a common understanding of the coaching engagement and to document this in a written agreement. These agreements frequently include the following elements:

- Confidentiality.
- Involvement of others, such as HR and superiors.
- Goals.
- Engagement duration.
- Session duration, times and dates.
- Medium of communication.
- Client's recognition of need to change and commitment to change.

Because the coaching relationship is an intimate partnership, it is essential that clients understand which aspects of the engagement will remain confidential to the partnership. It is best to write out which, if any, aspects of the engagement will be

shared with other individuals in the organization.

Such agreements may also touch on legal and ethical grounds for a breach in confidentiality, such as a court order or threat to harm oneself or others.

Typically, the organization will be paying for the coaching, and organizational decision-makers will thus feel entitled to at least a superficial level of understanding of what is taking place in the coaching engagement. A commissioning HR generalist or superior will often request a report from the coach once or twice during an engagement. It is essential that the agreement detail the elements of the discussions that will be reported to ensure that everyone is on the same page.

Describing the goals of the coaching engagement in the agreement serves two purposes: it provides visual, concrete goals and assists in communicating the goals with others in the organization if the agreement is shared.

Coaching engagements may stretch from one session to many years. It may be difficult to tell how long the engagement will take, but it is best to indicate at least a range of time in order to set common expectations regarding the investment of time and money.

## Coaching Agreements

- Understanding of what will be confidential and what will not.
- How involved others will be, such as HR and superiors.
- High-level coaching engagement goals.
- Estimated duration of the coaching engagement.
- Session times and means of meeting.
- An understanding of the client's view of the need to change and commitment to change.

A coaching agreement should also include information about when, where and via what medium (telephone, videoconference, face to face) coaching will take place. The client should be comfortable with the medium and the location. For example, a client may wish to keep the fact that he or she is being coached confidential and prefer to meet in a private setting. A general, upfront agreement on the logistics of the engagement can go a long way toward building trust and rapport.

Because coaching is a client-driven process, a client's view and attitude will determine the success of the engagement. If a client views his or her need to change as high and commitment to change as high, it is more likely that the engagement will be a success. An upfront discussion of these factors—and their incorporation into the coaching agreement itself—can help build a foundation for success.

### ***Creating a Relationship***

The coach-client relationship between the coach and the client is one of the most significant factors in a successful coaching engagement (Baron & Morin, 2009). A strong coaching relationship will facilitate growth and inspire the client. The client should feel supported by the coach as well as safe in the knowledge that their conversations will be private and free of judgment.

In the organizational coaching context, this process begins with the decision-maker charged with pairing coaches and clients. It is crucial for this decision-maker to give each client the right to select or at least refuse a specific coach.

It may take many sessions for a coach-client relationship to develop. An effective coach understands that the effort to build a relationship is as important as undertaking tasks.

### ***Presence, Communication and Questioning***

When a coach is present with the client, his or her focus will remain solely on the task at hand, looking the client in the eye and remaining open to whatever arrives in the sessions. A coach must be adaptable in order to respond most appropriately and with whatever will be most helpful to the client in that moment. An effective coach is confident in his or her abilities and can convey that confidence in a humble and assuring manner.

The client should feel supported by the coach as well as safe in the knowledge that their conversations will be private and free of judgment.

Communication is at the heart of the coaching relationship, whether it be communication through words, body language or intonation. An effective coach uses all of these elements to convey a genuine interest in partnering with the client to facilitate growth. Active listening skills and inquisitive inquiry are valued elements of a successful coaching engagement. Questions that reveal beneficial information to the coach and the client are powerful tools in the coaching process.

### ***Goals and Growth***

Goals that stretch the client are powerful motivators (Locke & Latham, 1990). Easy-to-reach goals are not helpful because the client will readily vault low hurdles. On the

other end of the spectrum, goals that are unobtainable will lead to frustration and resignation, and may affect the way coaching is perceived by the client and the organization. Deep and open discussions will facilitate the creation of goals that promote growth within the client and provide the greatest value for all parties involved.

It is important for the goals to be generated by the client. A proficient coach will support the client in developing meaningful, succinct goals. Many clients find so-called SMART (specific, measurable, actionable or achievable, realistic or relevant, and time-bound) goals useful.

### ***Action***

Without action, coaching may be viewed as a series of nice, deep conversations. Supporting the client in developing an action and accountability plan will greatly enhance the chance of long-term success and value.

As actions are completed, they build a sense of accomplishment in the client that can lead to a willingness to take on and achieve more difficult goals. In addition, as actions are carried out, new ideas and values are sometimes uncovered that bring further insight into issues relevant to the coaching engagement.

### **Training and Credentials**

Coaches can obtain training through many channels. As summarized in Table 2, each type of training comes with its own advantages and disadvantages. Large organizations will frequently prepare their own training in order to reduce cost or to customize the training to their values, culture and industry. In order to take advantage

of coaching expertise, many organizations contract with coaches or coach-training programs to assist with curriculum development and/or delivery.

Third-party accredited training programs such as those accredited by ICF and EMCC are beneficial because the developers are steeped in the competencies required for effective coaching and are held to a standard necessary to ensure the coaches will be well prepared. Accredited training also prepares coaches to pursue credentials, should they desire to do so.

At the university level, many training programs will award coaching students with a certificate or a degree upon completion. Programs in the Graduate School Alliance for Education in Coaching (GSAEC) have committed to a high standard of education for their students.

**Table 2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Types of Training Programs**

Type of Training	Advantages	Disadvantages
In-house developed training	Low cost, control of curriculum	Does not take advantage of coach training experts, more difficult for coaches to earn credentials
In-house developed training in consultation with coach trainers	Low cost	More difficult for coaches to earn credentials
Third-party accredited training	Comprehensive, easier for coaches to earn credentials	Higher cost, less control of curriculum
Graduate school programs	Depends upon the program	High cost

In addition to education, many coaches set a personal goal to earn credentials from a coaching organization. A credential often brings personal satisfaction to the coach

through the recognition of some level of mastery and affirms to clients and organizations that the coach takes this role seriously, has acquired knowledge in the field and has demonstrated proficiency at some level.

## The Role of Coaching in Succession Planning

Successful organizations are intentional in ensuring the long-term viability of their leadership team. Identifying and developing employees who can fill significant roles in the future is a key element in this strategy. Because coaching is an individualized intervention providing one-on-one feedback that can quickly be implemented, practiced and honed, it is well-suited to succession planning and leadership development.

Coaching future leaders can help them build confidence and skills they might not otherwise develop. Individualized attention in coaching will bring a laser-sharp focus on unique strengths and growth opportunities.

As individuals move into new roles, coaching can support their transition. Coaching also helps keep leaders active and engaged in their own professional and personal development.

### Where to Learn More

- Association for Coaching:  
[www.associationforcoaching.com](http://www.associationforcoaching.com)
- European Mentoring & Coaching Council (EMCC): [emccuk.org](http://emccuk.org)
- International Coach Federation (ICF):  
[coachfederation.org](http://coachfederation.org)

The more that coaching is embedded into the culture of an organization, the more thoughtful and mature it grows. Coaching philosophy, standards and policies may be developed after reflective dialog on the role of coaching in the organization (Riddle & Pothier, 2011).

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