The Coach's View
Best Practices for Successful Coaching Engagements

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Introduction

Executive coaching is a growing industry around the world, particularly for leadership development. More than 70% of formal leadership development programs in organizations use some sort of coaching (Zenger & Stinnett, 2006). And, it's not just for the C-suite; one survey stated that coaches spend almost half of their time serving managers at all levels of the organization, not just top-level management (Sherpa Consulting, 2011). Moreover, coaching is becoming a world wide phenomenon. Coaching as an industry is growing on the entire continent of Europe. A recent survey stated that there are between 16,000 and 18,000 coaches in Europe, and a wide variety of coaching practices exist within the continent, with various cultural nuances in the way coaching is understood and delivered (Carter, 2008). Coaching is also becoming increasingly important in Asia with its growing economic and business prominence on the global scene (Wright, Leong, Webb, & Chia, 2010). Because of this popularity, numerous coaching models, tools, training, and other resources have appeared. Even so, not enough has been learned about what makes a coaching process an effective one.

A key variable in the success of any coaching engagement is what training and practices coaches use with their clients. But what exactly are those practices that result in success? What practices do coaches believe work best to bring about positive results?

To better understand the coach's view of best practices, a team of researchers at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) interviewed 87 experienced coaches about what they do in their coaching. Some of them were asked to even think about their most effective and least effective coaching engagements, in addition to specific questions designed to reveal their specific practices and processes.

Many details emerged from the interviews and most were grouped into five themes:

1. The coachee-centered relationship
2. Effective approaches
3. Contextual issues
4. Models, tools, and techniques
5. Roles

With these interviews, we tapped into the real-world experience of coaches to gain practical information about their own best practices for effective coaching. The interviews also reveal the complexity of coaching and the versatility required by coaches as they tailor coaching engagements to meet individual needs.

Our hope is that these insights will provide general direction, as well as some useful details for the coaching community.

What is a Coaching Best Practice?

To get a handle on the methods and practices that work well for the coaching process, it helps to first clarify what we mean by both coaching and *best practice*.

What is coaching? Coaching means different things to different people. It can be broadly defined in terms of a relationship in which the "coachee" (i.e., the one being coached) contracts with a professional (the coach) to facilitate his or her becoming a more effective leader. Coaching can be used to address a variety of leadership and work issues including job performance; how to better relate with, deal with or manage others; or career-related issues such as managerial derailment, career advancement, retirement, or developmental opportunities (Bono, Purvanova, Towler, & Peterson, 2009).

At CCL and for the purposes of this research, we define coaching as a formal one-on-one relationship between a coach and a coachee, in which the two "collaborate to assess and understand the coachee and his or her development needs, challenge current constraints while exploring new possibilities, and ensure accountability and support for reaching goals and sustaining development." (Frankovelgia & Riddle, 2010, p. 126)

The working definition of "best practices" for this research was: "Methods and techniques demonstrated and modeled by the executive coaching professional that have been deemed to be effective and practical when applied to specific coaching engagements and contexts."(Francis, 2011)

With this clarity of purpose, the CCL research identified many practices that coaches themselves found to be effective through analysis of the interviews. While some practices were valued across the board—whether coaches are working with middle or C-level executives, or whether they reside in Europe or Asia—others differed by context. All practices reveal important parts of the coaching process from the perspective of the executive coaches interviewed.

Key Findings

The research provided us with many details of the coaching process. Most of the best practices that emerged from analysis of the interviews could be grouped together around five broad themes. (For a list of themes broken out according to coaching categories, see Table 1. A detailed description of terms is included in a glossary starting on page 20.)

Table 1

Middle-Level Managers 45 Coaches, 11 Themes	C-Level Executives 11 Coaches, 5 Themes
• Results orientation • Reflection & guided introspection • Coachee-centered focus • Assessment data debrief/interpretation • Self-awareness • Use of various mental models • Guided practice • Knowledge/application of organizational context (systemic) • Holistic approach • Inclusion of others as part of coaching initiative (social learning) • Organizational applicability and relevance	• Coachee-centered focus • Facilitator & guide • Assessment & development planning • Higher-level processing • Trusted advisor & peer

Europe 19 Coaches, 6 Themes	Asia 12 Coaches, 10 Themes
• Approach • Coach development • Cultural sensitivity • Instruments • Relationship building • Techniques	• Assessment & feedback • Challenge • Coachee-centered focus • Cultural awareness • Intuition • Preparation • Results-driven • Structure • Support • Utilizing mental models

The following gives a summary of the five themes and ways the coaches implemented and used specific best practices:

Theme 1: The Coachee-Centered Relationship

Coaches believe that it is necessary to build a strong relationship with a coachee and that the relationship is based on the coachee's needs. The process of building the coaching relationship is coachee-focused, with the coach serving the coachee.

In the coachee-centered coaching engagement, the coachee sets the agenda and direction. Yet, a coachee-focused approach does not mean "the client is always right." The coach is an equal, stepping back from being the expert except in some cultures in which the coach is expected to provide direct guidance. The degree to which the coachee expects the coach to be an expert varies depending upon the cultural and business context of the coachee. The research suggested greater expectations of coaches to advise the coachee rather than the Western expectation of the coachee generating most of their own facilitated goals and action steps. The coach shows respect and builds rapport through listening, reflecting, and creating a general sense of safety. In the end, being coachee-centered means believing that with accurate inquiries, the coachee can generate his or her own best solutions in an environment of positive regard.

The importance of the coach/coachee relationship is rooted in trust, as one coach working in Asia said:

"I think the quality of relationship we had [was important], so the fact that at one point he was able to trust me. I think if that doesn't happen, the coaching relationship doesn't happen."

Coaches also describe building the relationship around who the coachee is and what the situation involves, then they both challenge and support the coachee with an eye on results. This parallels the CCL model of coaching, which wraps the coaching Relationship around four other elements: Assessment, Challenge, Support and Results (RACSR). All of the coaches participating in this study were familiar with CCL's model.

Honest assessment and feedback must be given to the coachees in ways they will be heard and understood.

"I'll do 15–20 interviews in two days. It's intense," said one coach who works with middle-level managers. "When I come home . . . I pull it together in bullet points, usually 6–8 pages of the strengths and areas of concern, areas that are troublesome. In giving the feedback, I always start with strengths because I think we build them and use them in order to get stronger on areas of development."

Challenge and support are closely intertwined, with coaches working to push the coachee and boost learning. One coach, working in Asia, explained:

"If you don't ever challenge the coachee on things and provide supportive affirmation all the time, learning may not necessarily be achieved."

Another coach from Asia put it this way:

"Support is not always pacifying. It's about building the relationship and using the data to corroborate some of the findings which may come from 360 [an assessment where ratings are gathered from the person and his or her coworkers], or the person's own problems which they share, that this is what I'm struggling on."

Keeping focused on the coachee's needs and goals requires the coach to ensure measurable objectives and action steps built into the coaching process. Setting goals, taking action and tracking progress can take many forms, according to the coaches in the study. One coach who works with middle-level managers typically uses several steps, including

- homework based on differentiating a leader vs. manager. Coachees bring their work back to the next coaching session.

- a grid that focuses the coachee on important, but not urgent tasks. The coach has the coachee create a four-quadrant grid:

  1. Important/urgent
  2. Important/non urgent
  3. Non important/urgent
  4. Non important/non urgent. This creates a picture of what matters most and what gets in the way.

- a learning history. The coach completes a summary of outcomes before the first and the last session, including themes, context, and learning history. The learning history includes mapping the goals and what the coachee has accomplished, how it was accomplished, and what qualities he used.

Another coach noted:

"The coach tries to help coachees look at their leadership on several different levels, and not the goals the coach may be inclined to have for the coachee. The coach is very goal-oriented; he or she talks about goals and ways to implement them into each session."

Theme 2: Effective Approaches

Coaches conduct their work in different ways. In the interviews, they refer to their coaching styles, as well as specific frameworks or lenses, on their approach to coaching assignments.

Coaches will vary their approach based on the coachee or context. Coaches working with middle-level managers report that an approach of reflection and guided introspection is a best practice. Coaches are facilitators, helping to slow down the coachee's thoughts and provide time for reflection. One coach described her style as looking for:

". . . word choices, tone, listening for pauses and for tightness in the voice. I reflect it back and respond on what I'm hearing from the words being said and the sounds she's making. [For example] When my coachee heard this, it caused her to pause. She was shocked at how she was coming across. She then immediately connected that with the tightening in her gut that she was feeling."

Another coach had a similar take:

"I serve as a mirror to show the coachees how they're doing . . . I'm coaching in the moment about what I see and experience from them. [Then I] get the coachees to look at how they feel about their own behavior. I ask them, Would you work for you?"

The best practices in Asia revealed a different approach. Coaching engagements had structure, but coaches needed to adapt during the time with their coachee as well:

> *"So it was in there but I think the need to customize to adapt and flex and tailor is so much part of the coaching process anyway that it happens naturally, not just for cross-cultural issues, it happens because it needs to happen because everybody is in a different role and have got different goals, got different needs, different preferences."*

Coaches of C-level executives tended to approach coaching with a focus on personal growth and leadership legacy. They expressed an approach that uses creativity and offers solutions. Three examples from coaches included:

> *"I think a visual image and a story . . . that's accessing the right brain. I think for most of us, that is extremely powerful and more powerful than just reading a bullet point."*

> *"It's an opportunity for you as a CEO to take a look at who you are and the kind of leadership shadow that you cast because your shadow is long and you may not have a way of really seeing what the impact of that shadow is unless we take a very close look."*

> *"People usually seem to want to talk about deeper values, where they find their meaning in life, what kind of contribution they're making to the planet, not just their organization."*

Theme 3: Contextual Issues

Coaches cannot coach in a vacuum. They have a range of practices to help them grasp the organizational context and issues. This includes having a perspective on the key drivers, the organizational structure and role expectations. The coach must also understand the pressures of the coachee's job and the organizational hierarchy.

The coach may gather and assess the context in a number of ways, including site visits, examination of organizational charts, goal alignment meetings between the coachee and the coachee's boss, needs assessments, and direct insight from the coachee.

Coaches working with C-level executives were well aware they were working with executives at the highest levels of organizations who have very complex problems that not many others in organizations face. As coaches, they described the need to conceptualize things at a faster rate, to think through complexity, and help these executives "connect the dots" between their assessments, the behavioral observations and the future changes the executive is planning.

Several examples emerged from the interviews of the coaches who worked with C-level executives. Three different coaches discussed this issue:

"The degree of impact of what CEOs are going to talk about can have far more effect that we need to be very cognizant of the importance of their role, and at the same time, respecting the fact that CEOs often live in a fairly isolated environment."

"They [coachees] may be aware of some of the positives and some of the negatives but they may have missed some of the implications of their behavior and what influence it has on the larger organization."

"Every leader needs to think about an information pipeline coming to them, and everything that they do to keep that pipeline open is good, and anything that they do to constrict that pipeline is bad because they need that good information to make good decisions. The decision quality can only be as good as the information."

Coaches working with middle-level managers need to have an appreciation of the coachees' "stuck in the middle" context. To effectively work with this group in particular, coaches mentioned helping coachees understand the bigger picture—both of their organization and of their personal situation.

To get a systems perspective of a coachee's context, one coach described the following:

> *"I go over once a year and conduct an on-site visit. I always interview his direct reports, peers and his boss in person at that time. I then have verbatim feedback on the questions that he and I have come up with in advance regarding the goals he set for himself."*

Coaching in context is not just about work, it's about looking at the whole person. Another coach said:

> *"The coach's model is to go beneath the surface to get to who they really are and how they can express that in their lives and in their work setting . . . the coach is very focused on work-life balance. The coach focuses on the whole person and how he or she can only contribute to the organization if he or she is being authentic and committed."*

For coaches in Europe and Asia, the contextual issue appeared primarily as a cross-cultural issue. These coaches emphasized the personal responsibility that they take to prepare to work in different cultures and with people from cultures other than their own. One coach from Europe gave the following piece of advice:

> *"I would also suggest, and one of the things that I do when I know that I'm going to coach somebody from another country that I've never coached from before, to gather as much information as I can about that country and the culture."*

Another said the following:

> *"Most important thing in cross-cultural coaching, never to assume you are an expert in any culture—even your own."*

A third coach from Europe gave this specific example:

> *"Because I know Dutch culture to a certain extent, I could understand not only his 'Dutch-ness' but the part of the country he comes from. So I have what I call culture specific knowledge that helped."*

A coach working in Asia advised other coaches in this way:

> *"If you're going to work with people of different cultures, or genders, or sexual orientations, you actually have to work on your feelings about that group of people. And some of it is dealing with your own racism, your own colonialism, your own imperialism, your own sexism, and actually facing up to it."*

Theme 4: Models, Tools, and Techniques

One common theme of the coaches working with middle-level managers, and those working in Europe and Asia, was that they discussed the various models, tools, and techniques that they typically used in coaching sessions.

Some coaches described general processes, including reflection, guided practice, appreciative inquiry, and assessment and feedback. A coach who works with middle-level managers gave the following example:

> *"I have a heavy emphasis on working with Appreciative Inquiry . . . the person does have many inner strengths and resources that we need to dig for. Helping them to bridge past success to future action—this is a powerful part of the model. I have come to appreciate that people in general don't enjoy just jumping off the edge to new behaviors. So when a coach can dig for parallel issues and have the coaching client tell stories of past successes in something parallel, it's very powerful."*

Other coaches mentioned specific instruments (Benchmarks, Myers-Briggs) or models (Assessment-Challenge-Support) or frameworks (Hofstede, Trompenaars, Edward T. Hall). Some also mentioned use of specific techniques such as "use of various mental models," "inclusion of others as part of coaching initiative," "finding mentors," and "role play."

"Role play is a "must have," said one coach. "Frequently, I'll be the coachee, because usually the coachee knows the other party so much better than me. So, I'll say, 'Why don't you be Sam or Suzie and I'll be you. Let's play this out two ways—I'm going to do what you said you did and I'm going to ask you for how that experience was. Then I'm going to give you another option and ask you how that sounds and feels for you."

A coach from Europe shared this technique:

"I'm usually thoroughly conscious of the timeframe, trying to cover so much ground. And one tool I've found to be highly effective with a number of coaches is a list on a flip chart . . . to summarize the session. They give the main points. I maybe add some. Did we discuss this as well? How shall we express this?"

Involving others can take place in a number of ways. A coach of middle-level managers suggests the following:

"Encourage the coachee to select two people:

1. A mentor, maybe the boss or someone high up, who can politically give them information and advice on what they want to do, who they want to connect with, how they go about doing things they haven't done before;

2. A direct report, or secretary or peer. It can be anybody. I ask my coachee to tell this person one or two issues they are working on . . . this says to that person, I trust you. I value your opinion. I value you as a person. It's a huge compliment because it's risk-taking and allowing yourself to be a little vulnerable."

Theme 5: Roles

A final theme that emerged from the interviews with coaches is the importance of having clarity around their role. This was apparent to coaches working with C-level executives and middle-level managers.

For those who work with C-level executives, the coach takes on the role of trusted peer and advisor. The coach needs to have solid standing with the coachee and be able to interact on an equal level of influence.

One coach said:

"Some of the courage that a coach needs to have the ability to be able to challenge where it seems appropriate and try to really understand what's driving certain behavior, and getting under their skin a little bit."

When talking about C-level coachees, one coach said:

> *"No matter how successful they were, they needed assistance and were looking for assistance, and grateful for it because there aren't many places that they can go. You want to be able to function with them as a peer."*

For coaches of middle-level managers, the coach's role is to help the coachees become more self-aware and to put their experience in a larger context. As one coach described:

> *"I put things in perspective and normalize their feelings. I let them feel like I'm someone who can relate and can be open about my own pluses and minuses. I do that a fair amount to help people understand that they are not completely alone in the world on [their issues].*

Applying Best Practices

A focus on these five themes is a useful way for coaches to understand and implement best practices in coaching engagements. To assess your own coaching practice in terms of the best practices revealed in this study, consider the following questions:

How can I ensure I am keeping coachees at the center of my coaching practice? What are their needs and goals? Just as important, a coachee-centered approach relates to beliefs a coach has about the coachee and the positive regard in which coaches must hold their coachee.

What different approaches might I try with current coachees or with different clientele? Explore your own patterns and preferences and consider whether a new approach or angle may be better suited to a specific situation or client. As with your coachees, the process of reflection and self-awareness may lead to new ideas and opportunities. At a deeper level, you should be considering the coachee's personality style or work context, and you need to be able to prepare the data into ways the coachee is best able to hear and understand.

How might I deepen my understanding of the contextual issues facing my coachees? Consider national culture and language—but also organizational culture and systems as well as the coachee's level and function in the organization. Also, work to learn more about industry trends and global economics.

What other models, tools, or techniques might be valuable? What tools are in your toolkit? What frameworks or techniques could you employ but rarely do? Are there topics or situations that might lend themselves to something new or different from you? How could you seek out or practice new models or techniques?

Could I play a different role with any of my coachees? What do they want or need, and might that require me to take on a new role or adjust the scope of the coaching engagement?

Another useful tool is RASCR, the CCL model of coaching. Our coaches and clients often find that it is a helpful framework for clarifying and focusing the coaching process. Consider the following tips as you reflect on what you might learn or improve in your own development as a coach.

Relationships

How well do you establish boundaries and build trust? To establish an effective coaching relationship, you need to, among other things:

- Be clear about learning and development objectives.

- Show good, sound judgment about which information to use with the coachee and whether the timing is right to share other, more sensitive information with him or her.

- Be clear about the impact of your own behavior on the coachee.

- Be patient.

- Show integrity.

- Follow through on promises or agreements.

- Continually show that you have the coachee's best interests in mind.

Assessment

Do you skillfully help others to gain self-awareness and insight? If so, the actions you take will include the following:

- Provide timely feedback.

- Explore the gap between current performance and desired performance.

- Help the coachees discover situations in which their impact is different from their intentions.

- Help gain clarity about behaviors that the coachee would like to change.

- Note inconsistencies between words and actions.

Support

How well do you listen? Are you able to understand the coachee's perspective and find ways to engage him or her in the coaching and development process—even through difficulty? Support comes in many forms, including:

- Listening carefully to the ideas and suggestions of others.

- Being open to the perspectives of others.

- Allowing employees to vent emotions without judgment.

- Encouraging employees to make progress toward their goals.

- Recognizing the success of employees.

Results

Do you help the coachee set meaningful goals and be accountable for them? If so, you are likely to help employees identify:

- Goals that will have the greatest positive impact on their effectiveness.

- Specific behaviors that will lead to achieving their goals.

- Specific metrics and milestones that employees can use to measure progress toward their goals.

Final Words

Given the scope and importance of coaching across organizational levels and around the world, it is essential for coaches to understand the best practices of other effective coaches. Clearly, the field will require more research, as well as ongoing interaction among members of the global coaching community. For instance, interviewing those who sit on the other side of the coaching engagement would be important; understanding what coachees believe are best practices used by their coach would be a critical piece of information to obtain and discover. In addition, understanding what "success" in coaching looks like, and how to measure it, would greatly contribute to the research and practice of coaching. By understanding coaching best practices from the perspective of those who coach, this first step in research will help other coaches to fine-tune their own approach and learn how to best coach their coachees, regardless of circumstance, level in the organization, or cultural context.

Appendices

About the Research

Participants

CCL researchers interviewed 87 experienced coaches in three phases. All participants were professional coaches, trained in the CCL methodology and considered independent contractors with CCL. They represented a range of credentials, backgrounds and experience, including those who work with middle-level managers, C-level executives, and those working in Asia and Europe.

The first phase of the project examined the practices of coaching middle-level managers and included interviews with 45 coaches (21 male and 24 female). A representative sample of coaches from each of CCL's three North American campuses (10 from San Diego, 11 from Colorado Springs, 12 from Greensboro) were included, as well as six coaches each from the campuses in Brussels and Singapore. The interviewees are professional coaches who make their living

coaching, and were identified as high-performing coaches. Each coach had been involved in at least 15 coaching engagements with consistently positive results.

The second phase sought to capture cross-cultural nuances in coaching. Researchers interviewed 12 coaches who were living in Asia (seven men and five women) and 19 located in Europe (13 women and six men). The coaches represent different countries, including Australia, China, Germany, Singapore, Great Britain, India, The Netherlands and the United States.

The final phase focused on coaching C-level executives. In this phase, 11 coaches working with C-level executives were interviewed. The coaches averaged 17 years of coaching experience with C-level executives.

Interview Protocol

During the development of the interview protocol, CCL researchers consulted with 15 CCL coaching staff and coaches to ensure the essential elements of the coaching process were addressed. The interview protocol asked the coaches to describe two critical incidents from their coaching engagements: what the coaches considered to be their most effective coaching engagement and what was their least effective coaching experience. Coaches were asked to describe what their specific coaching practices looked like, i.e., what was actually said and done in these sessions. Coaches were sent the interview protocol in advance and asked to consider and review their case files in preparation for the interview.

Analysis

Interviews were transcribed into the qualitative analysis software, ATLAS.ti (Muhr & Friese, 2004). To identify and code best practices (themes) in the data for each research phase, we combined the grounded theory approach of Glaser and Strauss (1967) with the coding techniques of Boyatzis (1998). By reading the transcripts of the interviews, the researchers could develop summaries, which were used to identify variations in coaching practices. From the summaries, key words emerged as possible indicators of best practices. These key words were then analyzed and grouped into different categories, which eventually became the indicators and beginnings of the definition of the codes used for analysis. Following Boyatzis (1998), the researchers then turned the category descriptions into codes containing a name, definition, indicators of the code, examples, and exclusions. Categories, along with the rationale for why certain keywords were coded as part of the categories, the definition, key indicators, and exclusions/qualifications were examined and refined as a "codebook." Several iterations occurred until a final list of codes emerged. The interviews were then coded according to the codebook of that particular research phase utilizing ATLAS.ti.

Coaching Practices Glossary

The following gives a detailed definition of each of the best practices that coaches used in their coaching engagements.

Coaches working with middle-level managers:

1. Results orientation. What objectives and action steps are set for the coachee to meet his or her goals, and how is progress measured? The coach functions to hold coachees accountable and assists in selecting choices and actions that will have impact on their specific situation. Attention is paid to revisiting action items and accomplishments.

2. Reflection and guided introspection. How does the coach facilitate a process that allows coachees to slow down and thoughtfully reflect inward to gain a deep understanding of their needs, motivations, values, belief systems, and impact on others? The coach is able to help coachees take in and process their experiences, the feedback they receive from others, and the coach's insights, and make meaning of the information in a very personal, introspective way. Coaches use a wide repertoire of questions (inquiry-based coaching) and activities (including mirroring, challenging the coachee to reflect, direct confrontation, and confronting resistance) to generate introspection. It is also essential for the coach to challenge coachees when they resort to denial or rationalization.

3. Coachee-centered focus. How does the coach establish an empathic relationship with coachees and hold them in "unconditional positive regard?" The coach views coachees as valued customers; the interaction and engagement is framed around their needs and what is most meaningful to them. This is an optimistic view that establishes confidence in coachees' ability to select the focus of change and, collaboratively, to cocreate the steps to accomplish change. The relationship is the foundation of the process and begins with "meeting coachees where they are," not necessarily where the coach might like for them to be. The coach encourages coachees to describe goals in sensory-rich language by defining what success will look like, sound like, and feel like to them. The coach interacts with the coachee as an equal, neither being subservient, nor acting from an expert or superior position.

4. Assessment data debrief and interpretation. How are formal and informal assessments continued throughout the coaching engagement? Data is used to focus on the most relevant issues as seen by the coachee, coworkers, and boss. It includes psychological and management instruments as well as behaviorally-oriented interviews, and may include site visits, goal-alignment meetings with the coachee and boss, and feedback on the coachee's progress. The integration of multiple data points deepens the coachee's understanding of the assessments and forms the basis for developmental planning. Frequently this illustrates something the coachee hadn't seen before, an insight or an "aha" in the data.

5. Self-awareness. How does the coach facilitate the building of self-awareness? In order to make conscious choices about their behavior, coachees need to become aware of their intentions and the impact of their actions on others. The coach helps coachees to understand the relationship between behaviors, perceptions, and impact.

6. Use of various mental models. How does the coach offer a new framing or way to view a situation? Utilizing and adapting new mental maps and models that allow coachees to shift the perspectives by which they habitually view the world leads to greater understanding of self, the world and others. Methods coaches use include: challenging existing paradigms, using metaphors, balancing/leveraging successes, and using appreciative inquiry (e.g., What does it look like when you are your best self?).

7. Guided practice. How does the coach use and teach methods and techniques that facilitate maximum learning? Practice brings mastery, and positive reinforcement increases the learning. This includes repetition and reinforcement (Learning Methodology), experimentation in real time with insights provided throughout, role playing, and assigning homework.

8. Knowledge and application of organizational context. How does the coach take into account the organizational context and issues that mutually influence one another? Understanding the context for the coaching engagement includes having a systems perspective on the key drivers, the organizational structure, and role expectations. The coach must also understand the pressures of the coachee's job and the organizational hierarchy. The coach's assessment includes site visits, examination of organizational charts, an organizational needs assessment, and balancing the needs of the individual with those of the organization.

9. Holistic approach. In what ways does the coach demonstrate an understanding that people are a combination of mind, body, and spirit and will respond best when all aspects of their being are considered, engaged, and valued? This includes providing interpretation beyond the data; life/work balance assessment; discussing the "undiscussables" (e.g., weight, grief, etc.); and looking at personal drivers (e.g., What are your competing commitments?).

10. Inclusion of others as part of coaching initiative. How does the coach leverage social learning? How do the coach and coachee solicit insights and input from those individuals who are most relevant and in the best position to provide it? Including others gives a 360-degree perspective to the coachee and affords the opportunity to gauge if progress is being made, especially in the eyes of the stakeholders. Actively seeking ongoing feedback from boss, direct reports, peers and scheduling meetings with them formally and consistently is a best practice. The coach also helps create feedback loops and strategies for enlisting the support of others.

11. Organizational applicability and relevance. How does the coach make learning relevant, important, and timely for both the individual coachee and the organization? Relevance is the "sweet spot" that makes the difference in convincing people the coaching is personally valuable and worth the investment. Coaches connect to real organizational issues and context in several ways, including: just-in-time coaching/solving business problems, probing for the most profound questions within the business, maintaining the big-picture perspective, and continually bringing the coaching back to what is happening in the present situation.

Coaches who resided in Asia:

1. Assessment and feedback. How does the coach approach the process from a place of inquiry? Coaches report using insightful questions to access the most information. Coaches use assessments, psychometrics, and testing to develop data on the coachee to inform the coaching engagement. Obtaining feedback from the coachee and the organization is extremely important, as is interviews and conversations with stakeholders.

2. Challenge. How does the coach challenge the coachee? Coaches must be willing and able to push coachees outside of their comfort zone, often through using experiments, directives, and role-plays.

3. Coachee-centered focus. How does the coach establish a strong relationship with the coachee? This relationship allows the coaching engagement to remain focused on the coachee and the coachee's needs. The relationship is established by building rapport through listening, reflecting, and creating a general sense of safety.

4. Cultural awareness. Does the coach have the knowledge, awareness, and understanding of the coachee's culture and how the process of coaching might be adapted based on cultural similarities or differences? Sensitivity to interaction of coach's and coachee's cultural backgrounds is vitally important information.

5. Intuition. Is the coach aware of his or her intuition? The ability for the coach to utilize his or her instincts and intuition to make decisions during a coaching engagement may be important.

6. Preparation. Has the coach done his/her research and is prepared with information, plans, etc. Coaches work to better themselves, to constantly learn, so as to be better prepared and more knowledgeable for coaching engagements. This also includes exposure to ideas and cultures.

7. Results-driven. How does the coach steer toward desired outcomes? This involves developing objectives, indicators, and goals that will drive the coaching session and establish when the coaching has been successful or is complete. Coaches use follow-up and checking-in routines to establish how the engagement is proceeding.

8. Structure. How does the coach develop and provide a structure for the coaching process? Providing a schedule, agenda, or plan is crucial. At the same time, coaches must be willing and able to adapt that structure and be flexible within the coaching engagement.

9. Support. In what ways does the coach provide support for the coachee throughout the coaching session? Coaches utilize advice or expert opinions as a way to give them the best tools.

10. Utilizing mental models. What is the framework from which a coach approaches coaching engagements? Mental models, in this case, are viewed as the coach utilizing models in his or her coaching practice. These may include developmental, cultural, and practice models.

Coaches who resided in Europe:

1. Approach. What is the coach's communication method to engage the coachee, as determined by the coachee's needs, personality, and culture?

2. Coach development. What is the coach's commitment to continual development and review of his/her coaching?

3. Cultural sensitivity. Does the coach adapt to cultural factors? Coaches must be mindful of their own cultural and personal bias and arrange the engagement to be congruent with the cultural predisposition of the coachee.

4. Instruments. What instruments, models, and assessments does the coach use to evaluate the coachee and aid in his or her progress? Resources used include: 360-degree feedback; CCL's Assessment, Challenge and Support (ACS) model; Benchmarks; Hofstede; Intercultural Readiness Check; Myers-Briggs; and the Situation-Behavior-Impact (SBI) model for giving feedback.

5. Relationship-building. What tools and processes does the coach use for strengthening the connection with the coachee combined with the coachee's incentive for and comprehension of the coaching engagement?

6. Techniques. What general practices are used by the coach to strengthen the effectiveness of the coaching engagement and inspire further growth in the coachee? Techniques mentioned included the following: best- or worst-case scenario, coachee strengths, face-to-face sessions, goals, homework, organizational support for coachee, or prioritizing, recording sessions, and shadowing and tracking progress.

Coaches who primarily worked with C-level executives:

1. Coachee-centered focus. How does the coach build a strong relationship with a C-level coachee? The coach intentionally centers the coaching engagement around the coachee, with the coachee setting the agenda and direction of the engagement. Coaches show deep respect for coachee. Client-centered coaching behaviors include: active listening, asking a lot of questions, building rapport, nurturing relationships, creating an appropriate environment for coaching, being client-driven, showing immediacy, being holistic in one's approach, showing empathy, and offering support.

2. Facilitator and guide. How does the coach facilitate the coaching engagement and guide the process? Coaches help the coachee maintain focus and have a clear understanding of goals and personal growth. While the overall coaching engagement is coachee-driven, coaches challenge their C-level coachee, model behavior, pay great attention to detail, balance a variety of coaching behaviors, use creativity, and offer solutions that are practical and make sense.

3. Assessment and development planning. In what ways does the coach assess the coachee and work with the coachee on specific goals and developmental plans? Coaches regularly assess the coachee in the coaching engagement, using accepted instruments and a variety of assessment tools. Coaches make appropriate use of instruments and empirical research; help with developmental plans and goal-setting; help coachees evaluate performance; encourage coachees to do homework; and develop a tool kit to help them on the job.

4. Higher-level processing. Is the coach able to conceptualize at a fast rate, react intuitively, pay attention to process and take risks? This higher-level processing is needed in C-level coaching engagements. Coaches must be process-oriented and have a systems approach if they are to help C-level executives. Coaches must develop ways to challenge these coachees, help them connect the dots, and conceptualize information at a fast rate. The use of acronyms, metaphors, and stories are extremely effective.

5. Trusted advisor and peer. Is the coach able to take on the role of trusted advisor and peer? Coaches often move from a facilitation and guidance role to advising the coachee as a peer, with the coach and coachee interacting on an equal level of influence. Coaches help coachees learn the appropriate use of self-disclosure, teach the coachee to coach, have real-time checking-in, and help the coachee promote a feedback-rich culture at the coachee's organization.

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Authors' Note

About the Authors

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