

PROFESSIONAL COACHING

Principles and Practice



SUSAN ENGLISH | JANICE MANZI SABATINE | PHILIP BROWNELL
EDITORS

SPRINGER PUBLISHING
**DIGITAL
ACCESS**

See Code Inside

Compliments of Springer Publishing Company, LLC

Executive Coaching

Jeremy Robinson

WHAT EXACTLY IS EXECUTIVE COACHING?

How is executive coaching different from other types of coaching? What are some beliefs or misunderstandings people have about coaching (some of these people who have these misunderstandings are also coaches)?

As I seek to answer these questions, I'm reminded of the famous Zen saying: "Things are not as they seem; nor are they otherwise."

Let me start with a story. In 1999, I was lucky enough to have been invited to an event near Orlando, Florida, that became known as the First Executive Coaching Summit. Along with 35 colleagues, we co-wrote the first white paper on executive coaching, which when published was called "Executive Coaching Summit I: Documenting the Emerging Field of Coaching in Organizations." In this white paper, we defined what we as a group thought executive coaching was and what executive coaches did. The article summarizing the Summit's findings was written by an executive coach named Agnes Mura. The piece was published in the *International Journal of Coaching in Organizations* (IJCO; Mura, 2003).

The group had gathered as a brainstorm idea from Laura Whitworth, cofounder of the Coaches Training Institute (CTI). Whitworth noticed a growing demand for executive coaches by companies and organizations and convened a team to hold a summit. The group gained the sponsorship of the International Coach Federation (ICF) and decided to convene 2 days before the ICF conference in Orlando. Originally, more than 100 leading executive coaches responded to the invitation to participate in the 2-day summit. From this list, 36 were chosen by the convening team as applicants having the most extensive experience in the field, and who were also coaching in organizations at the highest levels of executive responsibility.

The task of summit attendees was to identify characteristics that set executive coaching apart from all other types of coaching like sports coaching, personal coaching, business coaching, spiritual coaching, life coaching, among others.

The summit group agreed to the following definition of executive coaching:

Executive Coaching is a facilitative one-to-one, mutually designed relationship between a professional coach and a key contributor who has a power position in the organization. This relationship occurs in areas of business, government, not-for-profit and educational organizations where there are multiple stakeholders and organizational sponsorship for the coach and or coaching group. The focus of the coaching is usually focused on organizational performance or development, but may also have a personal component as well. The results produced from this relationship are observable and measurable, commensurate with the requirements the organization has for the performance of the person being coached.

In breaking down “quick points of the definition” in her article, Mura listed five keys:

- A relationship exists between coach and high-level individual(s) of the organization.
- The relationship occurs in and is sponsored by differing kinds of organizations with multiple stakeholders.
- Coaching is for the benefit of a person with high levels of responsibility and broad scope of impact.
- Focus of the coaching may be both organizational and personal development.
- Outcomes are observable and measurable, and match organizational performance requirements. (Mura, 2003)

As I re-read the work these colleagues and I completed almost 20 years ago, I’m struck by the fact that there are still myths and misunderstandings surrounding what executive coaching is and is not.

For example, many people believe that if an executive hires me to coach him or her, then I’m providing that person with executive coaching. It would seem to make sense logically. This person is an executive. This person pays me out of his or her own funds and I’m coaching them.

But I’d say no.

The important distinction is personally contracted coaching is not an organizationally sponsored engagement.

Some readers might argue that I’m quibbling here but I’d reply that they are missing the point. By definition of the first Executive Coaching Summit and other organizations to which I belong that have defined executive coaching, executive coaching is always defined as an organizational sponsored initiative. It helps even

more if we take another step forward and describe executive coaching as an organizational sponsored *engagement*.

By describing executive coaching as an engagement, we let others know that we are handling an organizational initiative that has an arc to it and also has a number of organizational sponsors, whatever the level of coaching (more about different types of coaching a bit later in this chapter).

In describing “Managing the Coaching Engagement” in our book *Becoming an Exceptional Executive Coach*, my colleagues and I wrote the following:

- Engagement management describes the entire arc of the coaching process. As the coach, you are responsible for managing this process in its entirety, from initial introductions to the closure meeting.
- You are the expert about the coaching process; your clients are the experts about themselves and their situations.
- As the process expert, you are responsible for anticipating the flow and providing the client and sponsors with guidance about each step and expectations for it.
- Doing process checks with the client and sponsors will help you stay attuned to their reactions and needs, allowing you to address any concerns that arise.
- While there may be pressure to define coaching goals early in the process, it is more important that goals feel right to the client and motivate action, even though it may take longer.
- The essential challenge of engagement management is alignment: you and the client, the client and sponsors, and you and sponsors. This can be tricky but it is what makes executive coaching challenging and gratifying. (Frisch, Lee, Metzger, Robinson, & Rosemarin, 2012)

As we recount in “Becoming an Exceptional Executive Coach,” all these pieces involving the client and sponsors, and you and sponsors are crucial to the coach being successful as both engagement manager of the project and coach of the client (Frisch et al., 2012).

Before the sponsor has even contacted us as a potential coach, there has been what we think of as “pre-engagement events” that have led to the request for this coaching. We don’t know what triggered the coaching request. Was it a new opportunity this coaching client is facing? Was it a problem, or perhaps a mixture of opportunity and problem? Whatever the impetus, it is likely that a series of people have been involved in making the decision to consider executive coaching and these people may include the client’s manager, an Human Resources business partner, and others in either leadership development or other areas of the organization. As a coach, our job is not only to coach the client but also help him or her be successful by leading this engagement to closure and a successful outcome.

Ultimately, in all executive coaching engagements, our goal as both coach and engagement manager is to help our client increase alignment with all the

stakeholders involved in this coaching process, especially the client's boss. To be coaching a client independently of and segregated from an organizational engagement is to risk coaching a client out of that organization.

Why do I say that?

Because such coaching has no alignment with key coaching stakeholders. It risks being a random growth-oriented initiative that has nothing to do with the events in the organization that led up to the organizational request for coaching on behalf of this client.

Communication by the coach to other key stakeholders is essential for success of the executive coaching engagement.

We work in the service of the client's privacy and trust. Many of my colleagues and I tell the coaching stakeholders the following.

THE COACHING PROCESS IS PUBLIC AND THE CONTENT IS PRIVATE

What do we mean when we say this?

First of all, we mean that the person in front of us (or on the phone) is our client. The organization is the sponsor.

The coaching process that is public to stakeholders is the information about dates of coaching meetings taking place, their duration, the psychometric assessments administered, the 360-degree survey being undertaken, dates of various events in coaching such as the date of delivery of a coaching development plan, the date of the three-way coaching development plan meeting between coach, boss, and client—all of these events are public to the coaching client's boss, boss's boss, and Human Resources business partner.

Also public to stakeholders are the coaching goals articulated by the client, the client's boss, and other key stakeholders. As these goals shift throughout the coaching engagement into what we have called a Designed Objective, these goals are also public to stakeholders involved in coaching. Further, the key coaching deliverable, a Coaching Development Plan, co-written by the client and coach and added to by the client's boss, is also considered public to organizational stakeholders.

The coaching content, the conversational content between client and coach is private to the coach and the client throughout the coaching process. This means that the coaching client owns the right to what he or she has discussed at each meeting, absent the coaching goals that are public. This means that the coaching assessments taken by the client, including the 360-degree assessment, are the property of the coaching client. The coaching client may choose to disclose the results of these assessments and the 360-degree assessment, but the coach does not have a right to reveal this information unless told to do so by the client.

In operating this way as coaches, we believe that we create clearer and brighter boundaries about coaching for our clients. This leads to greater transparency to our organizations about what's going on in the arc of the coaching engagement.

This helps me as a coach stay true to the pledge that I make to all my coaching clients at the start of each engagement. My goal always, first and foremost, is to do no harm to you or your career.

The more clearly we define our roles and responsibilities as coach, client, and coaching stakeholders, the less likely anyone is to misunderstand the coaching engagement and to violate the trust that the engagement requires. Trust is the magic ingredient in improving stakeholder alignment. As the engagement manager, the coach can be the facilitator of building trust. It's plain to understand that to do so, the coach needs to proceed in the spirit of helping "thee not me." But that does not mean the coach is entirely selfless. The coach needs to make sure he or she is paid for the work and that all other events during the engagement are communicated about and are worked out as discussed. When we arrive at sponsoring organizations, we will find the clients in transition in their work journey and similarly when we leave these clients, they will still be in transition. Yet while we've been there we will hope to have provided real benefits including:

1. Helping clients meet behavioral goals and business results, and increase inspirational energy.
2. Bringing greater alignment in understanding and communication with their manager and other key stakeholders.
3. Helping clients have a greater sense of clarity and purpose of work related to their lives and life-long aspirations.

Sometimes, if we're really good at what we do or if we're lucky, we receive the gift of *the extraordinary client*. This client may not be extraordinary personally. But the journey that this client may need to embark on in the coaching engagement may make the client extraordinary in that it requires the client to transform his or her life entirely. If and when we receive such a gift, we get touched by the larger possibility of executive coaching as *transformative experience*.

Three years ago, I received a call from a colleague in NYC who had news about a former client of mine. She called to make a coaching referral and along the way of making this referral, she told me the story of what had happened with this former client's family. The coach was now referenced as an important person in this man's family's life. The client had changed the way he interacted with his children and wife. Up until his coaching, I learned, he'd been considered a loving father and husband, but was emotionally distant from his family. Post-coaching, he'd become the involved father and husband the family hoped he'd be. Obviously, hearing this was very gratifying, and proof that the work I'd done with this client had "stuck," something I often wonder about after my work is finished.

This client had seemed to be particularly challenging. Enormously intelligent and emotionally unavailable, the word I would have used to describe him would have been "robotic." But the "good news" was that his successful career in the business world had hit an impasse because of his difficulty teaching and being empathic with his direct reports and his problems being seen as a leader by his peers. This was good because his boss was telling him that despite his enormous capabilities to do his job, he'd need to be a much more successful communicator and role model to get to the next level. The boss needed him to be a leader, not just an independent contributor. And this client was very ambitious. An

ambitious coaching client who applies that drive toward his coaching can often achieve impressive results.

His manager proposed that they hire an executive coach to help him change. Oddly, the manager told me after coaching had ended that he had been extremely skeptical that anything would change as a result of this coaching.

The client was very open to the coaching because he was in pain about his career hitting a plateau. I assigned him to read and study *Primal Leadership* by Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2004). The book had a powerful effect on him. I did psychometric testing with him, including an Emotional Intelligence Bar-On Assessment. Testing revealed far below average empathy scores and above average self-actualization scores. It was clear to both of us we needed to use his drive to achieve business results to move his ability to be empathic with others. I pushed him very hard. I shadowed him in team meetings. We went through lists of all his organizational stakeholders, going over details of his relationship with each, often brainstorming how he might find a more tuned-in way of relating to each. I performed a deep 360-degree feedback study during which time I interviewed 15 of his stakeholders, plus his wife. I was pleased how committed to coaching he'd become. I tried to model an appreciative style that I wanted him to copy with his direct reports and his stakeholders, even as I was firm with him when he made missteps or said something brutally critical of others. I felt he was a good man with many loving qualities who was locked up in a shell. I was very appreciative when he made efforts to push out of that shell and became an empathic teacher to his direct reports. The good news of his changing started to surface at approximately the 4-month mark of his coaching and it continued to be experienced through the organization as our coaching was extended to 12 months. The client liked what was happening. He felt more effective with people. I understood it as his being more related with others. I was happy that I was able to reach his heart by going through his very powerful brain.

When the coaching ended, the manager repeated his pronouncement that he was surprised the coaching had worked. I was hopeful that the changes would stick with the client, but I was uncertain as to what extent they would. I knew it was most important that the client liked how he felt now that he had made these changes. That was the most hopeful part. It was a good diagnostic sign that the client continued to feel empowered by the changes in behavior he had made. That told me he had taken ownership of the coaching. The coaching was now his to drive.

Sometimes I tell people with whom I'm discussing coaching that I want coaching to line up as an unfair advantage favoring me and the client from the start. When the boss withholds a promotion to an otherwise extremely capable client due to a set of behaviors that the boss would like to see the client change, that can work in the favor of coaching. It feels to me that in these cases, we have the wind at our backs in coaching. My job is to successfully identify behaviors that will yield the greatest results for the client's coaching and keep him on track identifying and changing them. In the process, I need to model different ways I'd like the client to be so he can mirror it back to others. I want my client to see and feel the differences between behaviors that are not working and ones that will be more effective. Incidentally, these same behaviors will probably make clients feel better about

themselves. *So at this moment we have the phenomenon of the client liking his or her behavior change.* Liking behavior change is a crucial element in a client choosing to hang on to this behavior post-coaching.

I also have the advantage of having worked at behavior change for a long time, first as a psychotherapist and now as a coach. So I have a lot of “flight time” helping people get to a new behavioral destination. I think my clients intuitively experience this. I make them feel comfortable, I like and accept them but I work with them to change. This is the paradox of coaching, as it is of any human endeavor involving behavioral change. Change requires a degree of self-acceptance to become more self-aware and then see if the changes are taking effect.

My colleagues at iCoach New York and I have identified seven different types of executive coaching, which we have identified as a seven-stage continuum of coaching (Figure 34.1).

The different types of executive coaching we reference are:

Type 1: Targeted Skills Coaching

Type 2: Feedback/Development Plan Coaching

Type 3: Feedback Coaching with Follow-up

Type 4: Transition/Assimilation Coaching (sometimes called Onboarding coaching)

Type 5: Leadership Effectiveness Coaching

Type 6: High Potential Coaching

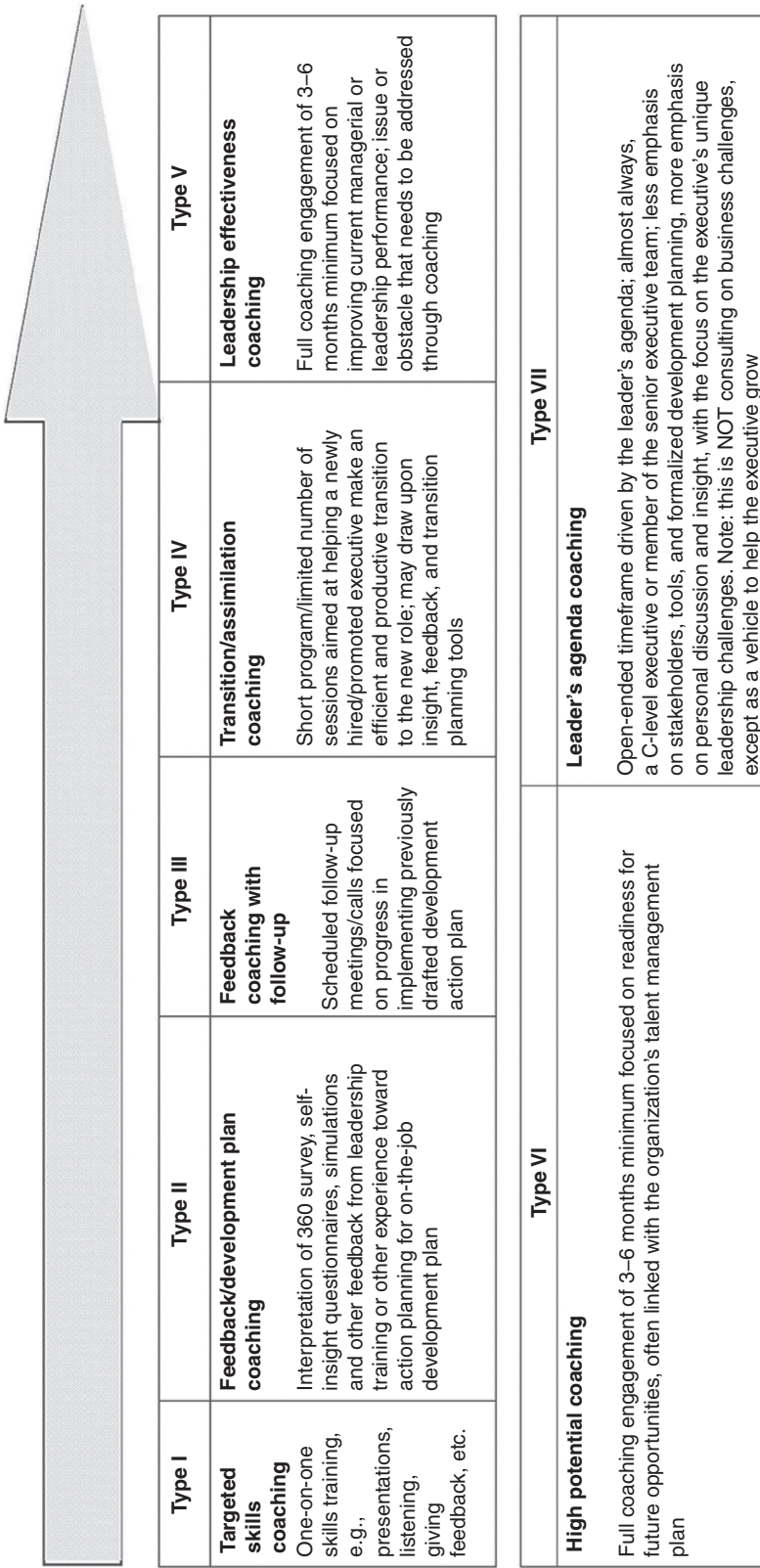
Type 7: Leader’s Agenda Coaching

Executive Coaching Types 5 and 6 are what is most often thought of when the term executive coaching is used (Frisch et al., 2012).

Type 7, Leader’s Agenda Coaching, has been masterfully documented in Karol Wasylyshyn’s book *Destined to Lead: Executive Coaching and Lessons for Leadership Development* (Wasylyshyn, 2014). Wasylyshyn’s book includes eight chapter case studies of her work with disguised CEO or senior executive clients, including her interventions and commentary about coaching actions and interventions with each. Every coaching supervisee I’ve asked to read this book has found it inspiring and enormously useful in thinking about their executive coaching cases, no matter what the level in the organization. For myself, I’m enormously grateful to Wasylyshyn for her pioneering work as an executive coach and colleague.

EXECUTIVE COACHING IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Sometimes looking back on something helps us anticipate what might come next. Looking at executive coaching in its historical context also gives us ideas about where we want to continue to grow the practice of executive coaching. I believe that the first time any of my colleagues recall hearing the term executive coaching was in the 1980s.



©CoachNewYork 2017

Figure 34.1 Coaching continuum: Individual development interventions arranged by difficulty and the likelihood of internal to external coach delivery.

Organizational Heads of Executive Coaching—whether they're called Human Resources business partners or Heads of Talent Management or more rarely, Heads of Executive Coaching—have today almost uniform agreement that executive coaching is most effective and a better use of dollars when provided for key talent and high potentials in organizations.

This means that many organizations that are sophisticated users of external or internal executive coaching now more rarely use coaches for executives who are derailing. We should note that this is an abrupt shift. When coaching first was introduced in the late 1980s and early 1990s many coaches were hired to coach executives who were about to be referred to outplacement programs.

Indeed, many of today's veteran executive coaches owe their beginnings as coaches to the work they were doing in outplacement programs at that time. By providing coaches to executives who were derailing, it was discovered that coaching could be enormously useful to both the executives and their organizations. Rather than being terminated, a good percentage of these people could be "saved" and retained.

As executive coaching became better known in the late 1990s and early 2000s, organizational leaders and executive coaches working inside and outside organizations began to wonder about the best allocation of money toward executive coaching. After all, they reasoned, if executive coaching is often effective (check the box) and expensive (check the box), why was it being applied mainly to executives who were derailing?

As CEOs and other leaders in organizations received coaching, they joined the chorus of those inquiring about the best use of coaching dollars. Executive coaching is a powerful tool. Why not focus its application to key talent and high potential employees? What would happen if organizations took that approach?

Discussions about applying executive coaching to key talent versus derailing executives began to influence organizations to spend coaching dollars more prudently—toward the development of the people in their organizations who would then in turn be most involved in the development of others.

As we remember, executive coaching was gaining media attention in the early 2000s. Because of the history of applying coaching toward derailing executives, some wondered if coaching was a form of "corporate therapy." *The Economist* magazine ran an article in November 2003 (which quoted this executive coach) with that exact title: "Corporate Therapy: Having an Executive Coach Is All the Rage" ("Corporate Therapy," 2003). This rumor about coaching as therapy, however, never really gained traction because almost all practicing coaches, especially those coming from the mental health field, were quite clear in providing boundaries and discussions with their clients regarding differentiators between psychotherapy and coaching. Coaching was about helping clients achieve business results. Executive coaching was not only a one-on-one initiative; it involved a boss and other key organizational stakeholders. Coaches spoke the language of business, helping organizational leaders calculate metrics around performance by eliciting business goals for coaching. Organizations learned that these business goals for the coaching client were often best determined by the coaching client's boss as well as by the coaching client.

Sophisticated coaches were clear in speaking to Internal Coaching resources that they were looking for clients with business goals, not executives who had

“symptoms,” like anxiety or depression. This became another way to triage those who were best suited for coaching. Yes, coaching could be therapeutic; it felt good to be in coaching. But it was a special kind of good feeling.

Executive coaching also needed to be differentiated from management consulting, another type of organizational intervention that was clearly not coaching. Management consultants get hired to provide expert information often from consultants who are subject matter experts (SMEs).

I recall trying to explain how executive coaching was different from his work to a management consultant client I was coaching in 2004. At first, I was at a loss for words. To help demonstrate the difference I asked this client (who was participating in a coaching program at a colleague’s coaching school) to “coach” me in the middle of a session at which I had been coaching him. He demonstrated his style with me over 5 or 10 minutes as I willingly spoke about an issue I wanted coaching about. His “coaching” was giving me advice. After he did this with me, my words returned.

“Coaching is about providing inspiration,” I reflected to him. “Consulting is about giving information.” I thought then, and continue to think today, that these are important distinctions for us to have.

More troubling for coaches in the early 2000s was the idea that executive coaching was some kind of organizational “fad.” It was a trend. In a few years or so, it would quickly be replaced. The reason I found this objection more troubling was the implication that coaching lacked substance, that it was superficial, or not relevant to the real needs of our coaching clients, that they were wasting their time.

I’ve never wanted to be involved in anything that wasted my time or anyone else’s time. So this criticism touched a nerve.

Yet, as I write these words, I notice we no longer hear it said that executive coaching is some kind of fad or fly-by-night trend. The rumors as to coaching’s imminent demise have died long before coaching has left the building. This has led me to wonder, what were the reasons people stopped asking, “Is coaching just another fad?”

The answers owe much to how coaching has evolved and become artfully practiced by many excellent coaching practitioners. Through the writings and practice of high profile executive coaches such as Marshall Goldsmith and Karol Wasylshyn, business leaders came to understand that incorporating 360-degree feedback into coaching engagements would make engagements more effective.

By using 360-degree feedback studies in their coaching engagements, executive coaches gained much more entry and visibility into the clients’ worlds. Moreover, the feedback we collected from the participant raters was more objective because it would not influence the performance reviews that our clients received at the end of the year. Raters didn’t have to “elevate” what they observed. Our coaching feedback was done solely for the purpose of our coaching clients’ development.

Stakeholders and clients of executive coaching saw something else. They saw that executive coaches were more sophisticated facilitators of feedback. Executive coaches took extra effort to explain to clients that when they talked to participant raters about providing feedback for their coaching that this was a different kind of feedback than these participant raters had provided before. Many clients told stakeholders that this feedback was for the purpose of “my growth as a leader.” Stakeholders stood up and noticed. Their attention was aroused that these clients

wanted feedback, wanted coaching, and wanted development in order to continue to improve their “game.” It confirmed the title of the Goldsmith and Morgan article that, “Leadership Is a Contact Sport” (Goldsmith & Morgan, 2004). And this contact best occurred through feedback. Now, as feedback collectors and facilitators, executive coaches had increased their organizational remit. We now better understood our clients’ business goals and helped them achieve targeted business results. We could do so by hearing from key stakeholders. Our coaching had moved from private to the client to public to others in the company. Coaches had become trusted and necessary recipients of key client information. Coaches had the keys to the feedback vault. When feedback is accurate and deep, it can help clients see around corners and anticipate obstacles and risks. Feedback in coaching meant another good new thing. It meant that those who received feedback became better organizational players because they had more focused information. Feedback may at times be painful but it began to be seen as a gift. The gift meant that feedback recipients had an advantage over others who had never received it. They were more self-aware. They could begin to understand the different ways they were seen, plus and minus. Knowing this gave clients further incentive to do something about it, thereby improving their organizational odds of success. Feedback pain equated to performance gain. The sound of coaching being effective started to register throughout organizations. Yes, executive coaching was expensive. But the dollars were yielding results. This was a further benefit to organizations in understanding differences between coaching and therapy. Almost all executive coaching clients found that they liked coaching. The only question was: How much did they like it? Clearly, coaching was inspirational!

Today, we see that although coaching is no longer spoken about as a fad; its acceptance and popularity pose other risks. What are the risks that I see today that might undermine the effectiveness of executive coaching?

The number one risk, which has been a potential problem all along the trajectory of the growth of coaching, is that the wrong people can become executive coaches for the wrong reasons. People may become executive coaches because they think it’s a quick way to earn a buck. People on the question-asking portal called Quora, many of whom are intelligent individuals, ask questions about executive coaching that show they have not done any homework to find out what is required in terms of the self-discipline of being an executive coach; they just want to get into the field and “get clients now.”

People who seek to become executive coaches need to understand that learning how to be a good executive coach is an apprenticeship, and probably a long one. It requires diverse personality characteristics. It requires a gift of being able to listen to people and help human beings change behaviors. It requires the confidence of being able to present yourself to business leaders as someone who can say something that is worth their time and attention. It requires you to self-regulate your emotions in a similar way that we coaches ask our clients to self-regulate emotions. Coaching requires constant course work in behavioral science and business subjects, and requires us to learn what it’s like to stay present with our clients while at the same time working in the interest of “thee not me.”

Good coaches are unbelievably attuned listeners who can ask both ordinary facilitative questions and very insightful ones. We have no problem with being

provocative and direct with our clients in one moment or flexing to becoming tender and empathic in the next. It helps if we have good memories because we'll be required to absorb a lot of information in each engagement. It helps if we're pretty bright because our clients want good conversation partners who can hit the ball back conversationally. It helps if we are utterly committed to the process and the field of executive coaching which means having coaching supervision with a Master Coach, peer supervision, and having had your own coach. It is absolutely required that a coach be able to understand that he or she is not the client's friend although the coach may certainly have a warm demeanor.

Coaches need to live with paradoxical situations, and be able to tolerate complexity and uncertainty. If you have your own external coaching practice, you need to be able to tolerate what my late colleague Bob Lee labeled "CFA" otherwise known as cash flow anxiety.

CFA means we need to live through the ups and downs of being in business for ourselves. We need to have a savings account or line of credit to tide us through when business is bad or when business is good but we still are not getting paid in a timely manner. So we see that the personality factors required of a coach add up to the portrait of someone who can tolerate difficulties, such as financial frustration. It requires emotional resilience. We need to be able to persist with passion, as Angela Duckworth has defined "Grit" in her extraordinary book of the same name (Duckworth, 2016). We need to be able to have a strong sense of self and at the same time a "bullet-proof" ego that is able to adapt to CFA and other frustrations, while at the same time tolerate the provocations of a few provocative and overly aggressive clients, rejections from Human Resources leaders who don't include us on their coaching panels, rejections from potential coaching clients who are not wise enough to select us as their coach in beauty contests. We need to be competitive yet relaxed. We probably need a hard and a soft style. Almost every coach I've ever met loves the work of coaching clients. But some are unable to be resilient enough to endure and succeed at building a practice.

Have you ever watched one of those Wall Street mavens, perhaps even Warren Buffett, being interviewed on CNBC or some similar financial news network? They wax poetic about the "beauty of the market." They talk about how the market has wisdom, how it self-corrects, and so forth. The way they talk about the stock market makes it sound as if it's a living organism. They have worked successfully with the stock market for so many years, they begin to sound like experienced MDs who are able to diagnose the ailments of long-term patients just by checking a few vital signs.

My observation, after having coached for more than 30 years, is that the coaching market has a similar wisdom. That is what I mean when I tell people that the "coaching market self-selects and corrects."

It invariably self-selects out the con men, the egotists, and manipulators that some of our coaching schools are not wise enough to reject. It self-selects out the greedy, fast money guys and gals who come to coaching for the wrong reason and often leave quickly when they experience that coaching is not a quick game. Because the market selects, executive coaches find we need to learn the long game. We need to acquire some business vocabulary if we don't come from a business background. Maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea for us to read *The Wall Street Journal* or some similar

publication. If we come from a background that has not included much learning in behavioral sciences like psychology, we need to make sure we find ways to make up for this deficit via supervisory or peer relationships with others who have studied the psychology of human development and personality.

Of course, we have unethical practitioners and bad actors in the executive coaching field as all fields have. But because development as an executive coach requires constant validation from clients and other organizational players, I do hope this self-selection process weeds out most who need to be weeded.

Looking back at the evolution of executive coaching, I find many reasons to feel optimistic. Right now, there is greater agreement as to what constitutes “good executive coaching practice” among external executive coaches and buyers and sponsors who are internal to organizations. By having decided to add 360-degree feedback facilitation and the use of psychometric assessment tools to our work, executive coaches have transformed ourselves into needed facilitators of information that clients don’t just want to have; they need to have these data to manage and lead more effectively. This has been a career-saving pivot that has helped executive coaching be seen in this new light.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

We need more good research and writing on executive coaching. Books like Wasylyshyn’s *Destined to Lead* provide an invaluable casebook for the field (Wasylyshyn, 2014). Pioneering work that executive coaches are conducting now with group and team coaching needs to be encouraged with wisdom. The wisdom we provide to these endeavors needs to be for the clients of team and executive coaching to have clarity as to who is the client in these engagements and what are the terms of their confidentiality/privacy agreements. It goes without saying that coaches need to live up to these agreements. As we say, the coaching process is public and the content is private and owned by the client. This can get tricky when there is an entire team to provide information about to organizational sponsors. I don’t think any of us want to return to the uncertainty of a decade ago when executive coaching was referred to in that *Harvard Business Review* article as “The Wild West of Executive Coaching” (Sherman & Freas, 2004).

REFERENCES

- Corporate therapy: Having an executive coach is all the rage. (2003). *The Economist*, p. 61.
- Duckworth, A. (2016). *Grit: The power and passion of perseverance*. New York, NY: Scribner.
- Frisch, M., Lee, R., Metzger, K., Robinson, J., & Rosemarin, J. (2012). *Becoming an exceptional executive coach: Use your knowledge, experience and intuition to help leaders excel*. New York, NY: AMACOM.
- Goldsmith, M., & Morgan, H. (2004, Fall). Leadership is a contact sport: The “follow-up factor” in management development. *strategy+business*, 36. Retrieved from <http://www.strategy-business.com/article/04307>
- Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2004). *Primal leadership: Learning to lead with emotional intelligence*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

- Mura, A. (2003). Executive Coaching Summit I: Documenting the emerging field of coaching in organizations. *International Journal of Coaching in Organizations*, 1, 19–26.
- Sherman, S., & Freas, A. (2004, November). The Wild West of executive coaching. *Harvard Business Review*, Reprint R0411E.
- Wasylyshyn, K. (2014). *Destined to lead: Executive coaching and lessons for leadership development*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

This article is copyrighted by Springer Publishing. This article is intended solely for the individual user and not to be distributed broadly.