

Becoming and Exceptional Executive Coach: Use Your Knowledge, Experience and Intuition to Help Leaders Excel by Michael Frisch, Robert Lee, Karen Metzger, Jeremy Robinson and Judy Rosemarin

Chapter I

Your Personal Model of Coaching

No two coaches work in quite the same way. Nor should they. Whether offered from an internal or external perspective, executive coaching assumes a special bond between coach and client that is genuine and well defined. It is a human partnership aimed at achieving results by exploring the individuality of you and your client. As a result, exceptional executive coaching goes well beyond just knowing about established coaching practices and techniques. Those coaches who are most successful bring insights about their own identities to the activity, including awareness of their goals, their feelings and their interpersonal styles. They draw on a combination of professional experience, personal characteristics and self-awareness, as well as formal training, to help shape their observations, question, and hypotheses about their clients.

Ideally, your unique combination of knowledge, experience and intuition can be woven together into a pattern that will be both similar to, and different from, other coaches. Having created that pattern you will be better able to describe your services to others, deliver them consistently, and stretch toward handling more complex coaching challenges. This pattern making is the basis for articulating a Personal Model of coaching and it has both immediate practical utility as well as a broader value as foundation for your coaching.

Crafting your Personal Model does not happen in the first weeks of your career as a coach. It takes time, practice, feedback and reflection to pull one together. On the other hand, it is never too early to begin considering elements of your Personal Model of coaching so that it will evolve as you gain experience and reflect on what you are learning.

Especially for anyone new to coaching, shaping a Personal Model of coaching asks a lot of you. Early in a coach's career, there is a tendency to rely on established protocols, techniques, and procedures that others recommend. While this is understandable, it fails to leverage the *whole person* that will show up when you meet with each client. Consciously or not, who you are has a significant impact on your relationships with clients. In effect, creating a Personal Model asks you to reach beyond impersonal descriptions of coaching into your actual coaching experience and catalog what you know and do not know about how you perform as a coach. The sooner you gain insights about what is unique in your applications of coaching processes, the more you will be a thoughtful learner and practitioner.

A Personal Model can be compared to an iceberg: Some aspects of your approach are visible to clients, but a lot of it is under the surface and out of sight. The visible parts cannot exist without the underpinnings and together they make up a unified whole. Carrying the metaphor further the visible parts are likely to be more readily modified by external conditions, while the foundation also needs to be acknowledged so that all contours can be redrawn.

Clients cannot be expected to know what coaching is or how to differentiate coaching from other helping and consulting experiences they may have had. They certainly cannot know what any particular coach will do during an engagement. It is your responsibility to explain what your approach includes and what it does not. Coaches can more effectively do that when they have invested the time and energy to articulate their own Personal Models.

The importance of creating a Personal Model rests on a core belief that *there is no one best way to coach*; coaches, clients, and contexts are all involved in designing the process. Learning to coach must be an active pursuit to internalizing, not just absorbing, wisdom about coaching. A Personal Model describes what you are trying to do with your clients, how you believe coaching works to create insight and change, and what you *feel* is relevant to bring to the coaching relationship, as a human being and as a professional. This foundation allows you maximum flexibility to tailor your approach to the challenges of any particular case.

In this book, the concept of a Personal Model of coaching is comprised of six key components shown in Figure 1-1, that define who you are as a coach. Three of the components are *inputs* to your thinking that emerge in answer to the following broad questions:

1. What characteristics of whom you are as a person may be relevant to executive coaching?
2. What sensibilities and skills do you bring to work in organizational contexts?
3. What concepts and practices in executive coaching have resonated with you and you would like to adopt?

Your responses to these three input questions are often under the surface and not apparent to clients, but they need to be explored by you in defining the underpinnings of your Personal Model.

Three other components of your Personal Model are called *outputs* because they can be described, discussed with others and used to conduct your coaching activities. They are revealed in formulating ideas and answers to these questions:

1. What are the elements of your preferred approach to delivering coaching services?
2. How do you intend to promote your coaching practice and secure more experience as a coach?
3. What skills and abilities need to be further developed by you in order to continue growing as a coach?

The inputs to a Personal Model may seem fixed, but in fact they do change since reflection simulates clearer self-observations so that new self-insights emerge. Even more dynamic are the outputs. They are works-in-progress that continue benefit from adjustment and updating as your client experience, learning, reflection and preferences build.

This book is intended to support that process by providing a structure for your model, illustrations of coaching content, and examples of coaching cases. You can use the questions outlined in this chapter to help you capture your reflections about first two inputs in a learning journal. As you go through this book, you can also record impressions, ideas, questions and other reactions the coaching content in chapters in Part II. Doing so will prepare you to assemble your coaching model, guided by Part III, Chapters 21 through 23, which explore the three output areas of creating a Personal Model of coaching.

Input 1-Yourself: What Do You Bring to Executive Coaching as a Person and as a Professional?

Coaching is a *whole-person* activity. You bring your various talents and life experiences to our assignments. Although not everything in your life story is relevant to coaching, it is important to identify and acknowledge those aspects of yourself that may have an impact on your coaching practice and on your client relationships. Your personality, formative life experiences, career history, interpersonal style, interests, notions of success, skills and talents may all influence your approach to coaching.

Consider the following questions in reflecting on this input area to your coaching model:

1. How might your early history, family of origin, early formative events, role models, personality and characteristics influence your approach to coaching? For example, you might have grown up in a household that shaped your helpfulness, self-reliance, or introversion, all of which would have implications for your coaching.

2. How does your education relate to coaching? How might the contents of your undergraduate, graduate, continuing or professional education and other coursework relate to your practice as a coach? What notions about personality, motivation, leadership and business that you learned in school have application to coaching?
3. In what ways has your career brought you to coaching? Internships, part-time jobs, full-time employment or any work experiences that may have a direct or indirect connection to coaching. For example, you may have worked as a leadership development consultant and been exposed to concepts and models relevant to coaching.
4. What are your assumptions about adult health and growth? Consider courses, books, mentors and theories about adult development that resonate for you and are likely to apply to your work with managers and executives in coaching relationships. For example, you may have found that emotional intelligence or cognitive-behavioral concepts appeal to you.
5. How might your own personal priorities about what is important in life, values that guide your interpersonal dealings and the principles you aspire to in your interactions influence your approach to coaching? For example, if work/life balance and connection to family are priorities for you they are likely to shape the topics that you emphasize with clients.
6. What is your *growing edge* as a person? How are you leveraging strengths, targeting areas for learning, identifying biases and blind spots and addressing personal skill gaps? Consider the connection between your own areas of personal growth—such as being more assertive or being better organized—and coaching. What are the ways that coaching as a practice may align with areas you have targeted for personal growth?

Input 2-Yourself in Organizational Settings: What Sensibilities and Skills Do You Bring to Work in Organizational Contexts?

Executive coaching almost always occurs in organizational settings. Each coach has had different experiences in organizations. Whether employee, manager, consultant, advisor, senior leader, board member, or coach, you have had experiences that are likely to influence how you interact with coaching sponsors and others in organizations. For those readers who have done some executive coaching, either internally or externally, your prior contact with the organizations in which you have coached is especially relevant to your Personal Model.

Related to how you function in organizational contexts, these questions are relevant to your coaching:

1. Since executive coaching benefits both individuals and organizations, what is your motivation to do such work? What experiences within organizations have you had that indicate the usefulness of coaching? How motivated are you by the organizational and individual outcomes of coaching?
2. What are your feelings about business and other types of organizations in which you may be coaching? What preferences do you have for the type of organizations you may coach in? What if those preferences cannot be fully followed in your coaching work?
3. What do you know about the ways in which individual coaching objectives tie into organizational expectations? How should the connection be managed between business or organizational goals and individual growth objectives that you help your clients articulate?
4. How do you respond to authority and organizational hierarchy? Your client's work world will probably have levels and structure-up, down, and across the organization. It will be regimented to some degree with reporting lines, processes and cycles. What has been your experience in dealing with structure, formal authority, power, organizational politics, teams and leadership?
5. What has been your experience in dealing with human resource professionals and other staff groups in organizations? What prior experiences and assumptions about HR staff will you bring to those interactions? How do you feel about their oversight as they screen clients and coaches and monitor coaching engagements?
6. What is your approach dealing with those managers and leaders who sponsor coaching and make decisions about funding it? How comfortable are you in interacting with the sponsors of your coaching work at the same time that you maintain your closest tie to the person you are coaching?

Input 3- Coaching Practices and Content: What Have You Learned About Coaching That You Will Apply?

The third input to your Personal Model prompts you to consider your preferences about coaching practices, theoretical underpinnings, emerging coaching topics,, research questions and other coaching content areas. While there is a large amount of published material on executive coaching each coach will find certain topics and ideas more compelling and relevant than others.

The content chapters in Part II of this book discuss a number of these topics. Here you will find concrete and practical descriptions of foundational concepts that tap into theories about behavior; contextual considerations in working within

organizations; leadership challenges and approaches to building productive relationships with clients.

If you are an experienced coach, you may want to select specific chapters of particular interest to you or relevance to your practice. Whether your jump to specific content chapters or read them in sequence, you will probably find that the relevance of certain chapters changes with your coaching practice and clients. Going back and forth in reflecting on the first two inputs to your model and becoming familiar with coaching practices may be a productive way to begin to describe the foundations of your Personal Model.

We encourage you to capture your responses to this material in a journal, both to activate your learning and to prepare yourself to pull relevant ideas and practices into your own Personal Model. Consider these questions as you delve into coaching topics:

1. What are your reactions to the practices described in each content chapter in Part II? What is engaging and may be applicable to your work as a coach? What is appealing but would need to be tried before deciding on its value? Which practices do *not* seem to be useful?
2. What surprises did you have as you read about the practices described in each chapter? In what ways do these practices differ from the coaching that you might have already done? How might you explore those differences to determine if they should be part of your Personal Model?
3. What is your reaction to the coaching cases and supervisors' observations presented in Part II? What subtle practice points are highlighted in the cases? What does the supervisor bring out that may be especially relevant for your coaching?
4. What topics that are not covered in the content chapter but are allied to coaching—such as counseling, individual assessment, action learning and organizational change—do you want to explore?

At some point we hope you will feel the need to pull your inputs together to provide a basis for your Personal Model outputs. Detailed descriptions of how to populate those outputs are discussed in the final chapters in Part III of this book. To provide a preview, however, they are described briefly here.

The first *output* to your Personal Model, explored in Chapter 21, is the broadest. It taps insights and inclinations from all three input categories, asking you to weave them into a description of your approach to coaching. Your ability to articulate an engaging definition of coaching enables you to answer the predictable question, “What’s your approach to coaching?” More importantly, it requires that you be

knowledgeable about your coaching process, practice boundaries, interpersonal presence and other factors that are likely to define you in your coaching roles. These considerations and others provide an essential backdrop to productive conversations with clients and sponsors.

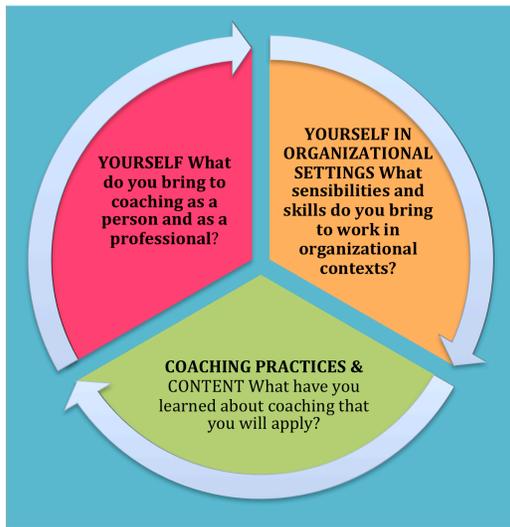
The second *output*, which is detailed in Chapter 22, explores the promotional and business aspects of coaching. It is your *practice plan*. Because executive coaching is usually done on the basis of contracts with organizations, it is valuable to know how to manage our coaching as a business partner. A successful coaching practice has a structure, marketing plan, materials, references and professional affiliations. This second Personal Model output provides guidance about these matters so that you can successfully promote and deliver the coaching that you want to do.

Chapter 23 covers the third *output*, which is an active *development plan* for your role as coach. Just as your clients, you need to be an involved adult learner, committed to your professional growth and constantly curious about alternative approaches and new ideas. Coaching has many roots and branches for you to explore. Some of those will require further study, courses and guidance from more experienced coaches, case supervision and other learning interventions.

Your Personal Model of coaching is both a concept and a roadmap. This book and our teaching philosophy are based on the importance of connecting who you are as a person and how you conduct yourself as a coach. There are no universally useful techniques, so having the broadest possible foundation for your coaching work is the best preparation you can have. A Personal Model is a concrete plan for how to operationalize these points. Reflecting on the three inputs and then extrapolating them into the three outputs brings impressive depth and breadth to your role as a coach. As you read subsequent sections of this book, the Personal Model framework is used frequently to guide your learning and help you become an exceptional executive coach.

Personal Model Inputs and Outputs

INPUTS



OUTPUTS

