

The Coaching Practitioner

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Abstract: Coaching practice is well established, but many who are new to the practice of coaching may not yet understand how coaching can achieve a dramatic effect on personal, team, and organizational performance. In the organizational setting, there is a growing practice of developing coaching skills for managers to be able to align individual employees with the organizational strategy and release high performance.

This article offers practical advice for managers on how to develop their coaching skills alongside an emphasis upon performance management. This article aims to support managers in taking the role of the coaching practitioner building upon the necessary understanding and coaching skill base required to enable managers to effectively engage with their direct reports in the workplace.

Keywords: Adult Learning, Coaching, Challenging Dialogue, High Performance, Transformative Learning



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INTRODUCTION

In the digital economy it might seem strange that there is an increasing demand for the very human practice of coaching. Technology has been a contributing factor to a seemingly endless stream of access to and demand for fast information. How the human mind manages to process the hundreds of e-mails and messages that require an immediate response on a daily basis is perhaps a mystery for neuroscience to solve. What is clear is that the level of complexity that most individuals need to deal with to get their job done has resulted in a situation where they are struggling to match their understanding with the challenges that they are being faced with. However, as we work through sifting the data, managing the task demands, and responding to information requests, there is a realization that technology cannot replace the one thing workers need—space, time, and conversation to make sense of all “this stuff.”

Adult Learning

Lifelong learning has become a bit of a buzz phrase since the start of the millennium, but despite its overuse, lifelong learning is an essential tenet of adult learning in the modern world, and more importantly provides the

framework under which coaching sits. Experience is a central component of both lifelong learning and coaching practice. It's not about returning to the classroom and being taught by a lecturer, although that may contribute to lifelong learning, instead coaching is about enabling and transformational learning through dialogue, and the focus is on the coachee's own experiences and knowledge. Coaching is a tool that enables the coachee to build their own capability, come to their own conclusion, reveal their own thinking and achieve their goals, but this process requires the individual to have a growth mindset, open to constant inquiry and an interest in the opportunity of learning throughout their lifetime.

The coach is an instrument of change; a conduit through which an individual will examine the different worlds in which they orbit, reducing the complexity and confusion until there is one best version of the possibility for potential of self to be achieved. It clarifies for the coachee how that self, in relationship with others, can healthily interact with the world as it has been interpreted. The coach therefore has a huge responsibility in regard to acting in and in accordance with a professional capacity. They must be supportive without colluding with the coachee; challenging without damaging the coachee's emotional state; up to date on best practice, but practice authentically and attention must be paid to both their role and the art of coaching to deliver outcomes for the client. Exploring the depths of an individual's knowing to discover the wisdom of knowing what they don't know is part of the journey that the coach must travel with the coachee. The important aspect of this journey of course is that it is continually moving forward, cocreating new opportunities for the coachee to investigate and invest in the new possibilities arising.

Coaching versus Mentoring and the Coaching Practitioner

Coaching and mentoring are very often linked together, fused if you like in the

minds of both practitioners and clients. But coaching and mentoring are two very distinct practices. There is no single agreed definition in literature of what coaching is, although most definitions refer to adult learning, development, performance improvement, goal focus, collaborative interventions, and supportive processes.

Behavioral change is at the center of coaching practice. It's not just about changing minds, addressing feelings, or adding new knowledge or skills, although these can all be positive outputs of a coaching process. Coaching creates the conditions in which the coachee can change himself or herself. The output of robust dialogue moves the coachee outside of their normal patterns of thinking and response cues and is both adaptive and generative. Coaching therefore is about effecting personal change.

Coaching is essentially an interpersonal practice, which enables people to create meaning, developing the maturity of their thinking and taking responsibility in what has happened and what comes next. It can direct people to live a life of purposeful endeavor. As such it requires both parties—the coach and the coachee—to be willing participants who are committed to and engaged in the process.

For the purposes of this article the activity of Coaching is referring to a specific interpersonal short- to medium-term dialogic intervention, which examines underlying assumptions that lead the coachee to make particular choices and changes to their behavior in a particular way. The coach enables the coachee to confront areas they would normally avoid exploring, taking them outside of their psychological and emotional comfort zone while maintaining confidence and security.

Coaching, however, does not occur in a vacuum but is instead an interaction of different contexts in which the coach, coachee, and supervisor exist. That context, the larger system, can play havoc with the personal truth of the individual system throwing it off balance and into a tailspin.

The influences from the external context can have a lasting impression on the individual's internal apex. Dialogue and relationship are the keys to the coach-coachee interaction, but also the keys to human interaction in the world at large. We make sense of the world according to who we are in relationship with, and how we talk about the world we are in. Coaching therefore is a systemic method, which, through examination of the individual's thinking, has an impact on the wider system of which the individual is part. This means when the coaching practitioner is working with a client within an organizational setting, they are changing not only the individual but also the organizational network for whom the coachee works.

This systemic basis of coaching has led to an increased interest in training managers in the workplace as coaches, or the development of a coaching style of management. While the acknowledgement that coaching is a key skill for people management is a healthy development, the normalization of coaching as a management skill has watered down the technical aspects of coaching practice, diminishing the skills and attributes required of the coaching practitioner. For many managers, all too brief training courses give carte blanche to mess with people's heads, and bad coaching skills increase the negative reputation of coaching as an effective intervention. Good coaching skills are impactful and contribute to self-efficacy. Bad coaching skills are at best ineffective and at worst destructive.

This article builds upon the necessary understanding and coaching skills base required to enable coaching practitioners to effectively engage with their coaches in a workplace setting. It is by no means comprehensive, nor a replacement for the proper study of coaching but provides a signpost to where individuals who are serious about coaching practice can begin their investigation in becoming a truly effective coaching practitioner.

Summary

- There is a realization that technology cannot replace the one thing workers need—space, time, and conversation to make sense of the modern workplace.
- Coaching is about enabling and transformational learning through dialogue, and the focus is on the coachee's own experiences and knowledge.
- Coaching is essentially an interpersonal practice, which enables people to create meaning, developing the maturity of their thinking and taking responsibility in what has happened and what comes next.
- Dialogue and relationship are the key to the coach-coachee interaction.
- Bad coaching skills are at best ineffective and at worst destructive.

HOW COACHING EFFECTS PERFORMANCE

There are many terms associated with different types of coaching: performance, developmental, life, and transformative. It's not clear whether these distinctions are particularly useful to the coaching practitioner other than perhaps to inform their own personal coaching philosophy and focus of their coaching practice. The distinctions, therefore, are perhaps a focus on the coach rather than the coachee who should always be at the center of any coaching practice. What is clear is regardless of the model, coaching technique, or coaching process, the output must first and foremost be focused on the outcomes for and of the client. It is the coachee's performance, development, life, and transformation and as such the focus on improved client outcomes that must be the golden thread upon which coaching practice must hang.

It is possible for coaching to achieve a dramatic effect upon personal, team, and organizational performance because quite simply, coaching influences individuals on several different levels at once. The first level consists of a façade, a public face if you like, of whom coachees think they should be, what their best of version of themselves is. This façade is built using a number of

artifacts including their choice of clothing, job title, and the accoutrements of their social position. The second level relates to the way in which the individual chooses to behave in any given situation. Exploring an individual's behavior in areas such as conflict, mistakes, pressure, and relationships leads to a deep examination of emotional and motivational roots, beliefs, attitudes and values which manifest in the coachee behavior in any given situation. These roots provide a framework of assumptions and habits through which an individual perceives any given situation. In order for coaching to effect an individual's performance, the coach must enable the coachee to develop a self-awareness of the framework in which they are operating and through that analysis begin breaking the frame through which they perceive and evaluate each experience. As the old adage of not putting new wine in old wine-skins goes the same is true of new learning not fitting into old frameworks. Coaching therefore is not effective if it consists of the coach providing the coachee with solutions to their problems; it only becomes effective when the coachee studies direct experiences in order to learn from it. Furthermore, it must be the coachee who processes their experiences, discovers their patterns of behavior, and develops possible ways forward for themselves.

Transformative Learning (Mezirow)

The frameworks through which we perceive our experience are often developed in childhood through to adulthood as a result of an individual's experiences, upbringing, socialization, and the culture of the society in which the individual lives. Mezirow (1991) described these deep-seated frameworks as meaning perspectives that become less flexible and more fixed over time. Mezirow (1991, pp. 5–6) identified two domains that form an individual's frame of reference: Habits of mind, described as "broad, abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking, feeling and acting

influenced by assumptions"; and points of view, which constitute "belief, value judgment, attitude and feeling that shapes a particular interpretation."

Mezirow offered a theory of adult learning called Transformative Learning, which is derived from communication. Based on Habermas' communicative theory, Mezirow (1991) describes two domains of learning process:

1. **Instrumental learning**, whereby an individual learns by doing tasks, problem solving, and making a connection between cause and effect relationships.
2. **Communicative learning**, which is based upon learning what is meant by the way in which people communicate, especially through more abstract concepts such as love, which can have different meanings depending on context.

An essential part of Transformative Learning is reflection. Transformative Learning occurs when an individual reflects upon their existing meaning perspectives, identifying underlying assumptions and presuppositions to understand the source of meaning schemes. Meaning perspectives can be transformed by analyzing meaning derived from a situation and taking time to revise existing meaning structures. Coaching sessions provide a forum in which meaning schemes and interpretations of experiences can be examined through dialogue to identify expectations, influences, behaviors, and viewpoints.

Gestalt Experience Cycle

Gestalt is a German word, which translates as an organized whole and is defined as "An organised whole that is perceived as more than the sum of its parts (Zinker, 1978)." The Gestalt energy cycle is a model based upon the interaction between individual self and the environment, and helps to explain where an individual is knocked off balance due to disturbances along the boundary between self and the environment. The primary focus of a Gestalt perspective to coaching is that self-awareness is the catalyst of change.

Zinker (1978) described seven stages in the experience cycle:

1. **Sensation:** A disturbing factor, which arouses consciousness.
2. **Awareness:** Conceptualizing the demand made or the need, which requires attention.
3. **Mobilization of Energy:** The development of an image of reality of a future state in response to the awareness and a commitment of resources to the response.
4. **Acting:** Taking action to move forward from the current state toward creating the compelling future state.
5. **Contact:** Implementation of the planned actions and the creation of change through contact with the disturbing factor and action.
6. **Resolution/Withdrawal:** Decreasing tension through the gratification of need or demand. Return to a state of balance.
7. **New Impulse:** Illumination of what has just happened, creating acknowledgment of new impulses.

The role of gestalt in coaching is to enable the individual coachee to make sense of situations that occur, by noticing what they have observed and examining what they believe. These experiences are examined with the coach to develop concepts and ideas to explain what has happened in order to make sense of it. The coachee can create meaning from an experience by consciously developing a mental picture of what is happening in regard to the people involved; the place in which it is taking place; the opportunities that have and are being created; conversations that have, or need to, happen; and the situation the coachee finds themselves. The coachee can then choose to act upon their new awareness to develop the connections required to create a positive impact and drive a way forward.

Therefore, it is not just what happens in the coaching session that is important. In many ways that coaching session is simply a catalyst for the change that happens to the individual as a result of the coaching conversation.

Dealing with transitions

Coaching that affects performance and the individual on a personal level, therefore, requires the coach to support an individual as they explore their self and learn from that self-reflection. It is as much about dealing with transitions as it is about solving a problem or creating an opportunity. Too often individuals become misaligned with a situation as their ability to move forward is hampered by an inability to change their mental structures and process the change required of them. At this point their performance stagnates. Managing through the pressure of a transition is the moment where the ordinary becomes extraordinary. Individuals who respond to a situation, and are willing to explore, examine, probe, and assess are more likely, and able to, move forward and improve their potential. Without reflection an individual will continue to rely on habitual responses and reaction, failing to adjust to new realities or learn from new experiences. But transitions are difficult, and often intense both emotionally and mentally. Exploring, through dialogue what might be going on for the individual, perhaps what the situation reminds them of, and acknowledging their reactions, patterns, and thinking, and taking note of their feelings provides a setting for a step change in performance.

Performance changes when individuals mobilize and adapt in response to an experience, but in doing so they take responsibility for their part, positive or negative, in the situation and stop blaming others. It is at this point that individuals grow, develop, understand, and fulfill their potential.

Summary

- The coachee who should always be at the center of any coaching practice.
- Coaching influences individuals on several different levels at once.
- Emotional and motivational roots, beliefs, attitudes and values provide a framework of assumptions and habits through which an individual perceives any given situation.

- Coaching only becomes effective when the coachee studies direct experiences in order to learn from them.
- Transformative learning occurs when an individual reflects upon their existing meaning perspectives, identifying underlying assumptions and presuppositions to understand the source of meaning schemes.
- The role of gestalt in coaching is to enable the individual coachee to make sense of situations that occur, by noticing what they have observed and examining what they believe.
- Performance changes when individuals mobilize and adapt in response to an experience.

DEVELOPING COACHING SKILLS

It is always strange to find coaches who do not engage in learning and development for themselves; after all if a development practitioner does not role model the very practices that they wish to offer to their clients, it begs the question whether they are fit to practice. It is therefore an imperative that the coaching practitioner seeks to continuously develop themselves, learn about their profession and increase their self-awareness.

Quite often individuals leave senior leadership or management positions to become executive coaches, when in fact their skill set is more suited to mentoring or consulting. They are competent in diagnosing problems and providing solutions but know little of psychology, learning, or people development. Developing coaching skills requires a continuous development of a tripartite of skills, knowledge, and self-awareness.

The start point for any coaching practitioner is the commitment to the continuous development of their own self-awareness, reflection upon their own meaning perspectives, and examination of their own competencies, capability and capacity to be a developer of people. As discussed previously, Transformative Learning requires the individual to assess and revise their existing meaning perspectives, and this is as

true for the coach as it is for their clients. These principles are core to the development of coaching skills, and to the growth of the practitioner as a professional coach.

Supervision

Supervision is essential to ensure that the coach remains on track with their personal and professional development. Hawkins and Smith (2010: p. 143) state that “supervision is one of the main integrating processes for ongoing personal and professional development of coaches. . . .” As an unregulated profession, coaching is still vulnerable to those who work in a manner that brings disrepute to the practice. If any one can give himself or herself a title of coach and establish a coaching practice, there is no pressure to engage in supervisory practice; it is therefore down to the coach’s professional integrity to commit to personal development and supervisory discipline as a part of a client-coach system.

Supervised sessions provide the coach with a process by which they can get a perspective of a fellow practitioner who understands the coaching process but is outside the client system. The supervisor provides feedback and professional support to the coach, aimed at improving the coach’s effectiveness, and contributing to the direction for continued professional development.

Developing Skills and Knowledge

Training and education in coaching theory and practice is recommended, developing both knowledge and skill. The basic skills that a coaching practitioner requires include:

- **Rapport Building:** The development of mutual trust and establishing good relationships with the coachee.
- **Effective Communication Skills:** A combination of nonverbal and verbal communication cues, assertiveness, capacity to impact, convey authority, be in the moment, and manage personal emotional cues.
- **Listening Skills:** Being attentive, open, and actively giving the speaker room to speak freely.

- **Questioning Skills:** Asking pertinent, probing, and facilitative questions to help the coachee develop better quality answers.
- **Providing Feedback:** Constructively providing observation about coachee reaction, performance for the basis of improvement.
- **Empathy:** The ability to understand the feelings shared by the coachee.
- **Emotional Intelligence:** A capacity to be aware of, control, and express personal emotions when working in an interpersonal interaction.

Learning basic coaching skills and techniques through experiential learning, preferably with plenty of opportunity for individuals to practice and be given feedback for improvement from their tutors is one part of the equation. Understanding why those skills work, when to employ what techniques and to be able to appreciate how the coachee is responding to the coaching conversation come from understanding coaching theory. The coach educating themselves on the theory and research is a lifetime commitment. Psychology and learning theories and research are constantly being revised, updated, and added to. There is no end to the education of a coaching practitioner, or the discovery of new knowledge to add to the coaching toolbox. Key coaching theories to begin this journey include:

- **Multi-Dimensional Executive Coaching** (Orenstein, 2007): Reviews multiple forces affecting the client, including individual and the organization, unconscious forces, multilevel forces, and the use of self.
- **Adult Transformational Learning** (Mezirow, 1997): Focused on how learners construct meaning structures, and how these are developed and understood through reflection.
- **Emotional Intelligence** (Salovey and Mayer, 1990): Developing an awareness, control, and capability to express emotion and manage relationships.
- **Gestalt Theory** (Von Ehrenfels, 1937; Wertheimer, 1938): Examining how the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

- **Cognitive Behavior Theory** (Meichenbaum, 1977): Talking therapy to change the way an individual thinks and behaves.
- **Positive Psychology** (Seligman, 1998): The scientific study of individuals' strengths to enable them to achieve a fulfilled life.
- **Developmental Psychology** (Baltes, Reese and Lipsitt, 1980): A scientific examination of how nature and nurture impact personal development.
- **The Psychodynamic View** (Jung, 1928): The importance of the unconscious on emotional and motivational forces and behavior.
- **The Behavioral Approach** (Watson, 1930): Since human behavior is learned, it is possible to unlearn behavior.
- **The Person-Centered Approach** (Rogers, 1959): Developing a psychological environment that enables a person to find fulfillment of their personal potential.
- **Theory of Clean Language** (Grove, 2008): Using language that is cleaned, as far as possible, of the coach's own references, while incorporating some or all of the coachee's phrases.

Schön (1983) distinguished between two types of reflection: reflection-in-action, which relies on intuitive knowing and reacting to action as it is happening, and reflection-on-action, which focuses on reflection after the action has taken place. Coaching professionals can use a retrospective process of reflection-on-action to examine their current coaching practice, the way in which the client tackled a problem or situation, and on prior experience and understanding (Roessger, 2014; Schön, 1983). Through this reflective process it is possible for professionals to consider how they used their theoretical knowledge and consider how this contributed to the consequences of decisions made by the coachee during the coaching session. The coach can then reflect upon actions taken and change their meaning perspectives based upon the experience. For reflection-on-action to be effective, individuals must be intentional about their learning, must choose to take notice of their action and choice of skill

and techniques employed and had personal involvement with the experience on which they wish to reflect. Finally, for there to be a benefit from reflection, it must be linked to action (Boud and Walker, 1991) in that the coach will choose to adapt their coaching practice as a result of their reflection-on-action.

Following initial training, the coach should engage a supervisor to create a bridge between their training and reflective practice. If a coach lacks experience, their reflection will be limited as they are unlikely to be able to fully integrate knowledge, skills, and practice with the experience of a coaching situation. Also, while in the moment of the coaching session it is difficult to notice habits of mind and points of view, which may be adversely impacting the learning process of the coachee. A supervisor has the advantage of being able to concentrate on the coach and recognize areas of development and progression required to improve the competence of the coaching practitioner.

Summary

- Supervision is essential to ensure that the coach remains on track with their personal and professional development.
- Developing coaching skills requires a continuous development of a tripartite of skills, knowledge, and self-awareness.
- Coaches should commit to the continuous development of their own self-awareness and reflection upon their own meaning perspectives.
- Basic coaching skills and techniques should be developed through experiential learning, preferably with plenty of opportunity for practice.
- The coach educating themselves on the theory and research is a lifetime commitment because psychology and learning theories and research are constantly being revised, updated, and added to.
- For reflection-on-action to be effective, individuals must be intentional about their learning.

- The coach should engage a supervisor to create a bridge between their training and reflective practice.

ALIGNING EMPLOYEES TO ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY

The majority of coaching happens within the workplace setting and many of the transitions that individuals go through are as a result of organizational changes. This may be because of organizational change programs, the introduction of new organizational structures or changes in the individual's role. The key outcome for the individual is that they are able to add value to the organizational strategy, integrate with the organizational culture, and contribute to organizational processes (Hawkins and Smith, 2010).

In a stable environment it is relatively easy for individuals to understand what is expected of them. Their job responsibilities are clear, and the tasks, which need completing, have established processes and procedures for deadlines to be hit. Unfortunately, organizations are rarely stable. The reality of the twenty-first century organizational environment is in constant flux and change. The periods of change and uncertainty are becoming more regular, last longer, and are more intense, and in this context the line of sight for the individual to align to the organizational strategy is limited.

Often organizational leaders will attempt to push change to the operational levels with edicts of what change needs to happen. There is often a substantial disconnect between the vision that the senior leadership have of the organizational future, and the communication of the required change, leading to confusion and uncertainty about what is happening and why. Working on the premise that everyone wants to do a good job, it is disappointing that modern organizations are filled with teams and individuals who are frustrated, looking for someone to blame, constructing a them-and-us dichotomy, suffering from a misalignment of values, and limited to short-term thinking.

Furthermore, individuals are often placed in job roles, which are inappropriate for their competency level. Peter and Hull (1969) offered the Peter Principle as a theory of management, which explains why individuals are promoted to a higher position, based on their performance in their current role, and will continue to be promoted until they fail. In short, individuals are promoted to their level of incompetence. Top-down change and inappropriate promotions can lead individuals to fail, or for their performance to dip considerably. When this situation occurs at management level, and with previous high performers, it is usual at this point that an organization will bring a coach in to “fix” the problem—or rather fix the person.

The role of the coach in this situation is not to fix the person. Instead, the function of the coach is to support the individual as they navigate the uncertainty of shifting sands, and develop a productive connection between what the organization is trying to achieve, and the personal and developmental goals of the individual. Purposeful endeavor is the prime outcome of strategic alignment, resulting in the coachee having complete clarity over their aspirations for their career within the organization, and how their personal success will contribute to organization success. This includes a review of the coachee strengths, capabilities, capacity, and most significantly the unused or underused potential that could be made available to the organization. Challenging the individual to consider their current behaviors, assumptions, and thinking regarding what they can contribute encourages the coachee to clarify the changes they can make to improve their performance. Coaching sessions can be used to consider what development opportunities are open to the individual and establishing a strategic plan for the coachee’s future career options.

The key to successfully aligning the coachee to the organizational strategy is to help them to recognize their role in helping

to achieve the organization’s success and to actively engage in connecting what they do with what the organization is trying to achieve.

The Goal-Setting Questions Model

The GROW coaching model (Whitmore, 2010) is one of the most well-known coaching models available to the coaching practitioner. The GROW model guides the coaching conversation through four stages:

- **Goal**—What is it that the coachee is trying to achieve?
- **Reality**—What is happening now? What is the current situation?
- **Options**—What options are available to the coachee to bridge the gap between current state and future desired state?
- **What next?**—Commitments made by the coachee to particular actions.

Gribben (2016: pp. 88–89) describes the process of goal-setting questions to provide a framework for the development of motivation and commitment using key questions at each stage of the GROW model.

- Stage 1—**Direction**: “What is it exactly that you want to achieve?”
- Stage 2—**Motivation**: “What is the reason for this goal, its value, the benefits and opportunities it brings. . .?”
- Stage 3—**Influence**: “What are all the ways, the options, the strategies, the plans, the ideas and considerations for achieving the goal?”
- Stage 4—**Commitment**: “By When?”

Significant time should be taken at the first stage, establishing purpose and direction. Until a specific direction of travel has been established, the coachee risks drifting in both their day-to-day job tasks and in the achievement of future ambitions. During the second stage the coachee should be supported in developing their understanding of how their purpose aligns with the organizational strategy and the benefit that the achievement of the individual goal will contribute to the organizational success. As Gribben (2016: p. 85) states, “Individuals who set goals are easily distinguished from

others by their level of motivation and sense of purpose in what they do. . . . Those who do not set goals can only drift in the hope that they will end up somewhere better.”

Summary

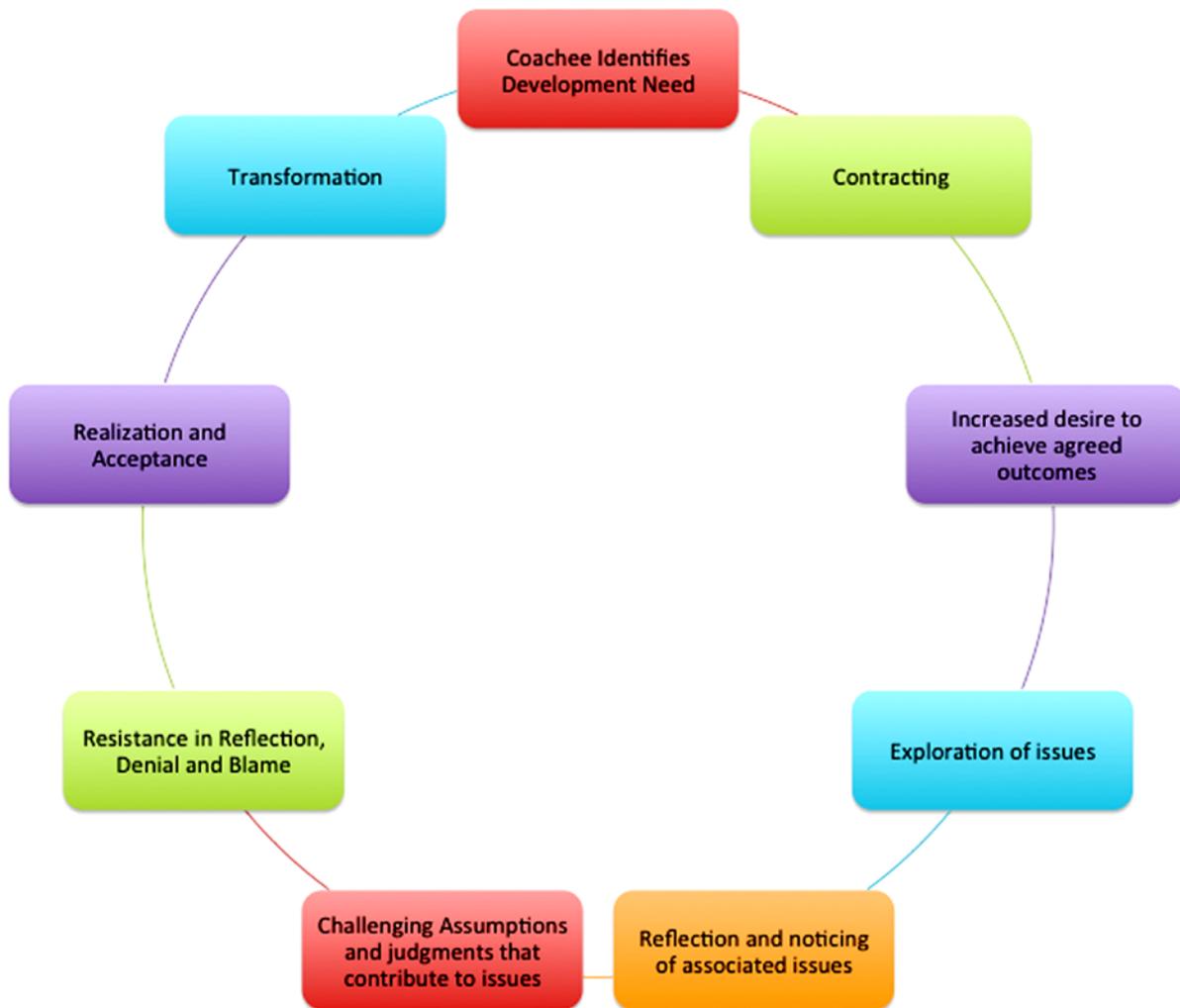
- The key outcome for the individual being coached is that they are able to add value to the organizational strategy.
- The reality of the twenty-first century organizational environment is in constant flux and change in this context, the line of sight for the individual to align to the organizational strategy is limited.
- There is often a substantial disconnect between the vision that the senior leadership have of the organizational future, and the communication of the required change.

- Individuals are often promoted to their level of incompetence.
- Purposeful endeavor is the prime outcome of strategic alignment, resulting in the coachee having complete clarity over how their personal success will contribute to organizational success.

RELATIONSHIP FIRST

A coach may enter an organization or coaching arrangement when the coachee identifies a development need (see Figure 1), or has, with the support of their line manager, been invited to take part in a development program, which includes a coaching element. The key concern for the coach at this stage is the establishment of a productive relationship. All learning and

Figure 1: Coaching to Release High Performance



development is dependent on relationship. The coaching relationship is particularly important, because it is essential to progress. A good coaching relationship is an alliance between the coach and coachee, which is based upon mutually agreed expectations, based upon what sort of style of coaching the coachee most wants, and on which of the possible areas of focus that they wish the coach to concentrate on.

The contracting phase of the coaching relationship is essential in setting the expectations upon which the coaching relationship will be founded. It is useful to explore conscious expectations, fears, and hopes in regard to what a successful coaching relationship will look like and what the coachee's concerns and aspirations are in regard to what will or will not be explored during the coaching conversations. A good coaching relationship has its foundations in an established framework agreement and established rules, and continues to build upon growing trust, respect, and goodwill between coach and coachee. The framework agreement should be recorded and shared between coach and coachee.

Once the contracting phase has been completed, the emphasis is on engaging the coachee in the process and increasing their desire to achieve agreed outcomes, using the goal-setting questions model discussed in aligning to organizational strategy or similar techniques. Encouraging motivation and commitment to both the coaching process and the expressed outcome is essential to ensure that the coaching process remains dynamic and does not wane or stagnate. Listening skills are essential at this stage to ensure that the coachee feels like there is an increased level of understanding between coach and coachee. The ability to ask open and inquiring questions is also important to help the individual consider possible futures and the direction that they wish to travel in.

As motivation to engage with the process, and seek a way to move forward, increases the possibility to explore real-time

issues that are barriers both to progress on reaching the stated outcome and to achieving day-to-day deadlines and tasks. As trust increases in the coaching relationship, the coachee will feel more able to open up to their coach about their feelings about a situation or work relationships. The coach must continue to remain in a state of enquiry to ensure that it is the coachee finding their own answers to issues they are discussing in the coaching conversation. At the beginning of the coaching relationship the coachee may rely on offloading of their problems, shifting the blame to others, and standing back from taking personal responsibility for their issues. As the coaching relationship develops, the exploration of issues will progress to become centered on the coachee's accountability and responsibility in a given situation.

With a strong productive coaching relationship the coachee can progress towards to the reflection and noticing of related issues stage. The coach and coachee will begin to observe patterns of behavior highlighted by self-reporting of issues by the coachee. This is the stage where challenging dialogue is used more frequently. This style of coaching is the beginning of the transformation stage and where coaching can have a significant impact and an intent for the coachee to do and be different. The acknowledgement of related issues is where light bulb moments happen in a coaching session, where the coachee realizes that they've seen this before, been there before, and can choose to be different this time.

As admission and acceptance increases, it is possible for coaches to work with the coachee at a deeper level challenging assumptions and judgments that contribute to issues. This is a rich phase of the coaching relationship, and relies on robust dialogue, trust, and compassion. It's hard to explore these areas, and expert skill is required on behalf of the coach in enabling the coachee to navigate through this phase. At this point, as the reality of facing up to thinking and behavior that they had supposed to be right,

the coachee may hesitate and withdraw. Not everyone wants to “go there” and may choose to regress into simple exploration of issues. As a coach you can only ever explore areas that the coachee is willing to examine. The coach is not in control of the agenda, the coachee is, and this phase may be achieved in the space of a couple of sessions; it may take months to get there, or it might never be achieved. Through robust dialogue and facilitative questioning, the coach may uncover reality gaps, observe that the coaching discussion is circling the same issues, and experience the coachee becoming stuck with an apparent no-win polarity. However, the more the coach tries to shift the coachee, the more the coachee may retreat into previous modes of thinking, seek out information that proves they are right in order to maintain their cognitive consistency in the situation (Festinger, 1957).

The individual choosing to change dissonant elements relating to attitude, behavior, or belief, a meaning perspective shift, can reduce cognitive dissonance. However, resistance to reflection, denial, and blame complicates this. Very often, a coaching relationship can be progressing successfully, with positive outcomes for the coachee and improved performance back in the workplace. However, when the coaching conversations begin to transition to the deeper levels of learning, or way of being (see *The Coaching Experience*), it will appear that the relationship has regressed or become awkward. It is the job of the coach to hold fast and support the coachee during the transition by reframing and changing the experienced situational viewpoint to another frame, which “fits the ‘facts’ of the same concrete situation equally well or even better, and thereby changing its entire meaning” (Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch, 1974). Examples of reframing questions that can be used to help the coachee move forward include:

- ***“I don’t know where to start with this project.”***
 - What one small step might you take?

- ***“I don’t have enough time to do [action].”***
 - What can you stop doing in order to make time?
 - ***“I don’t want to deal with this situation, it makes me unhappy.”***
 - What one small action can you work on now, that might leave you feeling happier about the situation?
 - ***“I have never been any good at [area]”***
 - If you imagined yourself to be successful in [this area] how would that look?
 - ***“I always fail at everything I do.”***
 - Have there been a time when you have succeeded in the past. If so, what did you do then that made you successful? How might you use this approach in this situation?
 - ***“My line manager/colleague said that I was not very good at [area of weakness].”***
 - What strengths do you have, that could be used in this situation?
 - ***“I’ve always been a [liability]”***
 - How might being [characteristic that the coachee sees as a liability] help you in your job role?
 - ***“I’ve tried [action], and it didn’t work.”***
 - What part of [the action] did work? What different things could you do this time?
 - ***“My manager just isn’t interested in being involved.”***
 - I wonder what barriers might exist that might prevent your manager from becoming involved?
 - ***“My colleague is just doing that to get attention.”***
 - I wonder what your colleague might need from you in this situation? What do you need to do to understand them better?
- Successful reframing will enable the coachee to move forward to realization and acceptance of the need to shift their thinking, adjust their feelings, or change their behavior. This stage requires the coach to be supportive and encourage the coachee to begin to do things differently. Often they will try something new and will fall back into old habits and behavior patterns. Suspending judgment and being curious about the change process itself and being

appropriately optimistic when the coachee notices when they fail as well as when they succeed will enable the coachee to transition into transformation and the achievement of their coaching outcomes.

Coaching is a process of continuous improvement, so once an outcome has been achieved, the coaching cycle begins again as another development need is identified by the coachee. This of course may be limited by budgets and the length of a coaching program supported by the organization.

Ethics

If the coaching practitioner is submitting to work in a professional capacity, then ethics will be at the heart of their practice. Perhaps the key principle to keep in mind is that the coach should act with integrity and compassion, work for the good of their coachee, maintain confidentiality, and be aware that there is a fine line between coaching and individuals who might require intensive therapeutic support. A number of coaching bodies exist, all of which have their own codes of ethics:

- European and Mentoring Coaching Council and Association of Coaching: http://www.emccouncil.org/webimages/EMCC/Global_Code_of_Ethics.pdf
- International Coach Federation: <http://coachfederation.org/about/ethics.aspx?ItemNumber=854>
- International Association for Coaching: <https://certifiedcoach.org/about/ethics/>
- International Association of Coaches, Therapists and Mentors: <http://iactm.org/code-of-ethics/>

Summary

- The key concern for the coach entering an organization or being employed by a coaching client is the establishment of a productive relationship.
- A good coaching relationship is an alliance between the coach and coachee.
- The contracting phase establishes a framework agreement and established rules between the coach and coachee.

- Increased desire to achieve agreed outcomes ensures that the coaching process remains dynamic and does not wane.
- Exploration of issues allows the coachee to open up to their coach about their feelings about a situation or work relationships.
- Reflection and noticing of associated issues requires the coach and coachee to observe patterns of behavior that are occurring in the issues being raised by the coachee.
- Challenging assumptions and judgments that contributes to issues is a rich phase of the coaching relationship, and relies on trust and compassion.
- Resistance in reflection, denial, and blame may occur as the coachee attempts to maintain their cognitive consistency.
- Realization and acceptance can be achieved by supporting the coachee to reframe the experienced situational viewpoint to another frame.
- Transformation occurs when the coachee succeeds in changing their meaning perspective and transition to achieve their coaching outcomes.
- If the coaching practitioner is submitting to work in a professional capacity, then ethics will be at the heart of their practice.

THE COACHING EXPERIENCE

When it comes to coaching in an organizational setting, the emphasis has been on releasing high performance and in many ways coaching *is* a performance management process. Programs such as developing line managers to be coaches often support this form of performance coaching.

This is the first level of coaching and contributes to improved efficiency and effectiveness in managing tasks and development relating to real-time work issues. Specifically, performance coaching is focused on the following elements:

- **Thinking:** Developing the intellectual capacity of the individual to analyze issues and solve problems including improving their knowledge regarding their role in managing themselves and others.

- **Relational:** Focusing on developing healthy relationships with a variety of people significant to the success in role including managing communication and conflict when it arises.
- **Action:** Cultivating an awareness of the skills and capability resource available and developing the capacity to apply capabilities appropriately, including improving decision-making, planning, and scanning the environment for challenges and opportunities.

There are two assumptions that dominate coaching practice in regard to the coachee. The first assumption is that the coachee does not require fixing and the second assumption is that the coachee already has the answers to all their issues. Both of these are useful assumptions when coaching for alignment to organizational strategy and for performance and are described as horizontal (Weiss, 2004) in that they support the coachee in developing the performance for their current role, in their current context. But for transformational coaching, a deeper level of coaching is required.

Nested Levels Coaching Model

New Ventures West (Weiss, 2004) developed a coaching model that not only acknowledges the horizontal level of coaching but also offers several vertical levels. Three levels are presented:

1. **What—Doing:** This level enables the coachee to be more efficient at accomplishing tasks and delivering performance improvement in their current role.
2. **How—Learning:** At the learning level, the coachee actively reflects about self, develops self-awareness, and addresses blind spots. At this level the coaching learns to self-manage their internal capacity and develop their competence for how to do what they are doing better. Key elements of the coaching conversation at this level include reflect, review, and gain new knowledge from experience.
3. **Who—The Way of Being:** The Way of Being level explores new knowledge regarding who the coachee is and the world as they understand it. The emergence of self-knowledge is as a result of exploring thinking, feeling, and behavior both in terms of who the coachee is now, and who the coachee wishes to become.

20 “Doing” Level Coaching Questions

1. What outcome would you like out of this conversation?
2. What would you like to happen that is not happening now?
3. What is happening now?
4. What things are going well/badly in this situation?
5. How much personal control/influence do you have in this situation?
6. What have you done about this so far?
7. What results did that produce?
8. What are you holding back?
9. What could you do to change the situation?
10. What other factors (personal or organizational) are relevant?
11. Who is/needs to be involved?
12. What actions have you used, or seen used by others in similar circumstances?
13. Which option is most appealing?
14. What option(s) are you going to choose to act upon?
15. To what extent does this help you meet your objectives?
16. What are the key milestones on achieving this option?
17. What support do you need, and from whom?
18. What makes you hesitate to commit to this action?
19. How will you know when you have succeeded?
20. Is there anything else you want to talk about?

20 “Learning” Level Coaching Questions

1. How are you doing?
2. What did you accomplish?
3. What are you doing?

4. What has happened?
 5. Have you solved problems like this before?
 6. Is this giving you energy or draining your energy?
 7. What did you learn?
 8. What are you feeling?
 9. Who did you serve through your choices?
 10. What will make the biggest difference?
 11. What is really going on?
 12. Is this a limitation or a strength?
 13. What is/isn't working?
 14. What needs to change?
 15. Are you acting on faith or fear?
 16. If you weren't scared, what would you do?
 17. How does your style of learning impact on how you do what you do?
 18. What do you need to learn in order to improve thinking about this situation/relationship?
 19. What do you need to learn in order to improve behavior in this particular situation?
 20. What do you need to learn in order to improve how you feel about this situation/person?
14. How do you be all who you are?
 15. Why does this matter?
 16. What needs to change for you to fully become who you want to be?
 17. How could you transform your life if you changed this right now?
 18. If you don't change this, what will the cost be to you in the long run?
 19. If you were you most courageous self, how could your life change?
 20. How will you choose to transform your life with this new knowledge?

The coachee's experience of the coaching conversation is therefore dependent on what level the coach is targeting. A transformational experience is possible, but it requires a deeper level of questioning to facilitate the reflective process and move beyond simple performance coaching. This can be difficult depending on the contracting agreement that is in place. Some individuals may wish to maintain their coaching experience to simply improve their performance. There may be no desire on behalf of the coachee to explore who they are, or who they may be becoming. This may be less rewarding for the coaching practitioner in terms of their own practice, but must be respected in regard to delivering the outcomes that the coachee requires.

The coach must also be aware that the coaching experience doesn't begin and end in the coaching session. On the one hand there is the conversation that takes place between the coach and the coachee, but what happens after the coaching session is also as important as to the level in which the coachee is affected. The coach may be asking questions at the doing level, but if the coachee chooses to reflect, or has conversations with colleagues, friends, and family, what happens between coaching sessions may be at the learning or being level. A question such as "What would you like to happen, that might not be happening now?" may begin as a conversation about a task issue or opportunity and lead

20 "Way of Being" Coaching Questions

1. How have you grown this week?
2. What outcome would bring you lasting fulfillment?
3. What ding can you make in the universe/ what legacy do you wish to leave?
4. What does this mean to you?
5. Who else will benefit?
6. If you chose to be, what could you be happy?
7. When did you begin thinking about this?
8. What rules do you have that are getting in the way of you being everything that you could be?
9. If you changed your belief about this, what would be possible?
10. What's preventing you from taking action?
11. Are you angry or are you hurt?
12. What do you need to understand and acknowledge about yourself to be the best you can be?
13. Who are you?

to the coachee acknowledging that there is a deeper need that isn't being fulfilled that they may choose to discuss with the coach at their next coaching session or reflect on in their own time. Beginning a coaching session by reviewing what has happened since the last coaching conversation is an effective way in which to assert whether the coachee has reflected on what has happened since the last session.

Asking questions that resonate with the coachee and stick with them long after the coaching conversation has concluded is perhaps one of the key ingredients to an impactful coaching experience, but it is as reliant on the coachee being in a time and place where such questions can cause reflective practice as it is on the skill of the coach. Some coachees may continue to operate at the doing level for many months before their resistance to learning is overcome and a richer coaching relationship can begin. Transformational coaching is more likely to happen when the coaching practitioner is working at a system level, working with individuals, teams, and the organization as a whole. For coaching practitioners who wish to be impactful, the ideal is that all coaching would operate at a transformational level, but as previously stated, the client must choose the outcome of a coaching session. If they chose to operate only on a task performance level, and their task performance improves, then the coaching can be considered to be successful.

Summary

- In many ways coaching *is* a performance management process.
- Performance coaching contributes to improved efficiency and effectiveness in managing tasks and development relating to real-time work issues.
- There are two assumptions that dominate coaching practice in regard to the coachee: the coachee does not require fixing; and the coachee already has the answers to all their issues.

- The Nested Levels coaching model acknowledges the horizontal and vertical levels of coaching including Doing, Learning, and Being.
- A transformational coaching experience requires a deeper level of questioning to facilitate the reflective process and move beyond simple performance coaching.
- There may be no desire on behalf of the coachee to explore who they are, or who they may be becoming.
- The coaching experience doesn't begin and end in the coaching session.

CHALLENGING DIALOGUE

Coaching is often seen as a soft profession, the touchy feely, aren't we all being nice to each other's profession, but transformational coaching is anything but touchy feeling. It can be a painful and difficult process for the coachee as they tackle change head on, and engage in robust dialogue and supportive challenge with their coach. Stepping into an emerging future means stepping into the unknown; in doing so, the coachee might discover things they may not like about themselves or their life. They may have to face up to some realities and cracks in their life that most people actively choose to paper over. Transformational coaching is an intensive exercise aimed at supporting coachees to move beyond simple performance improvement. A holistic, deep-level coaching process requires challenging dialogue from the coach, exploring areas, which are uncomfortable and possibly unpleasant, for the coachee. Blakey and Day (2012) describe challenging coaching as the "loving boot." It must therefore be a mutually agreed commitment to undertake such an approach and involves a high level of provocative questioning from the coach to deliver personal renewal for the coachee. Areas of improvement include:

- Developing self-determination and greater levels of autonomy and efficacy.
- Managing the environmental context to make effective use of personal competence resources and work in alignment with the authentic self.

- Committing to personal growth through the continuous development of self-knowledge, reflective practice, and activities to improve self.
- Increasing emotional intelligence, empathy, and concern for developing personal relationships with others.
- Possessing a positive self-regard, and finding meaning in pursuing a purposeful endeavor.

The U-Process

Scharmer (2009) developed a process of transition called U-Process to explain the stages of perception and change that a coachee progresses through with differing levels of action. Similar to the cycle of grieving offered by Kübler-Ross (1969), the U-Process moves the coachee from a state of anxiety to moving forward, recognizing that change leads the coachee through a multitude of human emotions including fear, guilt, denial, disillusionment, hostility, acceptance, and happiness. The U-Process offers an alternative to one-dimensional coaching processes of plan, act, and do, to draw the coachee into discovering who they really are and developing an awareness of their deepest sense of self in examining their intentions. Scharmer (2009) offers five stages, which involve different levels of action:

1. **Coinitiating:** Requires the coachee to listen and consider what it is that the “world” is calling them to do. This is a decision to pursue something other than what is, in response to what others may say, and opportunities that are appearing on the horizon.
2. **Cosensing:** At this stage the coachee is called to observe and be open to possibilities. It is about opening up both heart and mind to what might be.
3. **Presencing:** At this point in the process the coachee connects with their inner knowing and inspiration. This part of the process requires the coachee to retreat and reflect in order to allow a knowing to emerge. Scharmer (2009) describes this part of the process as the inner gate and threshold. It is the point at which

the coachee casts off the old self and is rebirthed, emerging with different sense of self.

4. **Cocreating:** As the individual emerges with a new inner knowing, they develop interconnections with others and opportunities to try on their new ways of doing, working with the world at large, and integrating self with the new world.
5. **Coevolving:** In the final stage of the U-Process, the coachee acts within the natural flow of the new system, which their newly emerged knowledge and understanding has created.

Any challenge provided by the coach must be constructive and used skillfully if it is to help the coachee reach a level of personal as well as professional transformation. The coach must be confident in approaching tricky areas and have the skill to navigate areas of tension, especially when working on deeper areas of beliefs, values, and personal identity. It is essential that when engaging in coaching on a personal level, the coach is engaged in supervision to ensure that the coaching dialogue remains as coaching and does not err into the area of counseling and therapy. Examining self can be an extremely positive experience for most coachees, and there is a sense of freedom and release as they discover their true authentic self. But there are occasions when skeletons in the closet are exposed that need trained psychological support that goes beyond the skill of even the most expert coach.

Summary

- Stepping into an emerging future means stepping into the unknown; in doing so, the coachee might discover things they may not like about themselves or their life.
- A holistic, deep-level coaching process requires challenging dialogue from the coach.
- The U-Process explains the stages of perception and change that a coachee progresses through with differing levels of action.
- It is essential that in engaging in coaching on a personal level, the coach is engaged in supervision.

CONCLUSION

Coaching is an incredibly rewarding profession, especially when working with a coachee who embraces the process and engages in transformative development. Good coaching has the ability to positively impact not just the coachee, but their team, line manager, and the wider organization. Bad coaching equally has the ability to negatively impact the coachee and their wider organization environment. Coaching has yet to develop itself as a regulated practice in the same way as therapists, psychologists, and other caring professions. It does, however, sit in the gap between organizational learning and development and trained caring and support professions. As a practice it is therefore open to poor practice, which damages its reputation as an intervention.

Good practitioners are humble in their approach, focused on the needs and desired outcomes of the coachee, and can be incredibly impactful not just on job performance but on a coachee's life and future career. As individuals become more attuned to who they really are, more authentic in acting in line with their values and beliefs and develop emotional intelligence, the organization as a whole benefits. It is the difference between a fake and an original. The original offers better quality work, honesty, transparency, influence, and real engagement and commitment from the individual. Being real allows the coach to work within their core values, goals, and beliefs and put real heart into how they approach every aspect of their job role. For managers choosing to become coaching practitioners, this goes beyond simply coaching by managers; this is a decision to engage deeply with coachees to provide a specific interpersonal short- to medium-term dialogic intervention. By examining the underlying assumptions that lead the coachee to make particular choices and changes to their behavior in a particular way, the coaching practitioner can uncover some answers as to why individuals act the way they do, or

do what they do. In the role of coach, practitioners can enable coachees to confront areas they would normally avoid exploring, taking them outside of their psychological and emotional comfort zone while maintaining confidence and security. In doing so they can positively effect individual performance, team performance, and ultimately the bottom-line performance of the organization.

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