

Selecting Coaches for Right Results

Leaders in successful organizations want to produce effective changes and develop their human capital. Coaching has gained not only in popularity, but there is now significant ROI data to show that it is a valid method for producing effective changes. Executives must make the difficult decision of how to select the right coaches for their organization. How to make that decision?

There is no shortage of executive and business coaches available. There are some 65 schools of coach training, several certifying bodies, and no one theory or best practice for delivering coaching services. Apparently, some of the best, highly paid executive coaches have no certification at all and don't belong to any of the professional organizations. To confuse the issue further, the two largest coach certifying organizations have established standards and practices that are not correlated with effective results.

Being a Great Coach is not Enough!

Currently, almost ALL criteria for selecting coaches for organizations is being measured incorrectly. It is being measured from a coaching effectiveness point of view, rather than from a client effectiveness point of view.

Coaching produces no repeatable tangible results by and of itself. In coaching, there is no established link or correlation between what a coach does and what a client can expect regarding results. Yes, the coach may be certified, but there is no proven link between what a coach does in reality and the tangible results gained from coaching interactions.

The problem in choosing the right coaches for your organization lies in putting the focus back on the results you need to achieve in order to be effective in today's business reality. What do you need to see as effective results, and how do you select the right coaches in order to facilitate this effectiveness?



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He is the author of COACH2 The Bottom Line: An Executive Guide to Coaching Performance, Change and Transformation in Organizations and the founder of BCoach Systems, a business and executive coach training system. If you would like more information on creating coaching programs for managers, leaders or executives, we welcome your inquiry for your coaching and development requirements.

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Coaching is what coaching does

The other critical issues are the links between what the coach does and what the client accomplishes as a result of the coach's interaction with the client. I realize that in defining the purpose of life, work, or results, we enter into a significant number of issues outside the premise of this discussion. However this question is central to the discussion.

Should a coach be judged as effective using criteria for coaches or using criteria as determined by the client? The key here is to not lose sight of the link between what coaching does and what the client does as a result.

The Key:

If we are to remain client-focused, the relationship between the "competencies" of the coach can only be assessed as effective if the client is successful or effective.

A Rule:

This would then be a rule of client-focused standards: If the client is not successful or effective, then under no circumstances could the coach be competent -- regardless of whether or not the coach met a particular set of standards.

Caveat:

Coaching is not always the answer! The key issue is that if coaching is to be effective, the client must be effective.

If it is any other way, then the focus is on the wrong element of the situation. Coaching is merely one subset of solutions that might be effective. Without proper matching or problem identification, coaching could not only aggravate but prove inefficient as a solution set -- in some cases, even be harmful to the client.

Keeping client effectiveness as the factor of production is the only way to eliminate inefficient solutions and tighten the link between coaching competence and client effectiveness. In general, we must resist or prevent the focus on attaining competencies not directly causal to client effectiveness from being established as a set of standards for judging a coach's competence. In the minimum, the client must dictate what is effective either through their results or willingness to continue to contract with the coach.

Coaching is about results!

The only clear measure of effectiveness is a correlation between the person's theory in use (behavior) and results that are rewarded and generative, as deemed by both the environment of choice and the nature of all results as effected by this choice. Even in those cases where a clear correlation is established between the client's theory in use (behavior as observed by others) and results that are clearly desirable from all perspectives, what caused the client's theory in use is not always attributable to the external environment (Hawthorne Studies, Mayo).

In business, we don't hire a CFO, a CIO, or CXO of anything unless we show there is a link between their actions and results. So, why would anyone hire a coach if there are no clear linkages between what coaches do and the results that people being coached create?

Measure coaches on the right thing! What if every coach were measured on his or her client's effectiveness as a result of the coaching interactions over time?

Forget about how you get that effectiveness. The underlying theory and practices of coaching effectiveness are that everyone is correct some of the time, and never all the time. There are many paths to the top of the mountain. It will take a variety of coach approaches to achieve client effectiveness in a variety of existential conditions. Therefore it is not a matter of having the right model but paying attention to client effectiveness over time, through a specific set of criteria.

We must take the focus OFF the coach! This won't be easy. While it is a lot easier to define standards for coaching based on a particular philosophy of coaching and/or their certification or training, a coach-focused approach is the danger. NO set of standards will guarantee client effectiveness in all situations. Just as there is no set of accounting standards that will guarantee business success, no insurance policy that will cause business to be profitable, and no recipe that will taste good to everyone. Therefore why not help the client define effectiveness in his or her personal, business, and network domains, and proceed from that basis?

Take one example: What is an effective conversation?

It's different for different people. Coaches need training in their own awareness, meaning-making and order of mind to remain separate from projecting their own meaning-making into the meaning-making system of the client. Effective conversations can only be measured as to their results in creating client effectiveness.

Otherwise, according to definition, they are not effective- even if in fact, they may meet a standard. If we proceed to measure effectiveness from the coaching position as opposed to the client position, we run the risk of creating competencies that don't matter and that are actually inefficient in creating client effectiveness.

Facts?

Until someone establishes a clear link between coaching core competencies or proficiencies and client effectiveness -- predictable, reliable results -- then it is pure speculation that the competencies listed by the largest coach certification organizations, ICF and Coachville, are leading indicators of client effectiveness.

In many cases, client effectiveness is in fact due more to the “Hawthorne Effect” - an effect on performance created as a result of factors not directly related to the reason given for effectiveness - than to anything directly correlated to competence on behalf of the solution provider.

At the time of this writing, Fall 2003, coaching in general is largely done at the executive level in business. It is delivered on such a wide continuum of models that no one theory or set of competencies could possibly describe a singular theory of results or effectiveness. Basically, I think most people operate from the theory that doing something is better than doing nothing. If coaching doesn't work, there is no harm done.

If more coaches were trained to create client effectiveness, rather than to focus on coach effectiveness, someone would have figured this out by now. Clearly, the industry hasn't, and is therefore perpetuating its own blind spots through its theory in use, while espousing a theory of action that is proving ineffective in placing coaches successfully into a skeptical market space!

The current certification theory in use - it's all about the coach - will become the industry's undoing because what it is producing is not linked to the market's needs.

It's not about the process; it's about people and results!

If you can begin to understand the distinction between coaching effectiveness and client effectiveness, you're half-way home. While I am not aware of any research that links a specific method of coaching to personal, business, and organizational results, several pieces of research link the improvement of emotional competency to results. You can find that information here: <http://www.eiconsortium.org>.

Continuing to focus on coaching processes and certifications as a method for choosing the right coaches for your organization is an exercise in futility, designed to pad the pockets of certifying organizations, mentor coaches, and coach training schools.

Disclaimer: Client results are the broadest measure of coaching effectiveness, when judged in a coaching interaction. Let's assume here that results come inside the domain of ethical, legal, and moral boundaries. We've had enough results-oriented leadership lately - which can be deemed clearly ineffective when you apply the measurements of client effectiveness. In my view, creating fewer problems than you solve would limit a significant number of leadership actions from being judged as effective.

Factors in client effectiveness

In a recent discussion, the following factors were mentioned as possible metrics of client effectiveness.

If we are to correlate what a coach does versus what happens as a result, then some of these factors may be important as examples to be used in identifying that correlation.

Identifying factors:

- Distraction rate
- Get-to-do versus have-to-do
- Intent versus results
- Clarity around what's important
- Comfort versus stress
- Greater self-awareness
- Productivity
- Increased growth and profitability
- Alignment with company objectives
- Value-added ratio (time spent)
- Energy and engagement
- Improved retention
- Loyalty

Here is a quick look at another paradigm of effectiveness for comparison, from 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, by Stephen Covey:

1. Be proactive
2. Begin with the end in mind
3. Put first things first
4. Think win/win
5. Seek first to understand, then to be understood
6. Synergize
7. Sharpen the saw

It doesn't matter what the coach does -- only what the client can do as a result.

A Final Word ...

It's not about the coach, it's about you, your organization and your people. What do you have to do to develop your people to be fully present, available, masterful and aware of what is required? Choosing the right coaches requires the right focus: on the results.

Now, just so you know, I train coaches. The developmental system I created is named B\Coach: www.b-coach.com.

I'm pleased with the direction we're moving in our system of promoting client effectiveness. I founded our program on the EI Theory of Performance along with the support of many theories in individual and organizational learning, growth and development. Using the anecdotal experience I've enjoyed throughout my tenure as an independent leader, consultant, and coach to synthesize real world results, I've synthesized a spiral system of development at <http://www.developmentalist.com>.

We're finding a number of our graduates are working as coaches and following a path leading to true client effectiveness. There are still a lot of unanswered questions about getting results. I don't know all the answers. But I have a good idea of where to go to find them-the client-and as many touch points that may be included in the construct of client effectiveness.

I'd be happy to hear your comments on this white paper, as well as any information you feel may provide insights into the issues I've presented. Please email me at: Coach@Leadwise.com.

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To Get the Right Results
under uncertain conditions
in response to discontinuity
to produce the third win
for all the players!

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