

Is There a Right Way to Coach?

The only right way to coach: “Do no harm.” Each person being coached will arrive at their own design of right action in different ways at different times for different reasons doing different things.

RightACTION™ is created when the right people are doing the right things in the right ways at the right time for the right reasons to get the **RightRESULTS.™**

Yet, if you were to ask me, what is the right way to coach someone, I would say to you the right way to coach someone is to be discovered during the coaching, to be improved on in subsequent interactions, and to change over time as the person grows and develops the ways they solve problems. I call this *dynamic inquiry*.

I'd like to say that if anyone tells you that there is a right way to coach people, other than using the ambiguous guidelines I've already set up, you should be wary. What I think most people want is a clear set of instructions of what to do when. I've prepared a diagram for you that may help you know what to do when. But it may not provide you with the answers to the question about the right way to coach. However, after reviewing the diagram, I'll tell you how I feel it helps to remove some of the ambiguity around the question.

What you see in this flow diagram is a way to look at problem solving in a setting where there is goal tension. While there are certainly more steps that can be added, I would like to draw your attention to the



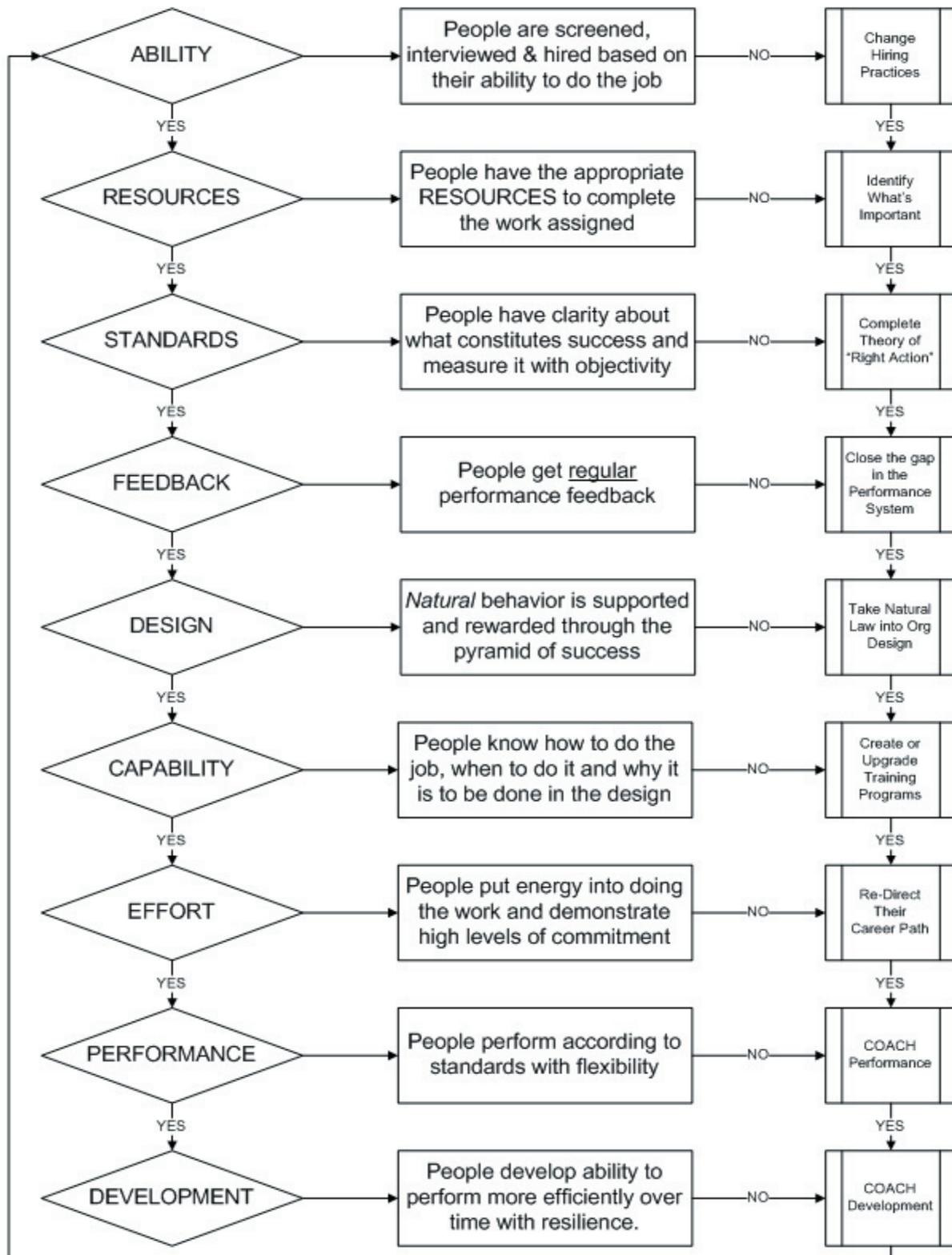
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He is the author of *COACH2 The Bottom Line: An Executive Guide to Coaching Performance, Change and Transformation in Organizations* and the founder of B\Coach Systems, a business and executive coach training system.

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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HOW will WHOM lead WHO to do WHAT WHERE WHEN and WHY?



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two areas where coaching is an efficient intervention in the two lower right hand boxes in the diagram. Until you get to there, coaching—unless it is done to promote efficiency and effectiveness in the remaining boxes—is probably not the most efficient solution.

Unfortunately, most coaches don't think or feel this way when they go about coaching. In most cases, it is because they have come to coaching from other disciplines which involve solving problems through therapeutic and/or consulting approaches.

Is There Any Right Way to Coach?

In the beginning or the end, there is no right way to coach. There is:

1. Choosing to use coaching when it is appropriate
2. Being clear about the model you practice
3. Establishing a clear scope of work
4. Engaging with PAAR (power, accountability, authority and responsibility identified in the system)
5. Showing up, paying attention and being present with yourself and the client while you're engaged in coaching right action.

A Caveat: Client Effectiveness

Coaching evaluated through *client effectiveness* is more efficient in my opinion. Some will argue that you can't have client effectiveness without coaching effectiveness, but I would point them to the Hawthorne Studies done at Western Electric by Alton Mayo (See My Dec/Jan Newsletter at www.b-coach.com/news.)

Often, coaching is described with a focus on the coach, rather than on *client results*. It is clear to me in more than 16 years of practice that no *one* set of coaching standards is effective all the time—in the current environment, even less so.

Coaching has not been shown to be quantifiable any more so than leadership, except through the *results* achieved. Therefore, rather than focusing on profligating a set of common standards, we should construct and promote a process whereby coaches can be selected by clients effectively—promoting high probabilities of success.

Sample Coach Selection Questions

Here are some questions to use in selecting a coach. If you review the “what to do when” diagram above,

it can help you understand when coaching may be most efficient. Coaching will almost always be most efficient after everything else in the chart is occurring effectively. Then, if you answer the following questions when you select a coach, there's a better than average chance the coach you select will be the right choice.

1. Who have been and are your current clients?

By beginning with this question, most potential coaches are required to get experience in some other way than with you as the current client, or at least you know you are their first—which should not dissuade you— but you need to know if the person doesn't have a lot of experience. In those cases where you approach clients in a particular area where you have no experience, in my view, the discussion should begin with: “I have no prior or current experience coaching in this area.” This doesn't automatically disqualify the person from the strategic conversation that might follow, but it does alert the potential client to the lack of experience in this area.

2. What kinds of results have your previous clients achieved?

In this case, the focus is on the area of results. This certainly doesn't mean that you could duplicate these results with this client. There is a great deal of evidence that methods used by one person or organization can be transferred successfully across clients. Yet, the key is to describe the results, which can align the coach selection with what the client is trying to achieve. In some cases this is an effective way of “credentialing” the intervention. At least, the client knows that this person has success in an area of importance to the client and we don't get induction errors by stating, “because I had success in leadership development, I will have the same success in sales or operations, or enterprise budgeting.”

3. Where have you worked in an organization and where were those organizations located?

This is a two-tiered question and important. Someone working at the unit level in an organization is different than someone working at the enterprise level. While certain aspects of the two areas are certainly transferable, depending on how the client defines coaching, it could be vastly different.

Another concern is the actual location where a person has worked in coaching. Many executive coaching assignments require expertise in global operations, or particular areas of operation culturally, some being Latin America, Asia, Europe, and so forth. Attempting to use experience in one area as transferable to another area can present real challenges. An additional concern is whether the experience is based largely on male or female clients. In many cases, coaches tend to specialize and be referred among gender and this is important to discuss ahead of time.

4. How do the client and the coach define coaching?

How a practitioner defines their practice or model of intervention is essential in selecting a coach. Since there are so many practices and so many models being used across a wide range of interventions, it becomes critical that the client be informed about what model(s) the practitioner uses in their work.

In some cases, the client will want a specific type of coaching, possibly consultative, leadership, team-based, project-based, personal, EAP, personality-based, organizationally-based, etc. because they have identified a specific area or reason for intervention. Matching what the client identifies as important and what the coach does is another way to increase the probability of success.

5. Why do you think coaching is the most efficient solution here?

In this question, we open up *strategic discussions* around who knows what about coaching and who is making the decision about coaching. In order to answer the question, we often have to employ *a scope of work* to define the issues as they relate to the most efficient solution. In many cases today, I see very expensive executive coaching being used when an effective trainer or leadership development program would get more mileage.

If even the minimal amount of work is done prior to coach selection in terms of identifying the issues and the solutions that will most efficiently resolve those issues, the probability of coaching success rises dramatically.

6. When is the most ideal time to begin the work and how long should the work last?

Timing is everything and everything in time. Clearly pre- and post-coaching metrics linked to business metrics are desirable. The relationship to time is critically important to identify the pace, duration and frequency of the coaching. Who they are in the organization and when they will be involved is an essential part of the process of linking space and time with the work to be done, as well as the achievement of results to be accomplished. When we look at executive coaching, or for that matter any form of coaching, the process over time is a critical part of the success system.

What Works ...

These are not all the questions that need to be asked, but to create high levels of *client effectiveness*, I believe these questions are among the essential. You'll notice that the focus is on the "*strategic conversation*" that emerges from this inquiry and not so much a paradigm of coaching standards. While coaching standards are important in some cases, they are more important for classifying coaches than they are for assuring client effectiveness.

Is there a right way to coach? In the end or the beginning, the answer is the same. *Do no harm.*

What is clear is that we standardize the conversations and let strategy guide the selection process. Then whoever becomes the coach of choice has the highest probability of success under due diligence. There is a high degree of resilience in the match between what's important and the most efficient way to coach. Coaching to morally, ethically and legally achieve what's important becomes the right way to coach, when no harm is done.



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Competence, Well-Being and RESULTS!**

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