

# Coaching with Style: Effective Coaching Head First

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A few years ago I had hired a consultant to work with my team on some key issues. We weren't making much progress and I asked him what he recommended. He replied: "You need coaching, you all need coaching." When I dug deeper to elicit the strategic reasons, goals, process and "fit" of the actual coaches involved, it was clear that these issues had not been thought through well enough to merit launching a coaching initiative. But how do we identify the 'missing pieces' in coaching?

With a recent Hay Study finding that 25-40% of Fortune 500 companies now are using executive coaching, we run the risk of seeing coaching as the "end-all be-all" to all ills. Since coaching inevitably involves people, and all people have brains, it is useful to look at our own "operating system", the brain, as a way to diagnose effective coaching. Our experience has shown that in order to truly be truly effective, an organization needs to use a whole-brained approach to manage a coaching program.

If you look up coaching in the dictionary, you will discover that the original meaning of coach, from several hundred years ago, was a *means of transportation*—a way to get from point A to point B. It was then broadened to include sports, performing and tutoring. The dictionary does not include the definition of today's "new coaching" that has emerged in the marketplace: life coaches, team coaches, peer coaches, executive coaches, culture coaches, etc. The original meaning is still quite relevant - coaching *should always be* a means to get from point A to point B! Those objectives can range from achieving improved **performance**, better **processes**, helping **people** grow, and opening the door to many new **possibilities**-the four P's of coaching. What is the best system to ensure that happens?

A key resource we use to get from point A to B is our own 'operating systems', our brains. The metaphoric whole brain model, based on 25 years of research, provides a useful approach to clarify and understand how our own operating system works. The whole brain model goes beyond a simplistic left brain/ right brain approach to include four distinct approaches to our thinking.

To honor the “upper left” mode of our brain, we need to start with the goals and objectives we want to accomplish with the coaching initiative. Key questions to consider are:

Upper Left Quadrant A: What are we doing this for?

- What is the purpose of this initiative?
- Have we analyzed the needs well enough to determine that coaching is the right answer?
- Who is the client? The coachee, the organization or both?
- What is the focus of the coaching process?
- How will we measure the performance outcomes?
- What specific goals do we want to achieve on an individual and organizational level?

Our left mode also needs to define the “how”, the process we will use to achieve those goals. Marian Thier, author of Coaching C.L.U.E.S., explains that a successful coaching practice requires a schedule and structure for each appointment, a review of each session, assignments to practice between sessions and focus--no multi-tasking during the session. These elements align perfectly with the lower left part of the whole brain model, which needs to address the following:

Lower Left Quadrant B: How will we do this?

- How can we define our agreement/contract, and how we will proceed?
- How can the coachee be held accountable for changes they need to make?
- What specific expectations can we set that will provide structure to this process? What is our timeline?
- What will be our guidelines and policy regarding ethics and confidentiality?
- How can we stay on track against articulated goals, respect our session schedule, plan for practice between sessions and ensure follow-through occurs in a timely fashion?
- How do we monitor quality assurance?

A study by the Council on Leadership has shown that fit between coach and coachee is a critical factor in coaching success. When the fit is wrong, the coaching relationship will suffer and trust will not be built. An interesting example of that phenomenon is a mentoring program that used the HBDI (Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument) to match individuals with similar brain dominance profiles

as mentor and mentee. **They found that the “fit” and trust was so immediate that out of 700 pairs, only 2 did not “stick”.** Karlin Sloan, a master trainer of coaches, suggests the use assessments to help the coach and coachee better understand each other, improve communication and build rapport and trust. Good fit does not require similar brain dominance or preferences; however, both the coach and coachee must be very aware of their preferences and values to stay clear of landmines that can interfere with the integrity of their process. The lower right quadrant of the whole brain model addresses this critical issue of relationship between coach and coachee:

#### Lower Right Quadrant C: How do we build an effective relationship?

- How do we determine if we have the right fit? In what ways are we similar and different? How can that enhance or detract from the coaching relationship?
- How do we maintain the right balance between personal and professional goals?
- How do we develop great rapport and yet keep it very professional?
- How do we build enough trust to get the “real” work done and address tough issues?
- How do we keep communication open and effective?
- How can we honor each other’s values and differences?

Marian Their’s research concludes that coaching without understanding the context of the coachee *does not work*. Coaches must have an awareness of a coachee’s real-life context. Understanding the coachee and learning about their environment both provide context, which is a more right brain process involving the lower right quadrant C (understanding) and the upper right quadrant D (context) explored below. Coaching cannot happen in a vacuum! Integration and alignment with the context, leadership, training and vision of the individual and organization is essential to move the coaching experience beyond a temporary “fix”. The last portion of the whole brain model addresses those key questions:

#### Upper Right Quadrant D) How does this all fit into the big picture?

- How does this align with the strategy and development initiatives in the organization, assessment data available, the goals for the department etc.

- What behaviors in the coachee's day-to-day work life need to be observed and discussed?
- How does this initiative fit with the coachee's personal vision and objectives for growth?
- How can both coach and coachee have the freedom to experiment to find the right tools and processes, yet stay on track?
- How can we make this process fun and creative so we both grow with it?
- How do we look for patterns that may reveal important issues to address?
- What coaching model will we use to provide a conceptual framework?

A whole brain approach ensures that all essential elements are addressed in the coaching process. Franklin University has built a very innovative coaching program for their MBA students which uses the whole brain model to ensure all needs are met along the way. **They have found that if any one quadrant overlooked, it is likely that those issues will need to be addressed later wasting time and energy along the way.**

Set up your coaching with the brain in mind. With proper planning and all quadrants tackled, coaching can demonstrate that it provides improved **Performance** (A), is a **Process** that drives action (B), helps **People** grow and develop (C) and opens the door to new **Possibilities** (D).