

The Coaching Conundrum: A Tale of Two Clients

Executive Summary

Executive coaching has often been used to put the kibosh on executives behaving badly. That is, to remedy damaging behaviors demonstrated by those who wittingly or unwittingly use their institutional authority in ways that significantly diminish their personal effectiveness and/or the effectiveness of people who report to them, work beside them, or otherwise depend on them. In other cases, business coaching is designed to expand horizons for high-potential leaders being groomed to assume increased responsibilities. Whether remedial or developmental in nature, executive coaching has traditionally focused on the individual as he improves his behaviors toward others or she adds to her leadership skill set.

Executive coaches have, by design and often by nature, created a safe and trusting environment in which coaching client and coach can address the issues and, hopefully, the coaching client will discover pathways to improved behavior. Seldom, however, has the coach or the coaching client treated the organization sponsoring the coaching as a co-client, equal to the coaching client in importance. Yet, whether powerful executives are behaving badly or high-potential leaders are not receiving the guidance they need for personal and professional growth, the organizations sponsoring the coaching suffer. When organizations suffer, the suffering cascades to a variety of constituency groups including peers, employees, employee's families, customers, and the community at large. What might appear to an isolated issue concerning one individual is nearly always the tip of an iceberg that threatens to damage or even sink the entire organization.

Failure to correct or correctly prepare leaders can mean lost opportunities, lost profits, lost benefits, lost jobs, and whatever good things customers and the community at large derive from the organization's goods and services. Anything, such as coaching, that helps managers and executives make better decisions is worth the investment; whether that means rebooting the way managers or executives think and/or helping them learn more productive habits, skills, and activities. To make this so, any coaching engagement must be conducted in the context of the organization.

The Conundrum

Who, then, is the coaching client? Is it the individual or small team receiving the coaching or is it the organization that is paying for the engagement? Re-read the opening paragraphs of this summary and note how many times the individual manager or executive's fortunes are tied directly to the fortunes of the organization and vice versa. This symbiotic relationship, this interdependence between the organization and the individual members of its organizational population demands that the needs of the organization be considered in every dimension of a coaching engagement and vice versa. To ensure a successful outcome from coaching, executive coaches must align what individual leaders can do best with what the organization needs most.

Conundrum solved. The tale of two clients unfolds. In a marriage counseling scenario, neither partner is the client. The *relationship* between them is the client. So it is with business coaching. Among the highest values a coach can bring to a coaching engagement is to find the place where the best interests of those being coached and the best interests of the organization converge and are being mutually served.

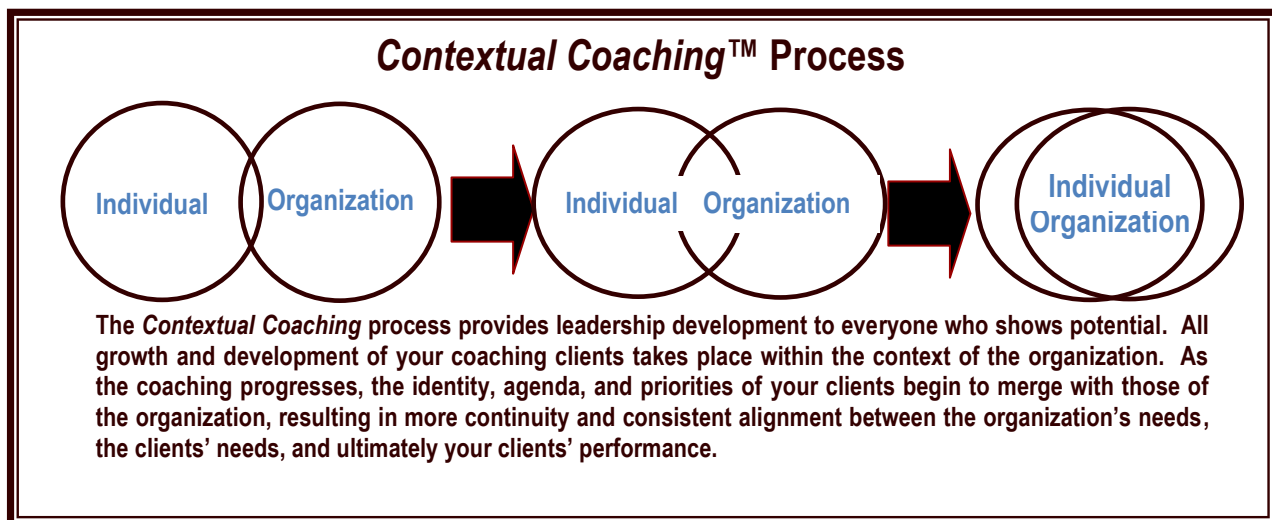
Thinking in the New Context

The diagram below illustrates how the individual and the organization are considered separate at first, but begin to merge as the coaching process progresses. Ultimately, if the coaching is successful, the individual's and the organization's interests become one—or as blended as humanly possible. A well-coached employee who has experienced such convergence will say, "...`tis a far, far better thing I do to consider the organization's needs as much as my own."

To paraphrase and spin John F. Kennedy in his inaugural address of January 1961, “Employees, ask not what your organization can do for you--and organizations, ask not what your employees can do for you. Instead, ask, “What can we do for each other?” Look no farther than a commonly-held definition of organizational culture to discover why the organization functions the way it does. Organizational culture is the driving, guiding—often unspoken—force that defines how an organization conducts business, treats its internal and external customers, and positions itself in the marketplace. Organizational culture is also defined as the shared beliefs, values, and behaviors that inform the real organizational environment and the real organizational conduct behind the rhetoric.

If espoused organizational goals and objectives are consistently aligned with organizational culture, an organization has a reasonable chance at achieving those goals and objectives. If organizational goals and objectives are at cross purposes with the shared beliefs, values, and behaviors are consistently aligned with organizational culture, the best efforts to act in spite of the culture or in ways contrary to the true culture are likely to produce entropy as the organization grinds to a halt (productivity-wise) in its own inertia. The *AMA/Institute for Corporate Productivity Corporate Culture Survey 2008*, commissioned and published by the American Management Association, concluded, among other things, that organizations with cultures that considered the individual needs of their employees tended to prosper more than those that did not.

At the bottom line, you cannot coach a culture. But you can coach the individuals who create and sustain a culture. And, as a result, both individual and organization can, and should, win.



The Benefits of Using the Contextual Coaching™ Model

Although you work or will be working individually with your coaching clients or coaching a small team, the Contextual Coaching model is a true organizational process. We developed Contextual Coaching to be a comprehensive way to expand traditional executive coaching into an organization development process based on alignment. Using a systems approach, Contextual Coaching produces simultaneous growth and development opportunities for the organization and the executive. Your individual clients’ contexts of your client remain a fundamental aspect of the coaching engagement and drive the developmental process for the individuals while, at the same time, enhancing your clients’ roles in the broader growth and development of the organization.

This dual focus means that you, as a coach or a manager who coaches, will address multiple contexts that affect your client’s unique situation as well as aligning the coaching process with the strategies, cultural imperatives, talent management systems, and competency requirements of the entire organization. As a contextual coach, you will map the coaching process to a changing

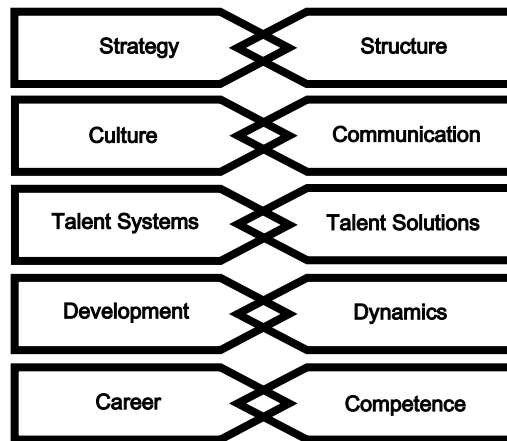
organizational landscape, complete with enterprise-wide strategic agendas and individual issues; revealing how each one compliments the other.

One of the greatest challenges when coaching is the complexity involved in having two customers who need to be satisfied through one process. The coaching process remains an individual development process that focuses primarily on the growth of one particular employee. Yet, the organization's expectations need to be satisfied as they have either funded the program or otherwise supported it through their resources.

Great coaches try to manage this process through good stakeholder management. This means establishing and sustaining relationships with their coaching clients' key constituents such as their Human Resources partners and their manager(s) if the latter is not indeed the coach. By clearly expressing expectations of these constituents and checking in with them to ensure the process is tracking with said expectations, the coach is able to manage expectations and provide important communication relative to the coaching success.

The return on investment from these engagements is maximized when both the coaching client and the organization are seen as customers in the process. Because of this, the Contextual Coaching model is well positioned to satisfy both customers and achieve overall success within the engagement. You, like all contextual coaches, will learn to balance the needs of the individual with the requirements of key constituents, including your client's manager (if that is not you), learning and development groups, and Human Resource departments, in each assignment.

The diagram below will be with you for the rest of this book. As we will explain in greater detail in Chapter One and beyond, the ten components of the Contextual Coaching model represent a structured approach to developmental coaching that, once studied, will result in a well-balance coaching client who is aware of, and skilled at addressing, the major areas of complete and comprehensive organizational focus.



The ten components of the Contextual Coaching model shouldn't be thought of as the Ten Commandments of Coaching. They represent architectural knowledge for a well-balanced organizational leader. However, thou shalt be knowledgeable about all ten if thou wants to serve the organization well and help it become an employer-of-choice filled with well-balanced employees-of-choice.

Another Part of the Trend

So far, we have mentioned trends toward blending the benefits of business coaching and the advantages of using it primarily for leadership and performance development, and using it sooner rather than later. This book will teach you the essentials to what we call

Contextual Coaching, which is the underpinning philosophical approach to developmental coaching we present throughout this book for producing well-balanced managers and executives.

We will talk about acting as a coach as well as acting at times as a manager who coaches. You might be coaching someone else's direct reports or you might be coaching your own. Sometimes you might be doing both, depending on your case load. The underlying approach to creating well-balanced coaching clients is the same in any case, although the exact execution might vary slightly from one scenario to the next.

Executive coaching is increasingly popular for all the positive reasons we have mentioned thus far. That's the good news. The bad news is that the use of external coaches remains among the most expensive of all external organizational interventions. Thus the trend to bring the coaching function inside the organization. There are advantages to that as well as disadvantages, upon which we will also elaborate in Chapter One.

For now, suffice to say that business coaching, at least for mid-level managers and possibly people working for them, will be increasingly delivered by people inside the organization. We are especially close to this practice because our firm is called upon to prepare internal candidates to provide coaching services—mostly in FORTUNE 100 and FORTUNE 50 companies as well as major not-for-profits. These coaches are sometimes specially-trained HR professionals. At other times they can be managers or executives who have expressed interest in developing coaching skills, and often have naturally-empathic and advanced emotional intelligence coefficients that help them to help others.

This book is officially a manager's guide because it targets internal coaches and managers who coach. As we mentioned, we will refer to the reader as both. Regardless of the precise distinction, anyone who coaches is engaged in a noble cause—developing and aligning what individuals do best with what their organizations need most—nothing could be more important to the health and well being of an organization and all the constituencies who rely upon the organization's success.

Join the Excitement

Our prediction for you, albeit admittedly biased, is that you will enjoy a rewarding coaching experience if you are new to it or, if you are an experienced coach, you will enjoy it even more as you become a contextual coach. As a coach, in particular a contextual coach, you deal with things that conventional training and development do not deal with. You engage more individual and personal aspects of your clients than a classroom or online instructor can. When people less intimately affiliated with your clients broach a subject that is as potentially sensitive as competence (for example) your clients might shut them out. Improperly or insensitively approached, your clients might disconnect from or push back against even you until you sharpen your coaching skills.

Rewarded behavior is repeated behavior; therefore you want to reward the right behavior through your coaching. That is logical. What makes just as much sense (but we seldom stop to think about) is that inappropriate or non-productive habits and behaviors are also rewarded. Why else would your clients engage in them? People only do things for two reasons: (1) to gain something as a result of the behavior or (2) to avoid something as a result of the behavior.

If your clients become extremely competent at what they do, they might get recognition, a raise, or a promotion. If your clients are hanging onto their jobs by a thread, becoming more competent through your help might mean little more than not getting yelled at, reprimanded, or terminated. The first is intentional behavior, which means intending toward something good. The second example is avoidant behavior, which means doing something to avoid a negative consequence.

If your clients' behaviors have been suspect for a long time, you might need to help them engage in avoidant remediation in the near term. Once you have been able to stabilize their position in the organization, the two of you can refocus on building toward intentional growth and development in the far term. To build the tallest skyscraper in the world, you must begin by excavating a deep hole in the ground. In other words, begin building in the opposite direction. The building needs to be anchored deep in bedrock to have the strength to stand tall. As a coach or a manager who coaches, you must secure a strong foundation before your clients can grow their careers.

Contextual Coaching propels your clients toward reaching their full potential within the context of the organization, as illustrated in the previous diagram. Contextual Coaching forges a stronger partnership between the individual's immediate needs, long-term career strategy, and the organization's immediate needs and long-term success strategy. Contextual Coaching transforms potential individual↔organizational disconnect into a thriving partnership. It transforms dissonance into resonance, contradiction into cultural compatibility, and mutual exclusivity into mutual interest.

When all is said and done, you played a critical role in helping the individual and the organization develop. Hopefully, you did it soon enough to avoid the kind of damage people with institutional authority can do when not grounded in good leadership skills and management science. Certainly, the good you do for your clients and for the organization will have a ripple effect—even so much as a trickle-up effect—on more people than you probably realize. That is how [The Coaching Connection](#) works.

To learn more about Partners International, please visit our current website at www.partners-international.com.

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