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The Second Commandment – Coach With the Art of Alignment


[\(http://www.humantalentnetwork.com/author/jhoover/\)](http://www.humantalentnetwork.com/author/jhoover/)

 by John Hoover (<http://www.humantalentnetwork.com/author/jhoover/>) on January 12, 2015

Countdown to the summit...

This is week two of the ten-week countdown to the Conference Board's 2015 Coaching Summit. The Summit will begin with a pre-conference event on March 9 with the keynotes and breakout sessions on March 10 & 11. On March 10, Dr. John Hoover from Partners in Human Resources International will join Dr. Harris Ginsberg of Pfizer, Dr. Eric Hieger of ADP, and Dr. David DeFilippo of BNY University in discussing *The Next Big Conversation – The Leader and Organization as Co-Clients*. This panel is designed to introduce and discuss the significance of keeping the voice and interests of the organization alive and involved in executive coaching engagements.

For each of the ten weeks leading up to the Conference Board's 2015 Coaching Summit, *Human Talent Network* is featuring one of the Ten Commandments of Contextual Coaching. Last week, *Human Talent Network* featured the first commandment of Contextual Coaching: *Coach in the Context of the Organization*.

(<http://www.humantalentnetwork.com/first-commandment-coach-context-organization/6739/>) Contextual Coaching commandment number two:

Coach with the Art of Alignment

Drilling deeper into the different dimensions of coaching in the context of the organization, the concept of alignment is ever present. Alignment in executive coaching and leadership development in general is more than the absence of chaos, although order is a positive outcome. Alignment, is the intentional and deliberate establishment of purposeful relationships between people, processes, ideas, and resources in order to initiate, accelerate, and sustain desired outcomes.

If executive coaching is intended to align what leaders do best with what organizations need most, the strengths and interests of individuals must be aligned with the vision, purpose, and strategy that have been defined and set up beacons to guide the organization. Alignment is an art more than a science because it is not absolutely and infinitely replicable. The strengths and interests of leaders shift and drift from season to season, with states of life, changes in roles and responsibilities, and the ever-changing state of the industry. Any industry.

The Four Levels of Coaching Motivation

What is eligible for executive coaching? Are the coaching clients (participants, coachees, or however you refer to them) involved (a) voluntarily because they raised their self-selected hands seeking help as they prepare for expanded responsibilities or new roles, and/or workplace challenges? Are the coaching clients (b) enthusiastic and willing participants in action-learning, strategic team alignment, or other group leadership development activities that offer coaching as an enhancement and additional layer of support for the growth and development of the leaders involved?

Are the leaders participating in coaching because (c) it is a requirement for participation in a mandated action learning, strategic team development, or other group leadership development program or, as is the case in some organizations, because participation in individual leadership coaching is required of every leader above a specified level? In the case of motivation for coaching level (c), the motivation for participation in coaching activities runs more to compliance than to enthusiastic engagement. Although compliance might be the entry point motivation at level (c), coaching clients, participants, and/or coaches can become converts and fans of coaching processes, the concept of coaching in general, and coaching relationships.

At the fourth or (d) level of motivation for coaching, the coaching client, participant, or coachee is involuntary, has no interest in receiving coaching, might even feel that coaching is pejorative and/or punitive, and is involved because he or she is compelled to participate by company policy or threat of pending disciplinary action.

Alignment Throughout

Regardless of the level of motivation for participating in coaching activities or the specific structure, length, or design of the coaching engagement, the work the coach and coaching client conduct together must be aligned with the organization's leadership development principles, values, or competencies. In turn, the leadership development agenda must be aligned with the organization's overarching business strategy. "Must be aligned," that is, if the strategic needs of the organization sponsoring (read paying for) the engagement are to be served and the individual's success through coaching is to be defined in the context of the sponsoring organization's culture and global strategic agenda.

The presenting issues for the coaching engagement, regardless of what they are specifically, or where they fall in the four levels of coaching client motivation, become the specific, targeted outcomes of the coaching engagement. The coaching engagement itself (and all coaching engagements across the enterprise) is framed in

the context of the organization’s cultural construct and strategic business agenda. This is the alignment of the micro agenda with the micro agenda.

For coaches, individuals responsible for managing the coaching function in organizations, even coaching clients and other interested stakeholders, the essential question that points back to the need for contextual alignment is, “How is this coaching engagement helping the individual *and* the organization?” That is, in fact, the essential question that should be posed regarding any investment in learning and development—especially expensive leadership development interventions like executive coaching.

How and why is the participation of each person involved in executive coaching helping the individual and the firm? How and why is the coaching process helping the individual and the firm? How and why is this leadership development investment increasing the profitability and/or financial stability and success of the firm?

Organizations perform better and become more profitable and financially viable right after people perform better. People perform better when their best thinking and productivity is enhanced and elevated by well-aligned coaching and leadership development.

Always coach with an eye toward the art of alignment.

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About the Author
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John Hoover, PhD, is a New York Times best-selling author and former executive at The Disney Company and McGraw-Hill. He coaches senior executives and their teams to venture outside of their boxes. By day he is a mild-mannered SVP at Partners International in New York City (partners-international.com), certified by the International Coach Federation, a coaching supervisor certified by the Coaching Supervision Academy, and a former Marriage & Family Therapy intern, licensed by the California Board of Behavioral Sciences. It's all about relationships, if you haven't picked up on that theme. Dr. John's hat trick--executive, coach, and author--is the perfect storm for supervising executive coaches and working as a thinking partner to those developing leadership and talent strategies that align what individuals do best with what their organizations need most. (More relationship stuff.) With more than 12 books to his credit from Amacom, Barnes & Noble Press, Career Press, HarperCollins, John Wiley & Sons, McGraw-Hill, and St. Martin's Press (including the New York Times, Business Week, and Wall Street Journal best-selling "How to Work for an Idiot") Dr. Hoover co-created the Contextual Coaching™ framework at Partners International and teaches fun stuff about managing coaching functions in organizations at Fielding Graduate University.

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