

Best Practices to Create a Coaching Culture in Small to Medium Sized Organizations



A wide range of leaders attend our programs: graduate trained professionals, electricians, health care, human services, environmental community, high tech, entrepreneurs and government. In the beginning, we weren't sure who would invest in developing their leaders for a coaching mindset. Surprisingly the first organization to take the plunge were city fire fighters!

The Deputy Chief attended our first program and immediately sponsored a program for most of his command staff. He saw the potential for his leaders to stop telling others how to solve a problem and start coaching them on how to use their strengths and experience to create solutions and make decisions. The word in the department was that when you walked into a command staff's office you would be "blue cubed" because leaders consulted a small three-dimensional aide that helped leaders remember coaching skills and processes. Firefighters knew that they were expected to engage in addressing their issues and developing themselves.

That was 2011 and the first time we knew leaders who coach could transform an organization. A coaching culture is not an end itself, but a means to an end, creating a culture that engages, empowers and encourages development at all levels.

Organizations with strong coaching cultures report **higher employee engagement and recent revenues above their industry peers**. High-potential employees with access to coaching have the largest engagement increases.¹ **Improved team functioning**, increased employee engagement and increased productivity are the top outcomes of coaching.²

Our experience is with small-medium sized organizations who seek a way to embed coaching in their culture, but whose resources are limited. We have learned that there are five basic stages: (I) Assess How Coaching Fits for Your Organization; (II) Form a Design Team; (III) Develop Leaders to Use the Coaching Model; (IV) Embed Coaching in Your Organization, and (V) Provide Internal and External Coaching Experiences.

Stage I: Assess How Coaching Fits for Your Organization

- Do your mission and core values support a unified coaching strategy?
- Does your leadership value a "growth mindset?" Growth mindset leaders believe that people who elicit feedback, learn from their mistakes, value effort over talent, and root for each other's success will create success for everyone. They prioritize learning and growing people and teams.

¹ 2015 International Coach Federation (ICF) and Human Capital Institute (HCI) Coaching Culture Research.

² 2016 ICF and HCI Coaching Culture research.

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- Do you want to develop leaders who can effectively develop others? When your leaders coach, they become part of a general culture of learning and development in service of individual, team and organization performance. Coaching and developing others (44%), engaging and inspiring others (41%), and having emotional intelligence (35%) are the **most valuable skills and competencies for first-time people managers.**³

In our experience, leaders at the top make the commitment to a coaching culture after they have personally experienced our program and/or been professionally coached. It is not theoretical to them; they understand how the power of coaching transforms them and helps them achieve their goals.

Stage II: Form a Design Team

- **Design Teams are made of influential leaders** who are committed to development. They may include training, HR, operations and other high-level leaders.
- This dedicated team defines coaching and why you believe it will contribute to your success. We meet with them on a regular basis to further their knowledge and facilitate discussions.
- They choose how to roll out the programs and ways to communicate the initiatives. They link coaching to other values and changes in the organization and serve as a steering committee.
- Design teams help us as consultants to understand their distinct culture and tailor examples and role plays. They advise us throughout the initiative on webinars and other strategies for sustaining the change.
- The design team is also essential for creating a coaching infrastructure where the coaching community is supported and rewarded. They decide how it links to people strategies including talent, leadership and team development.
- They lead how coaching can become a leadership competency that is continuously developed and measured.

Design teams are an essential step in creating a coaching culture because they help the organization “own” and implement the change. While closely aligned with the senior leadership team, their passion and focus on the coaching culture enables sustained progress.

³ 2017 ICF and HCI Coaching Culture research.

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Stage III: Develop Leaders to Use the Coaching Model

- **First, have the top leadership team attend Leaders Who Coach Essentials** to create a shared commitment and understanding of the value of coaching in your organization.
- **Next**, choose other attendees for the next program carefully. The design team of one of our clients interviewed these attendees extensively—searching for those who would champion the culture change and were willing to be vulnerable as they role modeled the new skills. The interviewing created a buzz and desire to attend within the organization.
- Provide time between each program to strengthen coaching in those who initially participated so they can support the next group.

Our program, Leaders Who Coach Essentials, begins the coaching culture process with a two-day highly experiential learning program with a Follow-Through Webinar one month later. Recently, our approach was resoundingly supported by research. The August 2018 HBR Article, [*Most Managers Don't Know How to Coach People. But They can Learn.*](#) reports that the “telling, consulting and micromanaging-as-coaching mentality” used by most managers can be significantly shifted to an evidenced based coaching skill set through a two-day coaching program with feedback by professional credentialed coaches.

Stage IV: Embed Coaching in Your Organization

- Coaching skills are sustained through practice. We promote the use of triads, using the skills in team and strategic meetings, and regular webinars with us to deepen the coaching skills.
- Share examples and stories of best practices throughout the organization. These stories might include customers, vendors and members of the public depending on the industry.
- Integrate the coaching values and growth mindset into your onboarding and other development initiatives so that it all connects for your organization.
- Always connect the coaching with your business strategy, purpose and mission. What are the outcomes you are observing?

These strategies also echo successful change strategies. Coaching activities (e.g. one-on-one coaching, team coaching and work group coaching with a professional

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coach practitioner) are rated as the most helpful in achieving the goals of **change management initiatives**. Using coaching to lead an agile culture is correlated with **greater confidence in employee’s capabilities in planning and executing change**.

Stage V: Provide Internal and External Coaching Experiences

- Engage external professional coaches for your top executives. Our program champions using real situations in which leaders can practice—when we are coached the effectiveness and magic of coaching becomes clear. High level leaders model continuous learning and need external coaches who can provide the feedback and challenge they rarely receive inside the organization.
- One of our clients also decided to invest in advanced coaching training for a small group of individuals who might provide short term coaching to those who did not report to them. Our advanced program mirrored the core competencies required by ICF. While there are many boundary, ethical and power dynamics involved in creating internal coaches, the potential for a low-cost opportunity for growth of individuals and an organizational resource are tremendous. By investing in these individuals, they provided intense growth opportunities for individuals and a resource for their entire organization.

When leaders receive coaching, a strong majority (80%) report **positive impacts resulting from the coaching engagement**. Among the areas where they report improvement are their work performance, communication skills, productivity, well-being, and business management strategies. The October 2018 HBR Article, [How Peer Coaching Can Make Work Less Lonely](#) also reports “Peer coaching is about cultivating a network of allies that can provide mutual support in creating positive change to improve performance and addresses the roots of loneliness at work.”

Our coaching culture clients are smaller, investing their money and time carefully, believing leaders who coach will enable them to accomplish their goals. We work side by side in partnership with them and they have shown us that over time, they are fully capable of creating a coaching culture and reaping the same benefits as large organizations.

References:

2015-2018 International Coach Federation (ICF) and Human Capital Institute (HCI) Coaching Culture Research.

All other references are linked to their original source.