



# Appendix



This Appendix contains an Executive Breakaway Section, which is also posted on the Pfeiffer website ([www.pfeiffer.com](http://www.pfeiffer.com)), is intended to be used as informational reading for coaching clients. It may be photocopied or printed from the website and distributed to clients. It contains a summarized version of the key content of this book presented from the client's point of view.



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## Executive Breakaway Section

The purpose of this section is to provide you, the coaching client, with a better understanding of what to expect in a coaching relationship. It is written expressly to help you become a more savvy consumer of coaching services.

Topics covered in this section include the following:

- Why use a coach?
- How a coach can help
- How coaching starts
- Steps in the coaching process
- Electronic coaching
- Normal anxieties
- Ground rules and trust
- Taking responsibility
- The business relationship
- Time commitments

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- Responsibilities to your boss and HR person
- Coachable moments
- Permission to speak up

## Why Use a Coach?

You, the client, play the central role in the coaching story. We assume you've never been a coaching client before, so in this section we examine your role in helping to ensure the success of the coaching relationship.

Something in the way of a business challenge probably is causing the need for you to learn some new behaviors quickly. This challenge may appear as a change in the nature or scope of work, an assignment to turn around or fix a business, or a global or international assignment with a high level of complexity and ambiguity in it. Usually these challenges occur in clusters, possibly creating thoughts such as "It just never stops" or "I might be in over my head" or even "What am I supposed to do now?" Whatever it is, there is a need to ramp up quickly and accelerate the learning curve.

There are lots of ways to learn. Our early educational lives were typically dominated by "instruction" in one form or another. As we grow into adulthood, trial and error becomes perhaps the most common learning method. We also learn by reading about what others have done, watching what others do, or occasionally by going to formal classes. Personal coaching is also a learning alternative.

Coaching tends to be most appropriate when:

- Performance makes an important difference to the employer. Almost by definition, the contributions expected of senior executives fall into this category. Managers at other levels who are in especially significant roles also are responsible for making an

important contribution, so they too can be appropriate coaching clients. Managers may receive coaching simply because they are considered to be “high potential,” regardless of the nature of their current organizational role.

- The relevant learning issues are in the “soft skills” area. Improving any person’s performance in these areas is often difficult and requires an intensive effort. Many of these coaching assignments fall into familiar categories:
  - Helping people with personal or self-management issues, such as a need to micromanage, time management difficulties, balancing work and family life, or perhaps a career-related concern
  - Helping people who have assertive, dominant, or controlling styles become better able to build relationships, create trust, delegate, work in teams, or develop their subordinates
  - Helping people who have good “people” skills to be better at calling the tough decisions, setting and enforcing standards, and handling conflict in productive ways
  - Helping people develop leadership skills when they have moved (or are about to move) into a more prominent role (Some typical leadership issues are providing vision and strategy, performing symbolic roles, and functioning in a much more “alone” position without getting much valid feedback.)
- Used in conjunction with formal succession planning programs.
- Associated with executive development programs. Lessons learned offsite may be combined with

on-the-job assignments and the support of a coach when the formal program is over.

- There are no right answers, you need to develop your own solutions to certain of the puzzles of executive life, and it's hard to do it on your own. If there were right answers hidden away somewhere, the task would be a lot easier.
- The learning needs to happen according to your schedule, and quickly. People who are moved into important positions with little advance notice can be supported with a coach.
- Assimilating new hires, or another term for this is “on-boarding.”

The common theme throughout this list is the need to deal with a steep learning curve.

## How a Coach Can Help

What actually happens in the coaching relationship that allows you to get better at interpersonal skills, communicating, delegating, time management, emotional self-management, or other soft skills? How does someone focus on and improve these kinds of skills?

First, let's agree that these skills are not of the kind that can be learned in a classroom setting. Rather, they are learned by direct interaction with others while working. Sometimes this is called “action learning.” This is the way adults learn best, and this is the model that best applies to interpersonal skills. With the coach's help, a feedback loop is created based on trying out new behaviors, followed by feedback and reflection, and then trying again to be as effective at whatever is happening.

Here are some of the things the coach and the coaching process contribute to the learning:

- *Focus of attention.* Having a coach means paying attention to the issues. Appointments are scheduled, time is spent, and discussions are held regarding the relevant topics.
- *Self-discipline.* Because of the regularity of appointments and the involvement of other people, it's a lot easier to stay on track. Organizational life is full of distractions, even emergencies. Having a coach is a way to increase the priority on this change effort.
- *Valid data.* Change and learning require good data, and the coach can help bring that about. Information is needed on what you bring to the job, what actions are effective, and what is needed in order to succeed. A coach may offer his or her personal views of your actions and/or may do some "testing" using standardized inventories. The coach can interview others in the organization to get their views confidentially. The coach can help interpret 360-degree surveys, attitude surveys, or performance reviews. Perhaps most importantly, the coach can help you make sense of all this data.
- *New ideas.* The coach may or may not have held a job such as yours. But he or she has worked with a lot of people like you and knows something about how they have succeeded. The coach brings new perspective to your thinking and helps you get out of mental ruts and dead ends. Not all the ideas are brilliant—or will work for you. Nonetheless, there's a pool of suggestions waiting for you to check out.

- *Support.* It's not easy to do things differently. In addition to your own ingrained habits, your colleagues may have you fixed in their minds as a person who does things in a certain way. Making changes means taking risks, persevering in the face of resistance, and possibly feeling a little strange or silly at times. Changes require a "safe" environment in which to take these risks. The coach is there to provide encouragement, help, and someone to talk to while all this is happening.
- *The learning process.* Sometimes the greatest value coming out of a coaching relationship isn't just your changed behavior or the changed perceptions of others in the organization. Sometimes it is your insight into *how* to learn. The coach's expertise is exactly in this domain, and some of it should rub off on you over the course of your relationship.

A coaching assignment is triggered by an opportunity or a glitch or a transition of one kind or another. There will be many more opportunities, glitches, and transitions in life, but a coach won't be there for most of them. If you take away good insights into *how* to handle the learning/change process, and a sense as to how to use these insights in future situations, then you will be the real winner.

## How Coaching Starts

Coaching puts you in a very *active* role. This is a shift from the role you played when you were a student or a patient seeking help from a doctor. Nothing much of importance will happen as a result of coaching unless you try to make it happen. All the other

participants in the story are supporting characters—it is really all about you and what you want to do.

This active role begins at the very beginning, when the first discussion is held about coaching. You should make an active decision to be a coaching client. Perhaps you initiated the idea. If someone approached you about it, your participation should be voluntary. Ideally, you should enter this relationship with positive energy and curiosity. Unbridled enthusiasm is too much to expect from a first-time participant, but you certainly shouldn't be coerced into this activity.

You should be comfortable about doing the coaching at this time. By “this time” we mean that the flow of your work suggests that coaching might be helpful now and that you're comfortable with your boss and HR professional as participants. This is also a decision on your part.

Similarly, you may have been actively involved with the choice of who your coach will be and what the two of you will focus on.

So now it's time to actually start the coaching relationship. What should you be doing to make it worthwhile? What are you likely to be experiencing during the coaching?

## Steps in the Coaching Process

Coaching relationships are custom-designed, not replicated from a manual the coach keeps on a shelf or that the HR department asks external coaches to obey. However, a large percentage of coaching assignments do follow a general format, which is what we will describe here. If you feel your situation falls outside of the usual pattern for coaching assignments, you will need to contract for a variation on the traditional relationship so you will have a process that makes sense for you and your company.

Steps in the coaching process usually are delineated at the outset of a coaching engagement. Although the names and labels may vary, in almost all situations a coaching process will contain these steps:

1. Contracting
2. Initial goal setting
3. Assessment
4. Action planning
5. Evaluation

### **1. Contracting**

Coaching is possible only when there is mutual agreement. Regardless of whether there is a formal, written contract, there has to be an initial step in which a general understanding is reached among you, the HR professional, your boss, and the coach about what's going to happen. Your HR professional may wish to set up an initial meeting with all parties to discuss the issues.

Usually the agreement is more formal with the HR professional and the organization and less formal with you. A continuum of formality is possible, ranging from a one-paragraph email to a formal contract with a non-disclosure agreement.

The purpose here is not to create rigidity or arbitrary limitations. Rather, a clearly understood coaching process is important because predictability builds trust. A good structure also allows for discussion of variations to the plan, as needed.

Perhaps the most important element in the success of a coaching engagement is the bond or "chemistry" between you and the coach. A lot has been written, but very little decided, on what goes into the magic of a good bond. During the contracting step there

has to be a sense from both parties that “This is going to work” or “I trust this person.” Of course, the relationship can be terminated at any time later on, but there have to be positive feelings at the outset—or there is no contract!

A contract, memo, or letter of agreement will typically address the following points:

- How often you and your coach will meet and for approximately how long, for example, two or three times each month for about an hour
- A starting and possible ending date
- The general focus of the coaching, such as project leadership skills, an abrasive interpersonal style, time management, or work/family balance issues
- Some sense of how “success” will be measured—how the wrap-up and evaluation might proceed
- Reporting and confidentiality—who can say what to whom
- Costs (if the letter is going to the person who pays the bills)

When asked about which steps are most valuable to the coaching process, one HR professional from a large technology company replied: “The contracting phase is critical to do with the client and the client’s supervisor so that there are appropriate expectations set by everyone involved. All of the parties involved, the client, the boss, the HR person and the coach, must understand the goals and objectives of the coaching. It also helps to convey to the coach the possible future plans for the client and what is contained in a succession plan if one actually does exist for that individual. At that

point, it is incumbent on the coach to develop a coaching plan to help the client achieve the desired goals.”

### *Information Sharing*

One of the main requirements in coaching is trust. Any successful coaching relationship is built on mutual trust between the coach and the client. The relationship is based on privileged communication between you and your coach, and often the information that is exchanged may be potentially damaging. If there is a breakdown in trust, the coaching engagement is clearly bound to fail. Therefore, the issue of confidentiality is crucial to coaching.

When being coached, you will share delicate private and corporate information with your coach in order to explore developmental opportunities. Naturally, this situation may cause concerns from your perspective as well as from the coach's perspective. You might wonder who else has access to the information. How can you be assured that the information is not shared with someone you don't trust? Who knows that you are being coached? Will the information shared have an impact on your promotion or salary?

The coach, who is usually paid by your organization, faces a different conflict: Am I obliged to share a progress report with my client's supervisor, Human Resources, or the sponsor? If so, how much detail do I go into? Who in the organization needs to be informed if my client shares information about illegal wrongdoings involving either the client or other organizational members? All these concerns are legitimate and need to be addressed before attempting to build a trusting, open relationship.

If you believe that your coach is sharing private information or if the coach feels caught up in an organizational power struggle, the relationship is likely to crumble. Confidentiality is therefore both an ethical and a practical issue.

### *Ethical Standards*

Whereas doctors, lawyers, priests, and others whose professions require dealing with personal information are bound by the law to apply certain ethical standards, there are no explicit laws in that regard applicable for coaches. For those coaches who are psychologists, the ethical standards concerning disclosures in the profession of psychology apply. Although the coach has to try to make every effort to honor your confidence, the coach cannot provide a guarantee. You should be aware that your information is not privileged under law.

### *Best Practice*

In order to avoid conflicts, the coach is well advised to discuss the issue of confidentiality up-front with you. By making you aware that there are usually other stakeholders in the coaching process, such as your supervisor, the HR manager, or others, your coach can discuss with you which information is shared and which information is kept confidential. Ideally, during the contracting phase, a meeting between you, your coach, your boss, and the HR professional has occurred in which issues of confidentiality have been discussed. Who does the reporting? How much write-up is needed? It makes sense to share information about goals and progress, but not the contents of coach-client discussions.

The other possibility is to encourage you to inform other stakeholders about your developmental process. This can either be done in the presence of the coach or in private. In any case, you and your coach must reach a joint agreement that leaves you both in your comfort zones and sets a solid basis for a trusting relationship. By reaching an agreement about confidentiality in the first place, most conflicts of interest can be avoided.

## 2. Initial Goal Setting

A first draft of goals—What is to be accomplished by the coaching?—should be part of the contracting step. It may look like a simple thing to do, but it is not.

- Client, coach, HR professional, and boss all may wish to see somewhat different outcomes. These expectations must be articulated and conflicts explored and resolved.
- As the coaching process evolves, what is considered to be a realistic and desired goal may change.
- There may be interim goals as well as long-term goals.
- There may be “business” and also “personal” goals—and they may overlap and impact each other.

A reasonable approach, therefore, is to set an initial goal and expect to confirm or revise it as time goes by.

Goal setting is central to the process. Well-defined goals allow you to work together, to assess progress and success, to choose appropriate methods and relevant data, and so on. Good coaching is results-oriented and does not wander off into unimportant tangents. It is important for the coach to understand the business challenges facing both you and the organization.

The goal for many coaching engagements is expressed in behavioral terms. For example, you will do more or less of something, or learn to do something, or stop doing something. Some typical goals in executive coaching address improvement in leadership competencies, specific interpersonal and social competencies, and the ability to manage your career issues. Other goals may explicitly

and implicitly involve increasing the effectiveness of the organization and team.

When possible, it will be useful to define the coaching goal in “business” terms—connecting it to operating plans or financial measures. This is often not possible, however desirable it might be. It is generally sufficient for the goal to be agreed on by the four interested parties—you, your coach, HR, and your boss. Both your needs and the employer’s interests must be served. This agreement may be easy to reach or may be negotiated.

### 3. Assessment

Good coaching rests on a foundation of good data. It is important for the coach to quickly ascertain your performance level in order to understand the magnitude of the gap between current performance and future desired performance. Questions your coach will have include: How are you currently functioning? What has to improve or change for you to maximize performance? The coach has to determine the overall pattern of strengths and challenge areas to help you set goals for improvements in job performance. You and your coach must be able to operate together with a common language and set of concepts. The most efficient way for the coach to go about this is by systematically collecting data on those behavioral dimensions that have the most impact on performance. Why collect data? As an executive, you are comfortable looking at data. Multiple perspectives create a richer picture. Coaching shouldn’t be based on hunches; objective data is of value. Data gathering can be done in lots of ways. Some alternatives for gathering information are described below:

- *Interviews.* The coach will create an interview protocol and conduct either individual face-to-face or telephone

interviews. Interviews can be conducted with direct reports, peers, supervisors, and others in the organization who have a high degree of familiarity with you. The results from the interviews are summarized separately and reviewed with you, along with the data from other sources.

- *Multi-rater feedback assessments.* Sometimes these are also called 360-degree feedback instruments. In addition to making “self” ratings, usually you are asked to provide a list of raters from the following categories: direct reports, peers, current and past supervisors, and customers. Most multi-rater feedback tools are now available so that the entire administration is done electronically. Typically, once you have provided the raters’ email addresses to the survey administrator, the raters receive a web address and a password. When the raters access the website and type in a preassigned password, they can take the surveys at their convenience. Reports may be generated electronically and emailed to the coach who delivers the feedback to you.
- *Testing.* Some coaches use individual psychometric tests. Some tests require professional qualifications, either through a certification process by the publisher or by educational background. In the hands of a competent practitioner, they can be very helpful. These include personality tests, interest inventories, learning styles, and interpersonal style tests.
- *Existing qualitative and quantitative data from performance appraisals, attitude surveys, customer satisfaction surveys, and training programs.* The information from these

sources can be very helpful to the coach, particularly at the start of a coaching program, because it provides insight into how you, the client, are being perceived by various parts of the organization.

- *Observations of you, the client.* Experienced coaches have skills in observing and recording behavior, and the information gathered from direct observations of you during meetings, phone calls, and presentations can be very useful. The coach may also ask to see written materials from you such as emails. All of this can provide powerful real-world data, especially when combined with data from assessments.

How much historical data to include? This depends on the nature of your issues. It can be really helpful for the coach to understand client behaviors that may have a long history. And it can be helpful for you to reflect back and gain greater self-awareness and insight. However, the focus of the coaching should be on how the behavior will become more adaptive in the present and future.

#### *What You Should Know About Multi-Rater Feedback*

Multi-rater feedback can be used to support coaching, either to help a client develop his or her potential or to address a performance concern. Such data can be useful for identifying development needs of future leaders. It is helpful for communicating behaviors consistent with new organizational values or principles or to provide senior leaders with valid data so they can make fine-tuned adjustments to their leadership styles. Typically, results are shared only with a client, who now “owns” the data.

Here are several important points that should make using such surveys a success, especially in combination with coaching:

- It is a good idea for you to identify most or maybe even all of the raters. Chances are that you will be reasonable about whom you choose. It is important that you not “stack the deck” by including only raters who have a highly favorable opinion of you! By selecting a broad variety of raters, you are likely to get far more credible data. And you will receive some very valuable information about how you are perceived by others.
- If you have questions about the process, ask! Take the time to have your HR professional explain to you and to the raters what the survey is, what it does, how it is used, and its benefits to all concerned.
- Even if a professional coach facilitates the feedback, it is important for your manager and HR representative to be familiar with the rating instrument and how it is used.

#### *Need for Reflection Following Feedback*

Once the data have been integrated and summarized, the coach will feed back the information to you, usually over more than one session. Because there is usually much information to reflect on, it is better if you absorb only some at a time. Sometimes you will be surprised by certain aspects of the data and you will need time to reflect and think it all through.

During the course of your coaching engagement, you can expect to be doing more self-reflection. This may seem uncomfortable for you at first. However, if you can learn to incorporate time for

reflection into your schedule, you will benefit greatly. Coaching can accelerate the learning process, and by making the time to think through your issues, you are allowing valuable learning to take place.

After the data from assessments and other sources has been reviewed, it makes sense to go back to the goals that were created earlier to see whether any new ones need to be added and to re-prioritize those that have been retained.

#### **4. Implementation and Action Planning**

The coaching process can move into an implementation and action-planning phase when:

- The initial goal of the coaching has been determined
- The coaching agreement has set expectations for how the coaching engagement will proceed
- The coach has had the opportunity to become familiar with different aspects of your behavior from the assessment results

In helping you explore and learn new concepts and skills, coaches may employ a variety of coaching methods and techniques. Which methods a coach may choose will depend on the background and training of the coach, the unique interaction between you and your coach, and the coach's views on which approaches would be most effective within a given organization. Fundamentally, a coaching process allows you to take the time to reflect on and explore issues that affect you and the organization's effectiveness. Although every interaction between a coach and a client is

unique, some of the common elements that could occur during implementation are

- *Exploring for alternatives.* You benefit from gaining greater self-knowledge by understanding your feedback data, reviewing previously successful and unsuccessful efforts at behavior change, gathering new ideas, reading, and observing others. In your sessions, the coach frequently poses questions to encourage you to engage in reflective thought. The coach provides a supportive relationship in which you are stimulated to explore new ideas, feelings, and behaviors. Often, the role of the coach is described as that of a catalyst.
- *Experimenting with new behaviors.* The trust that is established between you and your coach enables you to experiment with new behaviors that may feel very foreign initially, but which, in the long run, add to your repertoire of adaptable responses. Some of the techniques that help clients to feel more comfortable and competent as they adopt new ways of interacting with others are
  - *Rehearsing or role playing.* Being able to practice possible responses to anticipated situations lets you polish skills and reduce some of the anxiety associated with the fear of the unknown.
  - *Visioning.* Professional athletes have known for quite a while that increments in performance can be realized just by imagining oneself giving a peak performance. Whether it is a competency such as speaking to a large audience or maintaining one's composure during meetings, if you can practice visioning optimal performance, you are partway there.

- *Problem solving.* Coaches generally are good at asking clients questions to stimulate their thinking to arrive at creative solutions. The idea is that eventually you may learn to do creative problem solving on your own.
- *Role clarification.* Understanding everyone's role in a given business/social situation can help you to act appropriately and pick up important social cues. A coach can help you foster role clarity for yourself within your organization.
- *Creating an action plan.* An action plan consists of several components. It can be used to establish a goal, define the measures that will be used to determine whether the goal has been reached, explain the actions to be taken to reach the goal, the resources needed, significant milestones, and completion dates. This type of action plan can be used by you and your coach in tracking development goals.
- *Gathering support and getting feedback from colleagues.* The chances of a successful coaching outcome are enhanced when you can be open with your colleagues about the desired changes. Enlisting their commitment increases the likelihood that you will receive accurate feedback as new behaviors are explored and practiced.
- *Devising a long-term development plan.* This may be optional for you and focuses on personal goals over a longer timeframe. Sometimes you can use it for career management and to advance professionally. A long-term development plan can serve as preparation for future roles and contributions. It can also help you avoid backsliding once the coaching assignment is over.

## 5. Evaluation

There are many good reasons to evaluate the results of a coaching assignment. First, the organization will want to know whether your performance is improving or not. Have you succeeded in making the behavioral changes needed to improve leadership? To stay informed about progress on goals, your HR professional may want to receive occasional reports from the coach.

Second, the HR professional will want to determine the impact of the coaching on others in the organization. Has the allocation of resources yielded results for both you and the organization? How do others perceive the changes that are occurring?

Third, the evaluation serves as a recalibration process. It can provide valuable information for you and your coach that helps you make adjustments in the coaching. Which new behaviors are being demonstrated and which ones are not? How does the focus of the coaching need to shift? What job experiences do you need at this juncture? What feedback should the boss provide to you at this point in time?

Fourth, the outcome of the evaluation can serve as powerful reinforcement for the work effort involved in coaching. What successes can you and your coach celebrate? Where are renewed efforts required? What should be the content of the boss's communications to you in order to provide both reinforcement and incentive?

Finally, the evaluation can show where the action plans requires updating and revision. Are the coaching goals still appropriate or do they need rethinking?

A good time to specify the details of an evaluation of the coaching program is at the contracting phase. An evaluation process can help in establishing clarity at the outset about what the coaching is designed to accomplish. The memo or letter of agreement can address the topic of how success will be measured.

When it comes to a formal evaluation, a number of approaches are possible. The methods used for gathering information during the assessment phase can be used as measurements of performance between the initial data collection (Time 1) and a later point (Time 2). It's a good idea to allow at least six months between Time 1 and Time 2 to allow you the opportunity to develop new behaviors. It also takes time for others in the organization to notice your new behavior patterns! One or two demonstrations may not be convincing evidence for others to accept that you are truly doing things differently.

Evaluations can be based on any of the following sources of data:

- *Interviews.* If interviews were done at the start of the coaching engagement, it may be appropriate for the coach to reassess or reinterview the same respondents and compare responses from Time 1 to Time 2. How do the interview themes between Time 1 and Time 2 differ? Are you demonstrating more adaptive behaviors and fewer disruptive ones?
- *Multi-rater feedback assessments.* With this form of feedback, it is especially important to wait at least six months before a reevaluation and to recognize that it is a pattern of changes that will be significant.
- *Informal feedback from others.* On a more informal basis, the boss and selected individuals may be asked how you are doing. This information can be written in a progress report that is completed by the coach or jointly by you and your coach. With the exception of the input provided by the boss, it is a good idea for the feedback to be aggregated so that statements cannot be attributed to one person alone. Protecting the

anonymity of raters ensures that the feedback will be more accurate and reduces raters' fear of reprisal.

- *Performance appraisals, attitude surveys, customer satisfaction surveys, and training program surveys.* Since many of these measures are administered infrequently, they may or may not coincide with the evaluation period of the coaching program. Also, the actual questions on surveys often change from year to year so that the measure from Time 1 to Time 2 may not be consistent. With the possible exception of the performance appraisal, these instruments may not be sensitive enough to pick up the kinds of behaviors that you are attempting to change. However, taking all of this into account, the coach may still want to see the results from these sources of data, especially if at least a year has elapsed from the time of both the first measurement and the start of the coaching program.
- *Client feedback.* Are you satisfied? Feedback from you may be given directly to the coach, or to the HR professional, the boss, and others in the organization. If periodic progress reports are written jointly by you and your coach, you may have the opportunity to provide more formal feedback. Often, however, you may simply tell your HR professional how valuable the coaching has been in accelerating the required new learning.
- *Action plans.* The coaching may have involved the creation of an action plan that defines goals, measures of success, and completion dates. Was the action plan created and implemented successfully? Were useful goals set? Were the goals achieved? Is there a business

outcome? A behavioral change? How did the organization benefit from the action plans?

- *Long-term development plans.* Sometimes coaching leads to a long-term personal development plan. Was this prepared, and is there agreement to do something about it?

Finally, a good contracting process will provide some sense of how the coaching program will be wrapped up. You will want to keep your HR professional informed about that final phase of the coaching process. Did you and your coach openly discuss what has and has not been achieved?

Sometimes, there is a clear ending after a relatively intense process. More frequently, the coaching is continued with less-frequent sessions or on an as-needed basis and becomes more of an informal relationship with some level of paid involvement. There may also be a “planned follow-up” after a specified period of time. Usually, some closure is needed on the more formal, intense phase of the coaching.

## Electronic Coaching

In the future, coaches are likely to do more coaching via the telephone and the Internet. There are several reasons for this trend:

- *Globalization.* Organizational functions will continue to become more global in nature. Your coaching sessions may not be able to be scheduled when both you and your coach are in the same geographical location.
- *Cost-effectiveness.* It can be more cost-effective for coaches to deliver services electronically.

- *Technological improvements.* The improvements in voice quality in cell phones, computers with video, and other technological devices have increased the level of comfort in conducting long-distance conversations about personal/career issues.

Many coaches will use emails as a way of following up on points made during a session or will send information on topics related to your goals for your use between sessions. Emails can be very effective in fostering your ability for self-reflection. They require that senders be more thoughtful in their choice of words and allow readers more time to review and think carefully about the contents.

Whether or not emails are utilized more in the coaching process, the steps in the coaching process should remain the same. Usually the initial contracting and goal setting can still occur via several face-to-face meetings in which you and the coach have the opportunity to forge the chemistry essential to a good coaching relationship. The ability of the coach to see facial expressions and body language is important for the coach to get to know you. It also allows the coach to create a visual picture of you, to more accurately interpret your communications, and to see exactly what others also see when they engage with you.

## **Normal Anxieties**

At the very onset of a coaching engagement, it is normal to feel a bit anxious and vulnerable. You are starting on a high-disclosure, high-vulnerability adventure with a stranger. There's only so much comfort you can gain from an initial chemistry-check meeting. The contracting sessions should help you get started by reaching mutual agreement about goals and confidentiality. Still, there may be a

lingering sense of uncertainty as you embark on an unknown journey. For the coaching to have a successful outcome resulting in change and personal growth, it is wise to recognize that these feelings may accompany you at the outset.

What might you be anxious about? One answer to this question is that *all* changes come with some amount of stress. This is true for weddings, benchmark birthdays, promotions and new jobs, the birth of children, relocations—all the transitions and milestones of living, even the most joyous of them. Unhappy events certainly bring out a number of unsettling emotions. Coaching is associated with some degree of change in your public leadership style, and that too can be a transition. The outcome may be only a fine-tuning or a minor adjustment, but it may lead to something more substantial as well.

Another source of anxiety has to do with what happens if the coaching turns out *not* to be successful. Was it your fault? Does it mean you've reached a dead end in your career? Are you derailed or plateaued? Has your fatal flaw been discovered? In almost all cases, these are just anxieties and not likely to be realities. Coaching is not a surefire solution to problems, nor is it guaranteed to make the most of an opportunity. Many executives use a number of coaches over the course of their careers. It's not uncommon for a client to have some anxiety. These anxieties can be discussed with the coach, of course, or with the boss or HR representative. Our experience suggests that these concerns quickly fade away in most cases.

A comment is useful here regarding human "flaws." A much better word might be limitations, sore spots, things we're not proud of, even our secrets. Coaching does go better when there is a free exchange about motivations and personal histories. You are perfectly within your rights, however, to draw limits. For example, you might mention that you had a messy divorce, a troubled childhood,

a severe medical problem, or a traumatic military experience. There's no obvious need to go further than that. If that history isn't relevant to your current or future position in the organization, then either don't deal with it or deal with it elsewhere.

Sometimes people are anxious about letting go of habits or styles they've owned for many years. You might be feeling something like "I wouldn't be me if I didn't do things that way" or "I really don't want to stop being an analytic, detailed kind of person." Coaches are aware that some aspects of our characters are very deeply ingrained. Coaching isn't about deep character reconstructions. It's more likely to be about managing how this character shows up at work. If you find a behavior that is not helping, then you'll consider ways to control, modify, or redirect it. You'll still be the same person, but with more effective behaviors.

## Ground Rules and Trust

One of a coach's first tasks is to create "safety" in the relationship. It is his or her job to make that happen, but you can help too.

The structure of the coaching engagement serves as a roadmap for your interactions with your coach. By following the steps in the coaching process, as described earlier or as agreed on between the two of you, you have a framework with a beginning, a middle, and an end. The framework allows you to set expectations appropriately, recognize milestones and time limits, and celebrate your successes. A planned journey along a well-lit path allows for more trust and cooperation. Discussions with your coach about the ground rules will take much of the mystery out of the journey and help you to understand how you can help make the relationship work well.

It is wise to ease whatever concerns you might have by asking your coach the questions that are on your mind. There is no such

thing as a dumb, honest question. All first-timers have questions, whatever it is they are doing. Often some of the early inquiries “get the ball rolling” and lead right into important areas for further discussion. By asking your questions without letting them simmer, you will feel more comfortable and build trust with your coach. Trust between people is built slowly over a series of many interactions, so your early experiences with your coach are critical for establishing a strong relationship. You will want to feel reassured that your coach “has what it takes” to guide you through the journey of self-exploration and personal development.

Coaching engagements evolve over time. There’s no way to know exactly how things will progress or whether revisions will be needed in the ground rules, the goals, or the methods. Feel free to talk about these with your coach.

## **Taking Responsibility**

You owe it to yourself to take responsibility for the coaching-related changes. After all, it’s your life! You should be the “owner” of the goals for the coaching and for the steps for achieving them. When these are reasonably clear in your mind, then move forward boldly. Accept feedback from whatever sources—assessment instruments, official appraisals, informal comments, your coach’s interviews—and make good use of it. Try new ways of doing things. Get feedback from people who saw you do things differently. Learn what helps and what doesn’t. Your coach can serve as a catalyst, but ultimately it is only you who can make change happen.

Coaching requires that you give voice to your thoughts, hopes, and feelings. If this is not something you normally do, then at first you may feel as if you are exercising an unused muscle. Allow yourself to work through this and keep going. It comes more easily when

you accept the ownership and responsibility for making a success of the coaching effort. The coach can only be a catalyst—you have to make it happen.

This is obvious, but not easy. Why is it difficult? For the same kinds of reasons that diets, good health habits, and New Year's resolutions are difficult. Just because it makes sense doesn't mean we'll do things that way. We're accustomed to putting blame on other people, procrastinating, expecting others to change first, even being lazy. Recall the corny old joke that goes "How many people does it take to change a light bulb? Only one, but the bulb really has to want to change." It's really not so funny when we think about all the good intentions we've had that went nowhere, and not for good reasons at all.

So what can you do to overcome this tendency? A few hints: Go public with your planned changes—it makes it harder to backslide. Enlist the support of others; ask for their active support. Keep a log or diary of efforts and successes. Reward yourself when things go according to plan.

## **The Business Relationship**

The relationship between you and your coach is a business relationship: you and/or your organization purchases professional services from the coach to help both you and the sponsoring organization. There are likely to be both short- and long-term business benefits.

The outcome of the coaching benefits many others beyond the individual who receives the coaching, including direct reports, peers, supervisors, and anyone else who may be affected by a strengthening of leadership in one part of the organization. A ripple effect of good things can be created when the changes in behavior of one individual are perceived by others in the organization.

This is especially true if it is the leadership of a boss or a peer that is strengthened. Improvements in the morale of a group can occur. Individuals may be inspired to start on their own agendas for personal growth. The “return on investment” from successful coaching has the potential to be quite large.

With this in mind, you should know how the business relationship will be defined and how value will be assessed. It will help you frame your questions and form your answers if you approach the endeavor as you would approach any business project. To the extent possible, there will be a clear set of goals and objectives, action plans with milestones, and a means of evaluating the outcome.

## **Time Commitments**

You and your coach will arrive at an understanding of the time commitments associated with the coaching. This will have been done in the contracting process as well as in your discussion on ground rules. Having a schedule and keeping to it are important aspects of the structure of the relationship. They also are good predictors of a successful outcome. In today’s business environment, it is very easy to allow other events and meetings to crowd out your coaching time. It is common for urgent things to take priority over important things.

Making changes in your leadership or interpersonal style is the kind of task that requires continuity. That’s why regular contact with the coach is important. Making these changes can be difficult, lonely work. Sticking to the schedule is a shared responsibility of both you and your coach, but slippage is much more often due to pressures on the client than on the coach.

Do your best to take responsibility for maintaining the integrity of the coaching schedule, just as you would for any other business obligation. Sometimes the coach serves as a kind of conscience,

reminding you to stick to the process. However, your coach shouldn't have to become a nag!

If you do find that time commitments cannot be kept, have an open discussion with your coach. Maybe now isn't a good time. Maybe something is not working well in the relationship and the schedule slippage is a symptom of a larger problem.

## **Responsibilities to Your Boss and HR Person**

The organization has invested its resources in you. Your boss and your HR person have agreed that your professional growth is important enough that time and money can be set aside for your development. What is your responsibility to them? What should be the nature and frequency of the feedback to them? Who should do it? The answer to these questions varies depending on your level in the organization and on your relationships with these people. There are no solid rules about this, but there are some good rules of thumb.

Your organization has a vested interest in hearing about your progress directly from you. At the very least you will want to give periodic updates to your boss and HR person on how the coaching is proceeding.

They will want to know whether the relationship is working well, whether they should be doing something to help it along, and whether their observations could be helpful. They are busy people too and aren't thinking about you and your coach every day. They also don't want to intrude into your private conversations. So it's helpful if you'd remember to keep them posted once in a while, even if things are going well. You may want to obtain a sense of their expectations concerning how often and in what modality they would like to be updated (voice, face-to-face, or email). If things aren't going well, then of course you should speak up.

It is generally better for you to keep the boss and the HR person up-to-date, rather than having the coach do it all. The coach's opinions are valued, of course, but what they really want to see is progress and growth in you! In any case, you don't want the coach to do all that work alone.

There may also be some differences in the extent to which you communicate your progress to them depending on your level in the organization. More senior level executives are less likely to keep the HR person and the boss up-to-date. They also may request that the coach keep conversations with others to a minimum. Although this may be more comfortable for you, it doesn't necessarily serve your best interests. Those at middle or first-level manager levels typically have less ability to operate with this kind of independence.

## Coachable Moments

Some of the most valuable learning experiences come from "coachable moments." These are the occasions when you recognize that something important is happening that has to do with the focus of your coaching. If you want the coach's help, speak up! Any coach will make time for you. If you need only a few minutes, or if a crisis is happening and you need more time, that's what coaches are for.

What do coachable moments look like? Crises are one example, but there are many others as well. It could be a situation that causes a peak in your anxiety level—a sense that trouble is lurking. It could be an insight, an epiphany of some kind that says, "Now I get it!" It could be some negative feedback. It could be that an opportunity has come up to try out a new way of doing things.

The following is an example of a coachable moment:

Don had been working with his coach, Sheila, for about two months. The coaching focused on two goals:

1. Helping Don move effectively into a “manager of managers” role, a task that resulted from his promotion just before the coaching started, and
2. Building a constructive—and he hoped cooperative—relationship with Helen, one of his new peers.

Sheila and Don had moved through the phases of contracting, assessment, and goal setting and had settled into a rhythm of meetings every two weeks or so. Progress was being made on the first goal with his four direct reports—new boundaries were established, he had moved his own style away from micromanaging to allow them a very significant degree of autonomy, a revised follow-up system was in place, and informal relationships were improving.

But Helen remained aloof. She and Don were cordial to each other, but no real connection was being made. Don wasn't sure whether Helen resented him for some past misstep or just didn't trust him yet. Other hypotheses were discussed in the coaching sessions, most recently on a Monday. Sheila and Don even sketched out possible scenarios for how Don could try to engage Helen in the areas where their work overlapped. Don was prepared to approach Helen with one of these conversations after the upcoming departmental meeting on Thursday.

On Tuesday of that week, about 10:00 a.m., Don called Sheila with a sense of urgency. He had received a call from Helen at 9:30 a.m. asking for a meeting that day. When he asked Helen what she wanted to talk about, her answer had to do with a need to borrow some of his key people for a few days to finish a major client assignment before the end of the week. Don and Helen

agreed to meet at 2:00 p.m. that day. Don was looking for help from his coach on how to handle Helen's request.

Don wasn't sure what to do. Should he ask his boss? Should he ask for volunteers? Should he just tell his people to drop whatever they were doing so they could help Helen? He knew his people were stretched to do their own work. He didn't like any of the alternatives.

Sheila recognized this as a coachable moment. Sheila cleared her schedule so she could give Don the time he needed, which turned out to be more than an hour.

By noon, Don was clear about what he should do. He called a meeting of his direct reports. They developed a solution so that workloads were shared across organizational lines, priorities were maintained, and Helen got the help she needed. His 2:00 p.m. meeting with Helen, which included two of his direct reports, went smoothly. His relationships with his own people were honored and strengthened, and he built a bridge to Helen.

You will, no doubt, have many coachable moments in the course of your coaching engagement. Discussions with your coach can be helpful in helping you figure out which moments would be most beneficial to bring to the attention of your coach.

## Permission to Speak Up

It should be clear by now that you own the coaching relationship. Although the organization has invested its resources in you and you have the support of other key individuals, the outcome of the coaching engagement is in your hands. At any and all times you

have permission to speak up about your ideas. And why not? You will have permission from your coach. You will have permission from the organization. You just need to make sure that you have permission from yourself!

## **Conclusion**

This section was written with the purpose of taking some of the mystery out of the coaching process. We hope it has enabled you to have a clearer picture of what happens as you begin your journey with your coach and make progress during your coaching relationship. You may also wish to go to your HR professional with other questions you might have regarding your particular situation and how the coaching process will work for you within your organization.