



## CHAPTER SIX

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# COACHING COACHES

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Richard Beckhard

Coaching is an important and often central part of most organizational development (OD) and organizational consultants' practice. In the past five years it has become the activity that, for many, produces the basic relationship they have with clients and their "bread and butter" income.

Professional networks of coaches have sprung up in a number of areas, particularly on the West and East Coasts. Several websites and Internet conferences have been developed on the subject. At least three books on coaching are currently being written and will be published soon.

In the past year, I have personally been contacted by internal consultants who are starting individual practices based primarily on coaching. Two of the major management consulting firms with change practices are billing a significant amount of hours for executive coaching.

The subtitle of the collection of articles presented here defines a universal goal of the coaching relationship: *Helping Leaders Learn*. Within this universal goal, there are many types of specific goals that require different competencies from the coach.

The most popular type of relationship is aimed at giving the client feedback, often from a number of sources, as a basis for developing a plan for *improving his or her individual performance on the job*. Other goals may be *increasing*

*skills in interpersonal relationships or communication.* Sometimes the process is used for *career planning*, and occasionally the contract is for *life planning*.

Because coaching is so obviously helpful to clients, there tends to be no rigorous criteria for defining the professional competence required of coaches. There is also no clear differentiation between professional coaching, coaching from the boss, or coaching from friends and colleagues.

Thus the range of consultants who define their professional work as “coaching” varies tremendously. On the high end there are consultancies such as Keilty, Goldsmith and Company, who use sophisticated mechanisms and well-trained practitioners in their work. At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who have been internal OD consultants and have done some advising with internal clients, who decide to form an individual practice or partnership.

Although, as I have said, there are a few networks developing, at this time there are no professional standards. Anyone can “hang out a shingle” that says *COACH*. Given the lack of standards in the field, it becomes an individual issue for practitioners to develop a basis for judging their competence and their need to improve and grow. Fortunately, more and more consultants are being made aware of this issue and are seeking help.

Several years ago, David Nadler, CEO of Delta Consulting, asked me to provide some coaching for individual consultants in his firm who wanted to be coached. Nadler is committed to the continuing development of his people, and this request fit into his values.

I began spending one day per month at Delta; people who wanted to book time with me could do so. All discussions were confidential, and Delta paid me a retainer so there was no connection between payment and who was being coached.

Several consultants began meeting with me, and I was contacted by other consultants who had heard of the mutually satisfactory arrangement. I then started a formal practice. I saw people in my office or we consulted over the telephone.

Initial expectations were that I would shadow consult on cases that they would bring from their own practices. It soon became apparent that their needs were both professional and personal. In addition to testing examples of their work, they had issues about their professional lives and careers,

and in some cases their personal lives. Sessions became a combination of coaching and counseling. From the first, I demanded high confidentiality. Sessions were never reported or discussed with anyone but the client. In the past few years, the number of clients has grown slowly so that there are now enough clients to support a small practice.

I have had several significant insights from this work. One is that it is extremely difficult for people who identify their persona as a *helper* to receive help. My clients can basically be divided into two types:

The first type is experienced, usually successful, consultants who want to talk with someone older and more experienced about issues they cannot easily share with anyone. (This condition was similar to that of CEOs who told me how lonely they felt and how very difficult it was to confide in anyone in their organizations. An outside, trusted consultant could fill this role, and thus add value.)

The second type is people who are starting or have recently started coaching. They have shared that in working with their clients, they have felt less than secure about their coaching strategy. They needed to check with a more experienced mentor before implementing their plans.

I knew from earlier experience that professionals, such as ballet stars, top singers, and actors, no matter how successful, need to have a coach—a person who can help them keep fit, practice their scales, test a new opera, or do basic ballet exercises. I reasoned that consultants might need the same thing. The good coaches in the entertainment world usually have been successful performers—they've "been there" and are credible. Although they are no longer performing themselves, they are able to be helpful to current performers.

I am pleased and thankful that in the consulting world I am considered a "wise person." My commitment is to use that gift to help other practitioners continue to develop their impact on their clients and on the world.

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## About the Contributor

**Richard Beckhard** was an organization consultant, author, and professor of management and organization behavior at the Sloan School of

Management at MIT, where he served on the faculty for twenty-one years. His practice consisted primarily in working with managing complexity and change and in organizational and institutional development. He is considered a “father” in the field of organization development.

Dick authored eight books and numerous articles. His most recent book, *Agent of Change: My Life, My Practice*, was finished in 1997 and is published by Jossey-Bass. Along with Edgar Schein, he is the creator and editor of the Addison-Wesley OD Series. Dick was the co-editor of the best-selling Drucker Foundation Future Series (which has sold over 600,000 copies in fourteen languages). This series included *The Leader of the Future* (a *Business Week* “Top 15” bestseller), *The Organization of the Future*, and *The Community of the Future* (Amazon.com ranked number one in its field).

Dick’s most recent teaching activities included workshops for national management associations in Ireland, Finland, Australia, Canada, Denmark, and Venezuela, and leadership conferences for organizations in both public and private sectors.

In 1984, the Sloan School created in his honor the Richard Beckhard Prize, awarded annually for the best article on his subject in *The Sloan Management Review*. In 1992, the Richard Beckhard Prize was created by the Family Firm Institute, an annual award honoring an outstanding practitioner in the field. In 1994, The Richard Beckhard Prize in Organization Development, an annual award from the Office of Public Management in the U.K. was initiated. The award is given to an organization or agency in the public area deemed to have done the most outstanding program in institutional development in the U.K.

Recent business and industry clients included the top managers of Imperial Chemical Industries (U.K.), Norsk Hydro (Norway), and Mastercard International (U.S.). In the health field, he worked with the leaders of several academic health centers in the U.S. and with the National Health Service in the U.K. He also consulted with several foundations, including the MacArthur Foundation and the Commonwealth Fund. He had a long-term interest in family businesses; in the early 1980s he created a research program at the Sloan School, MIT, from which came the Family Firm Institute, with a quarterly journal and a network of research institutes in the U.S. and Europe.

Dick served on a number of boards, including the Drucker Foundation, the Organization Learning Center at MIT, and the Institute for Development Research. In the U.K., he was a senior fellow of the Office of Public Management; a member of the Academy of Management, the OD Network, and the Society of Human Resource Planners; and a life member of the NTL Institute.

Dick was a personal coach, mentor, and inspiration to many of the co-authors of this book.

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