Commentary on Case Study

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At Top Human Technology in China, we believe that for the executive coach to be well-developed, he/she needs to focus on the “Beliefs & Attitudes” and “Knowledge & Skills” (as reflected in the TopHuman “Human Concept”).

Case Study One: Chuck

Knowledge and Skills of Executive Coach

It would be beneficial—though it is not necessarily a must—that the executive coach come from a background in psychology or be a veteran in the field of business. A coach uses his/her coaching abilities (common ones like listening, questioning, making distinction and feedback) to support the client towards his/her goals. Being a specialist in another area (like business veteran, marketing expert, etc.) may enable the executive to give expert advice to the coachee—but that should be defined as a form of consulting. As a coach, we can carry the dual role of a consultant, but we must be very clear and distinct regarding our role at a particular point in time. Is it as a coach or as a consultant?

The same person (for example, Chuck’s coach) may be able to take on multiple roles (e.g., management consultant, coach or manager) but his role must be clearly distinguished from the role that is played by Chuck, by his boss, and by his colleagues. If roles aren’t clarified, people inside (and outside) the organization will not know what roles are being played at any one point in time.

More importantly, the coach should have attended some form of recognized coach training in order to improve his/her coaching abilities and to ensure he is well qualified to become a coach. If the coach is to base his/her work only on his/her previous experience, then he/she might better be called a consultant or mentor—rather than a coach.

Beliefs and Attitude of Executive Coach

An executive coach should know about the coaching process and about the way in which to conduct a proper and thorough first session to set up the coaching plan—and boundary-setting should be a must. From Chuck’s case, it seems that the coach is either ignorant of his own responsibility and stand as a coach, or he is very green (inexperienced) in the coaching profession. The coach should be able to let the client know what is a coaching relationship, what will happen in the coaching process, and what can be expected as an outcome of the coaching relationship. In the case study presented by Surrenda and Thompson, Chuck seems to hold a unique perception of what a coach should do for his coachee. The coach in this case study also seems to have his own idea of what he can do (for example, in confronting Chuck’s superior).
As an external coach, the coach should be very clear about his role as a coach and should not assume the role of the coachee in the organization, nor should the external coach be monitoring the projects of coachee’s charges. A coach has a definite purpose and professional role in the organization and this role does not involve being just a cheerleader to urge and cajole people. In summary, a coach should never step into the arena to play the game for his/her coachee.

**Distinction Between the Paying Party and the Coachee.**
How do we distinguish the fine line between coachee and paying party when they are two separate entities? Should the boss (paying party) have the right to know everything that is explored in the coaching process or do the rules of privacy prevail? Such a question cropped up at the recent Europe Executive Coach Summit and it seems that situations in China are rather different from situations in the western countries. In China, the coach has an obligation to the boss (if he/she is the paying party) even if the boss is not the coachee. When the boss is the contracting party with the coach, the goal could be that the company revenue goes up by a certain percentage during the tenure of the coaching agreement. Thus, if during the coaching process, the coach finds that there is a certain person who can’t make the grade, the coach is obliged to inform the boss. Of course, if the coach is personally employed by the employee, the employer will have no rights to know about the details. With regards to the coachee revealing some illegal issues or misdeeds performed at work during the coaching process, it should be up to the personal stand of the coach or subjected to the terms of agreement in the coaching agreement.

**Outcome of Coaching Process**
There should be a clear and measurable coaching plan laid out at the start of the coaching relationship. In the case study, it seems that there are no obvious goals and that is why at the end of the several months, Chuck seems to have no apparent results to show his boss to justify the heavy costs sunk into coaching. For us in the coaching profession, goal orientedness and results are very important.

When coaching, the key should always lie with the coachee. We focus on improving his inner locus of control. We don’t fall into the situation or even worse still attempt to solve the problem on his behalf. As said before, the coach should never jump into the arena to play the game for the coachee.

Chuck’s failure to create proper roles and boundaries for his coach is also partly attributed to the coach. The coach should be very clear of his own roles in a coaching relationship and what he is there for.

**Case Study Two: Warren**
As the superior, Laura has the right to recommend her coach to others, but should not have imposed coaching on her staff. From my experience, I found that a coachee who initiated the coaching relationship has higher determination to really want to see a change in his or her life. Comparatively, coachees who have coaching imposed on them have lesser determination—although the results could be similarly wonderful.

In this case study, the coach lacks coaching ethics with reference to the ‘leakage of information’ to senior management. That is truly undesirable. As seen from the TopHuman “Human Concept©”, the coach will need to build up more on his “Beliefs and Attitude” side and boost up his integrity and code of conduct.

As a coach, asking for recommendation and referral is fine—but he should know his limits and professional ethics. If he is employed by the organization rather than by a particular staff, the organization should state such limits and terms in the coaching agreement to prevent such unnecessary situations from happening. The organization may also ensure that the coach has signed a non-disclosure agreement with them so that confidential information does not leak out of the company.

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The pioneer of coaching behind one fifth of the world population—China—Eva Wong has groomed over 30,000 coaches of various levels serving numerous sectors in China. She and her team of over 100 staff and coaches provide professional coaching services and total coaching solutions through her company offices in Vancouver (Canada), Singapore and the major cities of China. She is also the ICF Regional Chapter Leader for China and Life Member of the World Outstanding Chinese Foundation.
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