Mike’s Musings:
Hints and Help from Mike Jay
Credentialing Coaches In Organizations

Mike Jay

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Credentialing Coaches In Organizations

One of the most interesting and highly debated aspects of the new coaching industry is credentialing. Over time I’ve realized that there are many ways to look at the underlying issues resulting in a preference for credentialing in the coaching field. While it is not clear at this point whether coaching is or is not a profession, there are people lining up on both sides of the issue, some vehemently so. I believe that over the next 2-10 years we’ll see a pointed debate. Bill Gates is known for saying what you think will take two years always takes longer and what you think will take ten years will always happen sooner. I think I’m safe in my prediction.

Credentialing and professionalizing a field often are bed partners because of the standards, ethics, methods and centralization of the profession. I would like to remind everyone that professions are not always the answer. In medicine, research has recently come to light that the number one illness killing people today is iatrogenesis. It’s an illness “induced inadvertently by a physician or surgeon or by medical treatment or diagnostic procedures.” We’re finding that the people who supposedly have the cure are actually responsible for more death than the leading illnesses of age, heart disease and cancer!

So, merely having coaching designated as a profession, being centrally controlled and regulated by some “entity” may not be at all what is efficient or effective in the future. We’re also seeing reports that psychology has its own issues and that many treatments are assessed as nothing short of ineffectual. And that’s giving them the benefit of the doubt. Both medicine and psychology are “professions” as defined by most criteria.

Credentialing is becoming more ambiguous every moment in the coaching industry. There might even be a good reason not to focus on credentials per se, but to focus more on the results that are created in the coaching interaction over time. This seems to be the premise of the new evidence-based coaching arising in some circles. While many businesses that use coaching often inquire about credentials, in some cases I think it is more a way to screen unlikely candidates. Coaching in organizations, in my opinion, is still largely purchased according to specific criteria that are represented by getting a particular desired result or solving a specific problem. On top of that, like recruiting, selection of coaches is very protected in most organizations.
Essentially there are still a lot of ways to look at how to create results and how to solve problems. As we introduce higher orders of complexity in organizations, I believe we’re going to see exceeding specialization in coaching and consulting, as few people have the experience, methods, complexity perspective, moral reasoning and sense-making that is required to work at multiple levels of complexity. I believe we’re seeing evidence of that in executive work as well as the attempts by those working in non-executive roles to cope with this rising complexity. It’s becoming obvious that most people are “in over their heads” as Robert Kegan’s 1994, book called *In over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, postulated.

Credentialing, whatever it is, has to reflect the stratification of complexity — the many levels of function in an organization — and the need for coaches to meet the needs of post-modern organization...as a coalescing hierarchy some might find. Globalization is speeding up the process as more and more complexity is piled onto the already difficult perspective of integrating so many balls in the air. As a possible consequence, many coaches may just not create results no matter what credentials they currently carry.

While it’s my goal here to muse about the topic, not to solve it, I would like to offer the readers a look at some of the background behind identifying a credentialing strategy at [www.executivecoachsummit.com/credentials/paper](http://www.executivecoachsummit.com/credentials/paper) and the degree of complexity involved in “skating to where the puck is going to be,” as the Great Gretsky would say. Frankly, I don’t have the answers, but I do have some ideas about how we can create enough complexity in credentialing where coaches and the people they coach are well-served, but not so much that we limit innovation.

In closing, I’d like to give you something to think about as we move this debate forward. What governs visible order is a much different set of “qualia—intangible attributes” than what governs non-visible order. What that means is there is a lot we don’t know we don’t know and as complexity, emergence, integration and consilience — a coming together of many disciplines such as biology, physics, sociology and anthropology — become modern day concerns, coaching must lead the way, rather than follow those professions that are no longer facilitating increasing returns...but presiding over diminishing returns to their professions.

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Mike Jay

1 Editors note: For example, see the new journal publication, *The International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*.  

Themes for 2005 Issues of IJCO

*Research Perspectives on Coaching in Organizations*

*Coaching with Wisdom*

*Organizational Coaching in Closely-Held Enterprises*

*Status Report 2005: Coaching in Organizations*
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