



The International Journal of  
Coaching in Organizations™

# IJCO

*Coaching Develops Leaders  
in Times of Turmoil*

Paul Fil

This article first appeared in *IJCO The International Journal of Coaching in Organizations™*, 2009 7(4),95-108.  
It can only be reprinted and distributed with prior written permission from Professional Coaching  
Publications, Inc. (PCPI). Email John Lazar at [john@ijco.info](mailto:john@ijco.info) for such permission.

*Journal information:*  
**[www.ijco.info](http://www.ijco.info)**

*Purchases:*  
**[www.pcpionline.com](http://www.pcpionline.com)**

**2009**

ISSN 1553-3735

© Copyright 2009 PCPI.  
All rights reserved worldwide.



---

Professional Coaching Publications, Inc.™

# Coaching Develops Leaders in Times of Turmoil

Paul Fil

*Very personal observations of how coaching works in financial institutions are expanded to include principles of people development that apply, in the author's perception, both in the military and in finance. The lessons for internal and external leadership coaches would help inspire those who believe in the success of an economic sector that has come under great pressures but is populated by remarkably talented people.*

*"There is nothing wrong with dedication and goals, but if you focus on yourself, all the lights fade away and you become a fleeting moment in life." - NBA Hall of Famer Peter Maravich*

It has been my privilege to work in two exceptionally challenging and significant sectors of our society: the military and financial services. With people development as a primary focus, I've reflected on the ways in which coaching is used and perceived in these two environments, and reached insights that might benefit coaches who wish to add great value to their clients.

This article focuses on coaching in a business environment, primarily the financial sector. It will begin with my perceptions of coaching, its differences from mentoring and the best practices I've seen lead to success. The article then transitions into a discussion of leadership coaching lessons learned in the military, and how they apply to financial institutions.

## **INTERNAL COACHING: COACHING AMONG COLLEAGUES**

As I have experienced it, internal coaching is a developmental approach inside financial firms that provides positive support and guidance for individuals who are valued and often responsible for running significant sections of a business. As such, this coaching focuses on the targeted behaviors that affect the "bottom line."

Internal coaching by supervisors, peers or HR managers can occur at the individual level, during one-on-one conversations, or evolve into greater conversations in group sessions, where the coach facilitates the development of a group's ability to deliver results. But what is the coaching always based on, if not feedback?

*Disclaimer: The opinions in this paper are those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect the views of any financial institution, industry or sector.*

Both in the military and in the corporate world people expect feedback to be a two-way conversation between the associate and the supervisor... In a more hierarchical organization, however, it can be very difficult to give feedback to those outranking you, unless the supervisor genuinely and sincerely solicits and encourages the feedback. - *Finance professional, former Lieutenant Colonel, Air Force*

In organizational contexts, coaching is therefore often preceded by multi-rater evaluations (“360 degree feedback”) as a means of seeking honest, unvarnished opinions of one’s performance from subordinate, peer and superior observations. One might think that in our industry the numbers tell the whole story, but we also care about *how* those numbers were achieved. Following a first evaluation, one of my very high achieving colleagues once characterized 360° evaluations as a “punch in the gut” for being so accurate. Although they may be unpleasant (because one cannot argue with other people’s perceptions of oneself), these and other feedback tools have become a critical part of leading financial firm’s effort to really understand how a manager performs in relation to all of his or her stakeholders.

The dilemma of internal coaching among co-workers, based as it is on candid exchange of feedback, is well outlined by a finance professional with a uniformed service background:

I usually start with the premise that we are all in this together and want to win. However, in the financial sector where I work, more so than in the service, the individual can sometimes win and leave the team behind. In a team context, I feel comfortable coaching up, down and sideways and also being inquisitive about ways that I could be a better coach or individual contributor. But in an individual context, I am conscious of the internal competition and I try to be more sensitive to the many ways that feedback can be received, however well intended. With peers and senior associates in financial services, I sometimes start with the question, “Would you like feedback?” I believe this sets a tone of candor and empathy and puts the decision to the associate, so that they can determine whether or not they are ready to listen. Coaching is not useful when it is done only for the sake of the individual providing the feedback, so that they can feel good about their observation – we used to call this “sharpshooting.” If the coaching is given and received constructively, it can really strengthen the professional bonds a good team needs to have – whether in the service or the financial sector. - *Finance professional, former Combat Commander, Operation Iraqi Freedom*

### **Coaching and mentoring**

Long before coaching, there was mentoring. I've tried to understand and clarify what makes mentoring distinct. In my observation, mentoring is a term often used for a relationship between a senior individual and a more junior employee, in a similar line of business, in which the senior individual helps the other individual succeed. Therefore, mentoring is largely knowledge and perspectives transfer, and involves a desire to see a subordinate succeed in an endeavor where the mentor has particular knowledge. In today's hypercompetitive world, mentoring high-potential talent is critical to developing a competitive advantage. Mentoring is pivotal to the personal and professional development of employees, as well as the retention of diverse talent. Throughout my career, I've had the benefit of bosses who took my evolution seriously, and were generous in guiding my thinking and my actions. Organizationally sponsored mentoring contributes hugely to an organization's short and long term goals of career development and career progression.

Selecting a mentor is a personal decision – and one's boss isn't always the answer. The mentee needs to find someone they respect and admire. Someone in whom they can confide, Someone from whom they are willing to accept frank, direct advice. A good mentor is someone who is completely credible and is respected by the mentee, but can also guide him or her through the complexities of a financial institution. The competent mentor is able to provide both appreciative and uncomfortable but necessary advice to the mentee. The mentee sees the value in the discussion, and is willing to consider implementing its conclusions. Moreover, the mentor may be able to provide opportunities or "open some doors" within the organization and beyond, in ways that the mentee might not be able to access on his or her own.

Both as a superior and as a peer, I've mentored other employees and shared what I knew. But I have found the mentoring relationship distinct from coaching in that the skills I've had to learn as a coach are more complex. In a coaching relationship, the conversation skills of the leader-coach create a broader, often visionary, direction, though still ultimately focused on objective improvements. As a coach, I've had to allow the employee to participate more actively in figuring out how they wanted to achieve their goals. On the other hand, the coachee had to be willing to "learn how to learn," recognize and correct behaviors, have a strong internal desire to improve, and be willing to invest time working on those growth areas. I have found finance professionals, with their fundamental curiosity and interest in continuous learning very amenable to such activities.

Mentors "show us the ropes." To my surprise, when coaching peers, I found that as an internal coach I didn't have to have deep experience in a subject area (like a mentor should), so peers from different departments or functions as well as Human Resource managers could fulfill this role. An internal coach needs

*Much of what builds strong camaraderie in the military comes from adversity. Indeed, the more extreme the adversity, the stronger the bonds.*

to understand people and how they learn, how they set goals, how they change, as well as the mechanics of achieving success in a business area. Moreover, the leader-coach must encourage alternative opinions from the coachee. This means that the coachee should feel comfortable exploring his or her own solutions, differing perspectives and out-of-the-box alternatives. Such points of view should be considered with even greater weight than the leader-coach's own perspective. Disagreement is not disrespect. Although past personal achievements do provide credibility to a coach, a dedication to helping the coachees learn and grow is more important – including the willingness to challenge their thinking and push their horizon.

### **Coaching the best**

The current economic headwinds that the world is experiencing are significantly impacting the financial business. The constriction on profits, changes in business models and business practices, coupled with an uncertain forecast of the global economy is forcing companies to look at their talent resources very carefully. However, every successful financial firm knows that the key to their present and future success is in the hearts and minds of their employees. Therefore, the challenge is to retain and develop the best employees. Indeed, companies want their employees to remain optimistic about their company's future prospects, and interested in staying to bring it about. Coaching in the form of open, intensely coachee-focused dialogue becomes critical to this effort, particularly with top performers. I have witnessed the power of a strong, honest, conversation between a supervisor and an employee who had become insecure from so much turbulence: listening well and walking with the staff member creates new commitment on both sides.

Not surprisingly, I notice that during times of increased financial difficulty, top performers work the hardest. In the financial sector, there is always the risk of talent being “poached” by other competing organizations suffering from a loss of high performers and future leaders. Good leader-coaches attend to their best employees (as well as others), giving them the tools to be successful, and assuring them that their efforts will be remembered.

Internal coaching can provide another powerful advantage: it can focus on leadership abilities, with a leader-coach role modeling daily what he or she is working on with the coachee, while challenging and inspiring the coachee.

We know that if we don't make a true investment in leadership training, or do a good job of grooming and coaching our junior officers all along the way, they may grow up to be poor future leaders. Leadership is something we can't fail at; therefore, coaching and feedback is imperative. - *Finance executive, former Lieutenant Colonel, Air Force*

*How can the financial industry recognize that human element, and apply it currently, without defaulting to a “them and us” siege mentality?*

Leadership coaching is a longer term investment that is intended to develop the individual in a broader sense. I have noted that the coaching conversations involving leaders in financial firms today go broad and deep, ranging from personal resilience to visions of future business models, to dealing with the globalization of jobs. Such discussions are very powerful when they occur among co-workers rather than with an external coach.

### **External coaching**

On occasions, my colleagues and I have resorted to executive coaching by a professional coach from outside the firm. The objectivity of the third party is important, especially because as managers become more senior they are less likely to get candid responses and input from their subordinates. Executive coaching is sometimes also used as recognition or reward for exemplary performance, or as an investment in a valued leader. But casualness never works well in executive coaching. Regardless of this sense of privilege, coaching works best when the individual feels that there is a lot at stake for him or her in this coaching relationship; that both the individual and the organization stand to gain or lose a lot depending on the coaching outcome. Given the personal pressures and huge responsibility so many senior managers carry in the current financial environment, executive coaching becomes a much needed forum for joint innovative thinking and problem solving.

For coaching to be effective it must address the seminal issues impacting the coachee and his department. Coaching must be pithy and direct. Coaching requires management's ongoing support and involvement. Especially when an external coach is involved, and given the current cost consciousness in the financial sector, management must hold the coach and the coachee accountable for a focused joint effort and specifically measurable or observable outcomes.

### **Changes in organizational coaching**

As the financial industry evolves, so do the coaching approaches required to meet those changes. In the past, coaches (internal and external) were often called upon to correct poor performance, commonly when the manager did not want to or did not know how to deal with them. Recently, coaching is increasingly targeted at the high performer, top talent and those leading the corporation. Therefore, coaching is evolving into an increasingly important developmental tool.

I believe that the need for coaching has only increased, but its application is more targeted and strategic. As I talk to learning and development managers in finance companies, there is a growing consensus that coaching serves a real value in the financial industry. Coaching has transitioned from being past performance focused, to being future-centered, as it is increasingly focusing on growing the next levels of critically needed talent. It works to improve

*Coaches might also note that in our War Colleges as well as our business schools, commanders are taught to think in non-linear, three dimensional, asymmetric environments.*

the individual today for the expected positions of increased responsibility and authority that will come their way in the future – or on a new assignment tomorrow.

### **Commitment and loyalty**

As I pondered how we best help our financial firms get better with the help of coaching – whether internally and externally sourced – I harkened back to my military days. I started talking to other finance professionals with a military background about the ways they have seen people develop (and be developed) in the two sectors. Were we mentored in the military? Or coached? Or just trained? Are we successfully training, coaching and leading in financial firms?

In our financial firms, there are large departments designed to achieve retention and talent development, as well as programs training leaders to do the same. An intriguing coaching and mentoring issue for me has always been how financial institutions can engender the same sense of loyalty, camaraderie, esprit de corps and strong bonding that one achieves in the uniformed services. Are there lessons the military has learned that create uniquely strong feelings of affinity – feelings that one keeps for life? How can managers in a civilian sector under strong pressure, as the financial sector is today, coach and develop the same sense of mission that is common in the military?

The bonds that are formed within the crucible of the armed service might be difficult to replicate. Those who have served our nation in the armed services feel a uniquely proud sense of accomplishment. They chose to give of themselves to serve a higher cause. Few feelings are as strong. And these feelings are universal. So how can a civilian industry develop the same sense of camaraderie that exists in the military? I've seen it done, and it is what has tied me to my company and my team.

Coaches who focus with their executive on creating loyalty will know that the key to developing tight, coherent groups which develop strong lasting bonds is high standards. That is why top companies establish a regimen of high standards in all aspects of their functions. The coach has to help leaders apply the high standards to everything they do, in a manner tough but fair. The other side of the coin of high standards is knowing about, caring for, and understanding the needs of those whose efforts one manages. Lastly, the work environment has to be flawless in respecting and enforcing standards that the organization strives to maintain. The associates have to be proud of what they do, and where they do it. While these requirements are simple to explain, they depend on so many individual and group actions every day that it becomes evident why peer and professional coaching can be of such great help.

Much of what builds strong camaraderie in the military also comes from adversity. Indeed, the more extreme the adversity, the stronger the bonds. Although one might think it counterintuitive, it is a commonly known fact that reenlistments and extensions are highest in service units that are most stressed. The crucible of combat forges strong, cohesive, highly motivated units. How can the financial industry recognize that human element, and apply it currently, without defaulting to a “them and us” siege mentality? In one of my projects, for example, we selected and enrolled in management development programs those individuals of whom management expected the most; and, having brought the best and brightest together, we intentionally made the program very demanding, requiring its members to work long hours individually and together. Winning could not occur at the cost of other team members, and nobody was left behind. It was critical that the work be seen as meaningful, that there be a lot at stake. The goal was to replicate something of a feel of “combat”-like conditions in a civilian workplace.

Today’s financial industry environment is very turbulent, uncertain and highly competitive. Financial workplaces are populated by highly competent, intellectually nimble, well-trained people who are comfortable working in a virtual environment. This intellectual nimbleness is valuable in both the boardroom and on the battlefield, and represents the foundation an executive coach can use to propel his coachee forward. Coaches might also note that in our War Colleges as well as our business schools, commanders (some of whom become our future financial leaders) are taught to think in non-linear, three dimensional, asymmetric environments. They are taught that success is not effectively applying your capabilities to directly defeat your opponent, but instead being able to influence your opponent’s capabilities so that they optimize your opportunity for success, at their expense, and far more efficiently for the victor. Decisions are not just measured by their efficacy, but also by the speed of their execution. A leader who wants to compete effectively, must not only make the correct decision, but the decision must be made in advance of the “opponents.” Thus, the opponent is always limited to responding to one’s initiatives. Strategic coaching can benefit greatly from this and other military thinking.

Asymmetry creates a unique challenge for financial institutions. Consider that approximately 30% of the loans in America are made by the large banks. The balance is made by the smaller financial institutions such as local banks, regional banks, savings and loans, the local merchant lender, etc. The playing field could be called “asymmetrical” because the standards of scrutiny to which large and small banks are subjected differ widely. Large bank leaders and their coaches know that they have to operate more transparently and more strategically than anyone else in this environment.

*Too often social propriety drowns out direct, candid conversation.*

*The coached person would often prefer the unvarnished truth, and loses respect for the manager who does not have the “intestinal fortitude” to be honest.*

### COACH "ARMY STRONG"

Can some of the leadership rules of the military help to achieve superior organizational results? How is the coaching and mentoring different in the two environments?

Seriousness and gravity are omnipresent during armed conflict. As such, instructions can be very directive at points during which there is no time to explain "why." When securing a perimeter in a questionably hostile area, the leader can correctly set sectors of fire or admonish a service member for not covering his buddy or holding the line. It is understood that there is no time or relevance in explaining. After a mission, the unit can debrief and leaders can coach by explaining the rationale behind certain decisions and instructions. Often times however, your time and effort are spent focused on the next mission, and the recipient of the coaching is expected to interpret and adjust their approach without further explanation during future missions.

In peace time, the pressure is significantly reduced and there is greater opportunity to pause in the middle of a training scenario to provide more detailed instruction and the reasoning behind the instruction, which both reinforce and enhance the effect of the coaching. - *Finance manager, former Combat Commander, Operation Iraqi Freedom*

In the military context, what is called coaching - whether in peacetime or in combat - is intended to address a specific, immediate concern. In the military one does not concern oneself with many of the social niceties that might occur in a corporate environment. In my experience, when my commander coached me to adopt a certain behavior, the expectation was that it would occur immediately, would be sustained, and would likely save lives. There was a direct, immediate relationship between the need for the coaching, and the expected immediate change of behavior. The approach and the coaching style were always consistent. The guidance followed three steps: (1) "This is what needs to change," (2) "This is why it needs to change," and (3) "This is how you will change it, now." Additionally, it needs to be understood that the outcome of such directive coaching was not optional. If one is encouraged to behave a certain way, one is expected to act accordingly. The consequence of not modifying one's behavior is costly, and a second conversation would likely include greater intensity and emotion than the first, given what is always at stake.

There are circumstances when this style can be suitable in a corporate environment as well. Too often social propriety drowns out direct, candid conversation. Ironically, the coached person would often prefer the unvarnished truth, and loses respect for the manager who does not have the 'intestinal fortitude' to be honest.

*One definition of a truly well developed team is that it works flawlessly in the absence of the hands-on leader, because everyone was coached during "peacetime" on what needs to be done and why it needs to be done.*

This does not preclude open discussion about what should be changed and why, or how the employee might like to go about the change, but it should not be at the expense of clear, direct, appropriate guidance or feedback.

I think the two most important things we can do for our associates is to set expectations, and provide honest, candid feedback. We tend to sugarcoat everything, and tell our folks that they are doing fine. The reason we do that is because it's easier on us as managers. We don't enjoy having those tough conversations; however, when the jobs are eliminated and end of year compensations are handed out, our associates are left wondering why they've been severed, or why they're not getting a bonus. People WANT to do the right thing and be successful. They can't fix something if they don't know that they're doing something wrong. - *Finance professional, former Helicopter pilot, U.S. Air Force*

In times of crisis or critical events, and with people who appreciate a direct approach (based on their personality) it is beneficial to use directive coaching. In finance, while the pace is very fast, we nevertheless have the opportunity to follow up with people through genuine dialog, especially when good performers seem to get stuck or to unravel against the same, specific challenges. After clear direction, we can then engage in "post-action" reviews that allow us to understand what worked for them, what didn't - and why.

### **LEADERSHIP COACHING PRINCIPLES**

There are three leadership principles every great leader follows which are taught at most military schools: clarity of vision-mission-strategy, earned respect, and the power of humility. Let's discuss them, and then discuss how leaders and leadership coaches can use them to achieve exemplary results.

I begin with the vision of an end-state. It is my responsibility as a leader-coach to begin by clearly communicating the vision of success. This involves patiently defining what the long range, strategic goals of the organization are until each member of my team has a chance to understand them. This is a visionary conversation that permeates great companies and clearly communicates where the organization needs to be in the near future. Next, I am responsible for highlighting what the critical success factors are in order to achieve the proper end state(s). Once these elements of success are described, management further defines in broad strokes how those goals will be met, what success indicators they will watch to confirm the goals have been achieved, and why it is in every member of the organization's best mutual interests to meet the success indicators, thereby achieving the organization's vision of success.

*They hold up examples of individuals whose greatest wish is to lift up those with whom they serve, and thus possess tremendous gravitas because they are commonly self-deprecating and humble.*

Military leaders are judged on how well their soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines understand the end-state (mission). A finance organization must coach its leaders to be able to equally clearly articulate what the goal is, why it is important, what role each and every person plays in it, and how it effects them all personally, as well as the unit overall. Once the task has been described, military leaders require their subordinate leaders to recite back what their understanding of their tasks are; this ensures that our direct reports know exactly what it is we expect of them. This is not distrust, it is attention to detail. People want to do the right thing; the leadership of an organization needs to coach its teams, patiently and repeatedly, to ensure that everyone knows what 'the right thing' is.

Leaders also stress the significance of what they are doing, and why they are doing it. Most people respond much more deeply to purpose statements that have a human meaning – like the 'cause' of serving the public well - than to dry financial goals.

Once an organization or team understands the long term vision, we move on to defining the near term mission. This is a practical conversation, connecting the strategic to the tactical. This ensures that all team members understand what has to be accomplished and why. The effective leader-coach gives subordinates the freedom to work independently (or as a team) toward a shared understanding of the mission goal, without an excessive amount of managerial guidance, but remaining available for 'just-in-time' coaching. In today's highly complex, matrixed, turbulent environment, members of an organization need to fully understand what they need to do to accomplish the mission, even in the absence of detailed tactical guidance. Indeed, one definition of a truly well developed team is that it works flawlessly in the absence of the hands-on leader, because everyone was coached during 'peacetime' on what needs to be done and why it needs to be done. Everyone is willing to work together when the chips are down. A great manager should ideally work him or herself out of a job.

Respect is earned every day. Leaders earn respect, they do not assume it. In the military as well as the civilian sector, your subordinates must respect the office you hold, but they do not have to respect you for holding it. Respect is earned personally, it is not endowed. Moreover, it must be earned each and every day, yet it can be lost in a moment. The minute you try to use your office or title to gain respect, you have lost it.

The way in which coaching is received is directly correlated to the level of regard and respect that the leader has earned during peace time and the deployment. Ultimately, a professional in either a military or financial services context, needs to establish rapport, respect, and lead by example for their coaching to be valued. Rank, status, or seniority only go so far in reinforcing the value of the coaching. - *Finance executive, former combat veteran, United States Marine Corps*

Using the coaching style of leadership goes a long way towards creating the above-referenced rapport. Mentoring people to go where I have gone before allows me as the leader to role-model the values and skills I'm trying to inspire in my co-worker.

A critical component of earning great respect is an appreciation for the tremendous power of humility. Great finance organizations understand this, and coach its value to their leaders, because finance is populated by strong egos and people of great intellect and talent. Coaches – internal and external – have to create the self-awareness in their coachees that keeps such ego from derailing into arrogance. They hold up examples of individuals whose greatest wish is to lift up those with whom they serve, and thus possess tremendous *gravitas* because they are commonly self-deprecating and humble. Such leaders do not feel the need to 'beat their chests' or win every argument. Mature executives and highly skilled financial engineers know that simply by the position they hold they have already demonstrated a high level of competence and success, so they are no longer primarily concerned with themselves. Instead they prefer to rise up all others, thereby raising the organization as a whole.

Coaches help leaders assume responsibility for everything their organization does or fails to do. When the team achieves success, the leader humbly states that it is because of all of the team members, yet when it fails, he or she takes personal responsibility. The great leader-coach praises publicly, but corrects privately. This builds strong allegiance to the leader and the organization.

### **Elitism - Healthy and inclusive**

What is remarkable is that the nation with the greatest fighting force also has an all-volunteer force. It is a fighting force which is voluntarily willing to forego the comforts of corporate life for the brutal privations of soldierly living. It is counterintuitive that a society that lives in such comfort and security would generate so many great people who will volunteer to serve in so difficult a job, for so little pay, with such great risks, anywhere in the world. How can our financial leaders coach and develop that same sense of volunteerism within their organizations? Coaching and mentoring may be a big part of the answer.

In an all-volunteer military, most of the service men and women have volunteered to serve in order to better themselves while giving back to their country. Additionally, all units are a sum of their parts. So both individually and collectively, it is incumbent upon leaders to foster discipline, high morale, and self-betterment for the sake of the unit and the individual. Coaching and counseling in the service is thus seen as an investment in the individual and the team. The return on that investment comes to the individual when they are promoted or offered greater opportunities and

*A few long nights or weekends actually increase morale, especially when followed up with appropriate recognition and reward. The tough times give people "battle scars" and "bragging rights," and bring people together.*

to the team when they win a battle or complete a mission during training or combat. - *Finance professional, former Platoon Commander, United States Marine Corps*

We tend to think of coaching and mentoring as purely helping activities. But there is also the necessary element of *challenge* that can be very stimulating. I have experienced that it is a beneficial part of coaching to assign an occasionally very tough task, or a challenging role in a task force. A few long nights or weekends actually *increase* morale, especially when followed up with appropriate recognition and reward. The tough times give people 'battle scars' and 'bragging rights', and bring people together. They remember and fondly refer to those difficult times when they had to go above and beyond the ordinary, but were recognized and appreciated for it. Those emotionally remembered experiences, if productive and appropriately recognized by the leader-coach, bring people closer together and closer to the organization. In fact, staff members may *volunteer* for similar tasks in the future.

Another feeling I have found which enhances a volunteer spirit is being part of something unique. In today's environment, the term *elitism* connotes something divisive, and non-inclusive. Indeed, it has almost become a pejorative. However, to a sophisticated leader-coach, elitism can be a source of organizational pride, inclusivity, and a strong value multiplier. Moreover, developing a sense of 'holistic elitism' (whereby everyone is welcome to try out, but only a few great ones are selected) can prove beneficial to the organization because it develops a strong sense of commitment. If people feel they and their organization are special and unique, they will stay, and personnel turnover or turbulence will be reduced.

The essential ingredient to inclusive elitism is management recognition of meaningful and challenging work well done by a team of associates who respect each other. Leader-coaches play a critical part in building (or potentially destroying) the respect team members have for each other, by virtue of how they speak of each member, and of the team as a whole.

### **THE COMFORT OF THE CLOTH**

Top flight financial institutions know that eventually they will return to pre-recession business levels. In order to prepare for those volumes, they develop the leaders they will need then... now. As these elite leaders are being developed, the coaches in these companies remember that most people are attracted to an organization for what they think it is, but stay based on whom they work with and for. Indeed, people generally leave because of management, not because of the work itself. When it really matters, people stay at an organization because of the people they work with. *They stay for each other.*

The bonding that occurs among people who have worked together, especially during difficult times, is what the military calls the 'comfort of the cloth.' When soldiers are marching into combat, they gain comfort in knowing their fellow soldiers are standing shoulder to shoulder with them; metaphorically, their shoulder cloth is touching. They form a metaphorical phalanx. This affinity enhances personal courage and develops intensely strong unit cohesion. People will stay in an organization and fight with their comrades. As we stated earlier, the highest extensions and reenlistments occur in units that have recently undergone the most stress! The experience of shared discomfort, fear and unconditional mutual support yields uncommonly cohesive teams. The greatest feeling of success lies at the end of the path of greatest resistance.

*The bonding that occurs among people who have worked together, especially during difficult times, is what the military calls the “comfort of the cloth.”*

A similar sense of affiliation can develop in the financial industry as well. This is done by reinforcing the coaching with the use of elite task forces, difficult joint assignments, shared experiences of arduous effort and shared recognition and rewards.

In the military, such strong affiliation also occurs against the backdrop of highly diverse ethnic and social backgrounds. Financial institutions know that embracing diversity is essential if they want to be a company representative of the communities and the nation they serve.

The “bottom line” value of embracing diversity is that it is the right thing to do. Moreover, it makes good business sense. The military, contrary to many perceptions, is a remarkably progressive example. The military has consistently adopted progressive social change, well in advance of our national culture. For instance, the military welcomed and promoted within its ranks people of different racial backgrounds long before they were welcomed in the greater society and even in business. This progressive attitude also applies to women, who have been promoted to positions of increased responsibility and authority well in advance of the civilian sector. Consequently, our nation enjoys an extremely effective, diverse, all-volunteer force that is willing to serve anywhere, under any conditions, and is a model for the rest of the world.

I would like to leave the last word on excellence and coaching to a colleague who is a former combat Infantry commander. His wise principles for achieving success through people are as follows:

1. Be positive in the face of adversity and uncertainty. Lead to the next milestone even if you as a leader are unclear about what the future holds.
2. Acknowledge and accept that no one can perform perfectly, but inspire the best results by engaging the team collaboratively and exuding enthusiasm.

3. The best investment you can make is an investment in your people. If all else goes awry, focus on development.
4. Finally, give people a mission even when there is no clear mission above you. In combat as in the financial services industry, bored professionals are more depressed and more likely to dwell on what's wrong with the system. Engaged professionals can begin planting the seeds for a brighter future and feel a sense of accomplishment along the way. - *Finance professional, former Combat Infantry Commander, Operation Iraqi Freedom*

---

## REFERENCES

- Cairo, P.C., & Dotlich, D.L. (2003). *Why CEOs fail: The 11 behaviors that can derail your climb to the top-and how to manage them*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap...and others do not*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Greenleaf, R.K. (1977). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Horn, B. (2009, September). Military ethos: Love 'em or hate 'em: Learning to live with elites, *Canada National Defense*. Retrieved from <http://www.journal.dnd.ca/vo8/no4/horn-eng.asp>
- Nielsen, B. (2009, August). *Top 10 training metrics*. Retrieved from <http://ezinearticles.com/?Top-10-Training-Metrics&id=921908>
- Somers, M. (n.d.). *How to coach through difficult times*. Retrieved from <http://ezinearticles.com/?How-to-Coach-Through-Difficult-Times&id=2284976>

---

## ■ ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Paul Robert Fil, M.A., M.M.A.S.**

**Phone:** 302.432.2627

**Email:** [fil580@aol.com](mailto:fil580@aol.com)

Paul Fil is a Learning Consultant for a major financial institution, where he has worked for over ten years. Paul partners with different lines of business to develop learning solutions, and has managed leadership development programs. Paul is also a retired Army Infantry Lieutenant Colonel, with over twenty-one years on active duty. While on active duty Paul held multiple commands, and served in Asia, North America and Europe.

---

## Resource Center for Professional Coaching in Organizations

*IJCO The International Journal of Coaching in Organizations*™ is the signature publication of Professional Coaching Publications, Inc.™ (PCPI). In addition to this internationally acclaimed journal, PCPI publishes books on topics of interest to those in the coaching community, whether practitioner, decision maker, or end user. You can count on PCPI, Inc. to provide content that pushes the envelope — bringing theory, research and application together in ways that inform, engage and provoke. Visit the PCPI website, [www.pcpionline.com](http://www.pcpionline.com), to view and purchase our growing line of products.

For advertising, marketing and operations inquiries, please contact to John Lazar, *IJCO*™ Co-Executive Editor, at [john@ijco.info](mailto:john@ijco.info). If you have an article you would like to submit for peer review consideration, please email to the *IJCO* Office Manager at [officemanager@ijco.info](mailto:officemanager@ijco.info). If you have other administrative questions, please refer them to our *IJCO* Office Manager at [officemanager@ijco.info](mailto:officemanager@ijco.info).

---

Visit Both Our Sites at Your Convenience

---

*Journal information:*  
**[www.ijco.info](http://www.ijco.info)**

*Purchases:*  
**[www.pcpionline.com](http://www.pcpionline.com)**

