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Inviting a Dialogue About Core Coaching Competencies

Jeffrey E. Auerbach

The process of International Coach Federation (ICF) coach credentialing and accreditation of coach training programs revolves around the individual coach, or the coach training organization, demonstrating sufficient muster in the eleven ICF core competencies. The "Portfolio Committee" developed the eleven ICF core competencies in 1999. This study evaluates how the existing eleven core competencies were identified and reports on a pilot survey of forty coaching competencies rated by twenty-nine coaches. This paper examines whether coaches currently view the eleven ICF coaching competencies as the most important competencies to be an effective coach. In addition, preliminary findings are briefly reported of a survey in which 565 coaches rated which competencies, or skills, are most important to valuable coaching.

Nine of the eleven ICF core coaching competencies are identified as highly important by the coaches in the survey and three additional competencies that are not named by ICF are identified. The three competencies that were identified in this survey that are not specifically listed as ICF competencies are "lifelong training and development," "managing obstacles," and "thought partner."

The top twelve coaching competencies identified by the participants, in no particular order, were: lifelong training and development; establishing trust and intimacy with the client; coaching presence; powerful questioning; designing actions; managing progress and accountability; direct communication; active listening; creating awareness; thought partner; planning and goal setting; and managing obstacles.

The competency survey indicates that the ICF core coaching competencies developed six years ago are still considered important to coaches although other competencies are also deemed uniquely valuable to be an outstanding coach.

Different coaching competencies are necessary depending on the needs of the client - complicating the identification of a core set of coaching competencies. The author cautions that as research continues into coaching competencies the value of the coach's wisdom, creativity, and professional judgment should not be constrained by an over reliance on any specific set of coaching competency guidelines.

Introduction

As coaching has expanded, the number of coach training programs has also grown, from eight in 1999, to thirty International Coach Federation (ICF) Accredited Coach Training Programs in April 2005. In addition, an estimated 145 additional coach training programs exist, albeit not accredited by the International Coach Federation (Peer Resources, 2005).
Although there are many for-profit organizations certifying coaches, the largest non-profit coaching professional organization, with an elected board of directors, is the ICF. A goal of the ICF is to maintain the coaching industry as a self-governing industry. Most media covering coaching emphasizes the need for the client to work with a trained, certified coach noting that since coaching is not regulated any individual can claim to be a coach. The drive to certify or "accredit" coaches lead to the development of an accreditation process by the ICF. In 1999 the "grandfathering" period of ICF accreditation ended. Since then coaches have become credentialed through either completing a "portfolio application" or a "graduate of an accredited coach training program" application process. Central to this process are the eleven ICF core coaching competencies. The credentialing of individual coaches and the approval of an "Accredited Coach Training Program" both revolve around the coach that is applying for credentialing, or the school that is applying for accreditation, as demonstrating sufficient muster, or a curriculum rooted in the eleven ICF Professional Coaching Core Competencies.

There is growing interest from coaching practitioners, researchers and some coach training organizations for increased dialogue and research on evidence-based coaching, coaching effectiveness, and coaching competencies and their application to the coach training process (Stober, 2004, 2005; Grant, 2004).

**Purpose of the Study**

The fact that both individual coaches and coach training programs are approved based on a demonstration of these eleven ICF core coaching competencies begs the question of how these eleven core competencies were developed. Are these competencies most needed for effective coaching, in most situations, and are they the best competencies for coach training programs to make a centerpiece of their curriculum?

In this paper we will examine the selection of the eleven core competencies, review research related to coaching roles and how they relate to coaching competencies, and analyze whether or not coaches currently identify the eleven ICF core competencies as among the most important competencies to be an effective coach. In addition recommendations and cautions are indicated for future research.

**How Were the Core Competencies Developed?**

No information on how these eleven core coaching competencies came to be selected has been published previously in a scholarly journal. Through a series of electronic communications with several past and current ICF board members the following description of the process was obtained.

In 1998 a committee entitled the "Portfolio Committee" was formed and chaired by Pam Richarde and Laura Whitworth. The committee was made up of the founders or senior faculty of the eight best-known coaching schools of the time. The intent was to agree upon coaching competencies and then create a portfolio exam for use by ICF that reflected these competencies. The current listing of the eleven core competencies was published on the ICF website in March 1999.

In the selection process the committee members emphasized the knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics that they considered were reflected in a competent coach. At the end of the process all of the eight coaching schools' representatives affirmed that the ICF core coaching competencies were ones that each committee member could support 100%, and that the schools' model of coaching and training incorporated the ICF competencies at least as a minimum (Richarde, 2005; Reding, 2005).

The process of selecting the eleven competencies and specific selection of identified behaviors has been described by one of the committee members as "part majority and part intuitive." In addition, there was a desire to develop competencies that when taken as a whole would distinguish a competent coach from a competent therapist, consultant, teacher, manager, friend, or mentor.

The intent of the committee was that the competencies developed would apply to every type of professional coach. Further, the committee specified which competencies would be used in every coaching session and which competencies were important for a competent coach to be able to use, when appropriate, in particular situations (Reding, 2005).

This determination of the eleven core coaching competencies adopted by ICF is based on an "expert model" where a group of experts determined, based on their experience, which competencies are most important. What was not evaluated in a systematic manner was whether the client obtains better results by working with a coach who utilizes these eleven core competencies appropriately than by working with a coach who utilizes a somewhat different set of core coaching competencies. That research is beyond the scope of this paper but would be a valuable study.

**Background on Competencies in Coaching**

For the purposes of examining professional coaching, a competency is defined as the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors that differentiate level of effectiveness. In one example of defining a competency, an individual who is seen as a "change catalyst" would need to demonstrate the following four behaviors with particular frequency:

1. Defines general need for change
2. Expresses vision for change
3. Acts to support change
4. Personally leads change (Boyatzis, Goleman and Hay/McBer, 1999)

Grant (2004) reported that since 1937 there were only 122 peer reviewed academic papers specifically focused on professional coaching. However, only one of those articles, "Executive Coaching: The Need for Standards of Competence" (Brotman, Liberi, and Wasyshyn, 1998), and only one coaching book (Auerbach, 2005), specifically addressed coaching "competence" in the title.

Especially relevant to examining the competencies of an effective coach is the "competency" approach designed to predict the outcome of effectiveness in various occupations, often with a primary emphasis on managers and leaders (McClelland, 1973;
Boyatzis, 1982; Lombardo and Eichenger, 1999). In this competency approach, specific capabilities are identified and validated against effectiveness measures, or often inductively discovered and then articulated as competencies. McClelland and Boyatzis's work suggests that it is insufficient to solely rely on the expert model of identifying the competencies of coaching, stopping there and then recommending that these competencies are what needs to be taught and what coaches need to be evaluated on. The next step is to analyze successful outcomes and then identify coaching competencies that have criterion-related validation. Perhaps one of the best methods to identify coaching competencies would include a combination of direct observation of coaching sessions over time, then an assessment of outcomes; an appreciative inquiry related survey of experienced coaches of successful coaching encounters; and an analysis of coaching outcomes using criterion sampling.

One of the most common methods of developing specific articulations of competencies is the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) where the objective is to identify specific and concrete behaviors that designate a person as outstanding or inadequate in his or her role. This technique would require that observers who are aware of the aims and objectives of coaching observe effective coaches for a specific time period and log specific coaching behaviors, and skills, that are linked to effective or ineffective outcomes. There are a large number of potential coaching competencies. A complete list of the types of knowledge and tools that comprise the competencies is beyond the scope of this paper. However, they would include a wide range of attitudes, skills, and techniques such as: relationship building, use of assessments, 360-degree feedback, insight, competency development, dialogue skills, systems-based approaches, listening skills, questioning skills, cultural awareness, diversity, psychological knowledge and business knowledge (Peterson, 1996; Tobias, 1996; Kiel, Rimmer, Williams, and Doyle, 1996; Katz and Miller, 1996; Levinson, 1996; Saporito, 1996; Witherspoon and White 1996; and Stein 1993a).

A complication in the development of coaching competencies is the variety of coaching being practiced in the marketplace. For example, Witherspoon and White (1996) report there are four different roles that coaches often play when coaching in organizations. In some cases, different competencies would be most important depending on the role of the coach: skills, performance, development, and the wide-open "thought partner" role of coaching a senior executive. Auerbach (2001) identified the four most common executive coaching roles, in order of frequency: 1) aiding in the development of effective executive skills, 2) identifying and modifying managerial style to improve the effectiveness of individuals and teams, 3) helping executives identify and utilize key strengths, and 4) aiding in the adaptation to change. These frequent roles suggest that competency in the technical areas of executive and leadership development and the recent research in positive psychology would be especially relevant, yet these knowledge domains are not mentioned in the eleven ICF core competency areas.

Research of the ICF membership (Grant and Zackon, 2004) found that 19% have prior employment in the mental health fields, whereas 31% have primarily management experience, representing substantially different college education and work experience. This diversity suggests a differing set of competencies, and development needs, of new coaches moving into coach training programs. Stein (2003b) points out that there are at least nine professional areas that coaching draws on that serve as roots for the coaching field. Numerous early leaders in the field of psychology, Jung, Frankel, Adler, and Maslow, as well as current contributors, such as Seligman (2002), Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002), Kouzes and Posner (2002), and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) have espoused development approaches that have not been limited to the treatment of pathology, but also mirrored what coaches now engage in such as focusing on methods to more fully develop oneself, obtain a clearer vision of one's life in line with vision and values, and engage in action learning activities (Auerbach, 2001). Again this points to a myriad of potential competencies – specific skills, knowledge, techniques, and behaviors that could be linked to effective coaching outcomes. To further complicate the range of desired competencies in a coach, moreover, amongst ICF 2004 Conference attendees, 32% indicate their primary work area is personal coaching and 30% indicate their primary focus is on executive coaching – again suggesting that there may be different competencies linked to whether one's focus is personal coaching or executive coaching (International Coach Federation Conference Evaluation, Final Report, December 2004).

Demographics

The survey participants were 76% female and 24% male and all had completed a coach-training program or were enrolled in an ICF coach-training curriculum at the College of Executive Coaching. A pre-requisite for admission in this program is the possession of a graduate degree so 100% of the participants had either a Master's or Doctoral Degree in fields such as psychology, business administration, social work, education, or organizational development. The median length of time that the participants had been earning at least 25% of their income in coaching was 2.7 years with a range of less than one year to fifteen years.

Table 1: Demographic data of the 29 survey respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male:</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Female:</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<th>Age</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median:</td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Range:</td>
<td>28-56</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Years Coaching</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median:</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range:</td>
<td>&gt;1 - 15</td>
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</table>
Method and Evaluation of Competencies

A random sample of 90 coaches were sent via email a 40-item pilot coaching competency questionnaire and asked to select the 20 competencies that they believed were most important for them to be an outstanding coach. Twenty-nine valid surveys were returned and scored. The percentages indicating how frequently the participants identified a particular competency as one of the twenty most important competencies are reported in this paper.

The forty coaching competencies, included (a) a verbatim listing of the eleven ICF coaching competencies, (b) a verbatim listing of an additional twelve executive coaching core competencies (Brotman, Liberi and Wasylshyn, 1998) which had been adapted from the Career Architect (1992), plus (c) additional competencies, including technical skills, competencies, and coaching approaches, such as "use of assessments," "values identification and clarification," and "thought partner" identified by the author from other senior personal and executive coaches.

Responses to the Coaching Competency Survey

Twenty-nine valid survey responses were received. Table 2 indicates the percentage of respondents that identified the respective competency as one of the twenty most important competencies to be an outstanding coach. The top twelve competencies identified by the participants, in no particular order, were:

- Lifelong Training and Development
- Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client
- Coaching Presence
- Powerful Questioning
- Designing Actions
- Managing Progress and Accountability
- Direct Communication
- Active Listening
- Creating Awareness
- Thought Partner
- Planning and Goal Setting
- Managing Obstacles

Of the eleven ICF core coaching competencies nine are in the top twelve identified in this study. The only two ICF coaching competencies that were not identified in the top twelve were "Meeting ethical guidelines and professional standards" and "establishing the coaching agreement." The three competencies that were identified in this survey as in the top twelve that are not specifically listed in the ICF competencies are "lifelong training and development," "managing obstacles," and "thought partner." (See Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Competency Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Lifelong Training and Development</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Empathetic Listening</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Body Language and Communication Style</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Approachability</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Comfort Around Top Management</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Customer Focus</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Meeting Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Establishing the Coaching Agreement</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Acceptance and Respect</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Coaching Presence</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Utilization of Coaching Tools</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Powerful Questioning</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Goal Formation and Clarification</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Designing Actions</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Establishing and Maintaining Accountability</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Managing Progress and Accountability</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Integrity and Trust</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Intellectual Horsepower</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Interpersonal Savvy</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Direct Communication</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Dealing With Paradox</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Political Savvy</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Self-Knowledge</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Active Listening</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Values Identification and Clarification</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Challenges to Break Out</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Resource Identification</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Use of Assessments</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Creating Awareness</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Imagining the Successful Outcome</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Managing Obstacles</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Identifying Mental Models</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Thought Partner</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Planning and Goal Setting</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>Encouraging the Client's Dreams</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>Commitment To Outcomes</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion of Findings

This paper seemingly makes the assumption that identifying the competencies of an effective coach is a useful undertaking. Not all authors agree with this premise. Ferrar (2004, p. 53) quotes the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) as having commissioned a project to "...establish whether there is an underlying set of core competencies common to all types of coaching and mentoring practice" and to "...identify whether it is possible to draw existing standards and competencies for all types of coaching and mentoring into a common framework."

Ferrar (2004) observes the cautiousness of the EMCC in examining the concept of competencies in coaching, and argues that there are limits to the usefulness of competencies and points out that the complexities of context can make an overemphasis on setting standards and evaluating competence, at the expense of exercising contextual based professional judgment. As an example, he points to the well-developed UK based system of the National Vocational Qualifications as having had little positive impact on the customer's experience in the financial services industry.

Moreover, it's important to remember that this study was not designed to illustrate a complete list of coaching competencies. Nor does this study attempt to specify which is the most important coaching competency. Rather it identifies that a group of competencies are deemed to be fundamental to be an outstanding coach in these research participants' opinion, and that there are other competencies that also are deemed important that are not addressed explicitly in the ICF competencies. Furthermore, it is observed that the ICF core competencies did make up the majority of the competencies that these coaches identified as most important.

A difficulty in evaluating existing lists of coaching competencies is that different authors have described the competencies with varying degrees of depth and clarity. For example, "coaching presence" as described by ICF includes a conglomeration of behaviors, and is 112 words in length; "designing actions" is 184 words in length; and "powerful questioning" has 84 words. Whereas, Brotman et al. (1998), use 41 words to describe "dealing with paradox." The impact of the longer competency descriptions is the respondent may conclude the longer description is more in-depth, hence more important. A useful next step would be to further the language of the existing ICF core coaching competencies to be refined and shortened while maintaining the central meaning of the competencies.

A range of explanations is available for why the ICF core coaching competencies are overall deemed as the most important. For example, these core competencies are emphasized in coach training programs, which have the effect of convincing coaches that they must be the most important competencies. Also, two of the three other non-ICF competencies that made the top twelve in this study, "managing obstacles" and "thought partner," happen to be competencies that are strongly emphasized in the coach training program that the sample was drawn from. Of course, the results may also be a reflection that the ICF competencies were the longest and most detailed of the competencies listed in the survey, and the results may also indicate that the ICF committee did an outstanding job in identifying and describing key coaching competencies.

Conclusion

The competency survey indicates that the ICF core coaching competencies developed six years ago are still considered centrally important to coaches although other competencies are also deemed uniquely valuable to be an outstanding coach. Although there may be different opinions on which competencies are most essential and future research studies may continue to delineate important competencies and specific behavioral descriptors, the value and intention of delineating what works, and what does not, is important to provide the best value for our clients and strengthen the coaching field. However, the value of the coach's wisdom, creativity, and professional judgment should not be constrained by an over-reliance on any specific set of coaching competency guidelines.

References


Appendix

Percentage of Respondents Indicating: "One of Twenty Most Important Competencies Needed To Be An Outstanding Coach" (Verbatim listing of competencies)

- **Acceptance and Respect**: Coach creates an environment of acceptance and respect for the client to work in. (41%)

- **Active Listening**: Ability to focus completely on what the client is saying and is not saying, to understand the meaning of what is said in the context of the client's desires, and to support client self-expression; attends to the client and the client's agenda, and not to the coach's agenda for the client; hears the client's concerns, goals, values and beliefs about what is and is not possible; distinguishes between the words, the tone of voice, and the body language; summarizes, paraphrases, reiterates, mirrors back what the client has said to ensure clarity and understanding; encourages, accepts, explores and reinforces the client's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs, suggestions, etc.; integrates and builds on client's ideas and suggestions; "bottom-lines" or understands the essence of the client's communication and helps the client get there rather than engaging in long descriptive stories; allows the client to vent or "clear" the situation without judgment or attachment in order to move on to next steps. (76%)

- **Approachability**: Is easy to approach and talk to; spends the extra effort to put others at ease; can be warm, pleasant, and gracious; is sensitive to and patient with interpersonal anxieties of others; builds rapport well; is a good listener. (48%)

- **Body Language and Communication Style**: Coach identifies and responds congruently within the client's body language, communication style and
Challenges to Break Out: Creatively use questions to help the client consider if there are new, better ways to proceed...breaking out and moving beyond the status quo. (38%)

Coaching Presence: Ability to be fully conscious and create spontaneous relationship with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible and confident; is present and flexible during the coaching process, dancing in the moment; accesses own intuition and trusts one's inner knowing - "goes with the gut"; is open to not knowing and takes risks; sees many ways to work with the client, and chooses in the moment what is most effective; uses humor effectively to create lightness and energy; confidently shifts perspectives and experiments with new possibilities for own action; demonstrates confidence in working with strong emotions, and can self-manage and not be overpowered or enmeshed by client's emotions. (79%)

Comfort Around Top Management: Can deal comfortably with senior executives; understands how top executives think and process information; can talk their language and respond to their needs; demonstrates leadership with minimal dependence. (24%)

Commitment to Outcomes: Maintain a focus on client-desired outcomes. (34%)

Compassion: Genuinely cares about people; is concerned about their work and non-work problems; is available and ready to help; demonstrates real empathy with the joys, frustrations, and pain of others. (38%)

Creating Awareness: Ability to integrate and accurately evaluate multiple sources of information, and to make interpretations that help the client to gain awareness and thereby achieve agreed-upon results; goes beyond what is said in assessing client's concerns, not getting hooked by the client's description; invokes inquiry for greater understanding, awareness and clarity; identifies for the client his/her underlying concerns, typical and fixed ways of perceiving himself/herself and the world, differences between the facts and the interpretation, disparities between thoughts, feelings and action; helps clients to discover for themselves the new thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, emotions, moods, etc. that strengthen their ability to take action and achieve what is important to them; communicates broader perspectives to clients and inspires commitment to shift their viewpoints and find new possibilities for action; helps clients to see the different, interrelated factors that affect them and their behaviors (e.g., thoughts, emotions, body, background); expresses insights to clients in ways that are useful and meaningful for the client; identifies major strengths vs. major areas for learning and growth, and what is most important to address during coaching; asks the client to distinguish between trivial and significant issues, situational vs. recurring behaviors, when detecting a separation between what is being stated and what is being done. (66%)

Creativity: Can formulate new and unique ideas, easily makes connections among previously unrelated notions in ways that yield novel problem solving and/or plans for the future. (45%)

Customer Focus: Is dedicated to meeting the expectations and requirements of internal and external customers, establishes and maintains effective relationships with customers and gains their trust and respect. (17%)

Dealing With Paradox: Is very flexible and adaptable; can act in ways that seem contradictory; can be both tough and compassionate, empathic and objective; can be self-confident and appropriately humble; is seen as balanced despite the conflicting demands of a situation. (21%)

Designing Actions: Ability to create with the client opportunities for ongoing learning, during coaching and in work/life situations, and for taking new actions that will most effectively lead to agreed-upon coaching results; brainstorms and assists the client to define actions that will enable the client to demonstrate, practice and deepen new learning; helps the client to focus on and systematically explore specific concerns and opportunities that are central to agreed-upon coaching goals; engages the client to explore alternative ideas and solutions, to evaluate options, and to make related decisions; promotes active experimentation and self-discovery, where the client applies what has been discussed and learned during sessions immediately afterwards in his/her work or life setting; celebrates client successes and capabilities for future growth; challenges client's assumptions and perspectives to provoke new ideas and find new possibilities for action; advocates or brings forward points of view that are aligned with client goals and, without attachment, engages the client to consider them; helps the client "do it now" during the coaching session, providing immediate support; encourages stretches and challenges but also a comfortable pace of learning. (69%)

Direct Communication: Ability to communicate effectively during coaching sessions, and to use language that has the greatest positive impact on the client; is clear, articulate and direct in sharing and providing feedback; reframes and articulates to help the client understand from another perspective what he/she wants or is uncertain about; clearly states coaching objectives, meeting agenda, purpose of techniques or exercises; uses language appropriate and respectful to the client (e.g., non-sexist, non-racist, non-technical, non-jargon); uses metaphor and analogy to help to illustrate a point or paint a verbal picture. (66%)

Empathic Listening: Accurate reflection of the client's emotional state. (41%)

Empowerment: Engage in behaviors that tend to lead a client to feel empowered versus dependent. (52%)

Encouraging the Client's Dreams: Facilitate the client in identifying life-long meaningful dreams that enrich the client's life in a deeply satisfying manner. (24%)

Establishing and Maintaining Accountability: Facilitate client following through on their selected action steps and goals in a manner that encourages self-reliance with minimal dependence. (24%)
• Establishing the Coaching Agreement: Ability to understand what is required in the specific coaching interaction and to come to agreement with the prospective and new client about the coaching process and relationship; understands and effectively discusses with the client the guidelines and specific parameters of the coaching relationship (e.g., logistics, fees, scheduling, inclusion of others if appropriate); reaches agreement about what is appropriate in the relationship and what is not, what is and is not being offered, and about the client’s and coach’s responsibilities; determines whether there is an effective match between his/her coaching method and the needs of the prospective client. (59%)

• Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client: Ability to create a safe, supportive environment that produces ongoing mutual respect and trust; shows genuine concern for the client’s welfare and future; continuously demonstrates personal integrity, honesty and sincerity; establishes clear agreements and keeps promises; demonstrates respect for client’s perceptions; learning style, personal being; provides ongoing support for and champions new behaviors and actions, including those involving risk taking and fear of failure; asks permission to coach client in sensitive, new areas. (79%)

• Goal Formation and Clarification: Client and Coach establish clear and inspiring positive goals congruent with Client’s values. (48%)
  Identifying Mental Models: Identify assumptions and mental models, and help client select adaptive perspectives on challenges. (17%)

• Imagining the Successful Outcome: Facilitates the client seeing himself achieving the desired outcome. (31%)

• Integrity and Trust: Is widely trusted; is seen as a direct, truthful individual; can present the unvarnished truth in an appropriate and helpful manner; keeps confidences. (59%)

• Intellectual Horsepower: Is bright and intelligent; deals with concepts and complexity comfortably; described as intellectually sharp, capable, and agile. (10%)

• Interpersonal Savvy: Relates well to all kinds of people: up, down, and sideways, inside and outside the organization; builds appropriate rapport; listens; builds constructive and effective relationships; uses diplomacy and tact; truly values people. (45%)

• Lifelong Training and Development: Coach engages in continual personal and professional development. (62%)

• Managing Obstacles: Identify and manage internal and external obstacles. Facilitates anticipating obstacles to their goals, and recognizing if they are internal or external and rehearses potential solutions. (62%)

• Managing Progress and Accountability: Ability to hold attention on what is important for the client, and to leave responsibility with the client to take action; clearly requests of the client actions that will move the client toward their stated goals; demonstrates follow through by asking the client about those actions that the client committed to during the previous session(s); acknowledges the client for what they have done, not done, learned or become aware of since the previous coaching session(s); effectively prepares, organizes and reviews with client information obtained during sessions; keeps the client on track between sessions by holding attention on the coaching plan and outcomes, agreed-upon courses of action, and topics for future session(s); focuses on the coaching plan but is also open to adjusting behaviors and actions based on the coaching process and shifts in direction during sessions; is able to move back and forth between the big picture of where the client is heading, setting a context for what is being discussed and where the client wishes to go; promotes client’s self-discipline and holds the client accountable for what they say they are going to do, for the results of an intended action, or for a specific plan with related time frames; develops the client’s ability to make decisions, address key concerns, and develop herself/herself (to get feedback, to determine priorities and set the pace of learning, to reflect on and learn from experiences); positively confronts the client with the fact that he/she did not take agreed-upon actions. (66%)

• Meeting Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards: Understanding of coaching ethics and standards and ability to apply them appropriately in all coaching situations; understands and exhibits in own behaviors the ICF standards of conduct: understands and follows all ICF ethical guidelines; clearly communicates the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy and other support professions; refers client to another support professional as needed, knowing when this is needed and the available resources. (55%)

• Planning and Goal Setting: Ability to develop and maintain an effective coaching plan with the client; consolidates collected information and establishes a coaching plan and development goals with the client that address concerns and major areas for learning and development; creates a plan with results that are attainable, measurable, specific and have target dates; makes plan adjustments as warranted by the coaching process and by changes in the situation; helps the client identify and access different resources for learning (e.g., books, other professionals); identifies and targets early successes that are important to the client. (62%)

• Political Savvy: Can maneuver through complex political situations effectively and quietly, is sensitive to how people and organizations function, anticipates where the land mines are and plans his or her approach accordingly, views corporate politics as a necessary part of organizational life and works to adjust to that reality. (17%)

• Powerful Questioning: Ability to ask questions that reveal the information needed for maximum benefit to the coaching relationship and the client; asks questions that reflect active listening and an understanding of the client’s perspective; asks questions that evoke discovery, insight, commitment or action (e.g., those that challenge the client’s assumptions); asks open-ended questions that create greater clarity, possibility or new learning; asks questions that move the client towards what they desire, not questions that ask for the client to justify or look backwards. (83%)
Evidence-Based Practice: A Potential Approach for Effective Coaching

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As coaching develops as an emerging profession, it is vital for coaches to begin integrating evidence from both coaching-specific research and related disciplines, their own expertise, and an understanding of the uniqueness of each client. Evidence-based practices (EBPs) encompass these three endeavors in designing interventions aimed at positive growth and change for their recipients. While coaching does not have an extensive body of specific knowledge, there is a wealth of evidence from fields such as psychology, adult learning, communication, and others which has a bearing on coaches' knowledge and practice. An EBP approach has the potential to raise the standards of practice and training, increase the credibility of coaching as an intervention, and stretch the individual coach's thinking and practice, if undertaken in its broadest form. However, we suggest there are a number of questions raised by the application of EBP to coaching.

What Is Evidence-Based Practice?

In developing an evidence-based approach to coaching, it is helpful to look at how evidence-based practice has developed and been discussed in other related fields. EBP first grew out of the practice of medicine and has since influenced other fields, notably psychology. It has been a discussion with some controversy, much of which goes to the heart of where research and theory relate to practice and where "artful" practice and "scientific" evidence meet. So first, let us lay out a definition from medicine:

Evidence-based practice is "the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients, [which] means integrating individual clinical expertise with the best available external clinical evidence from systematic research (Sackett, Haynes, Guyatt, and Tugwell, 1996, p. 71).

In unpacking this definition, there are three main characteristics that bear discussion. First, EBP requires that the practitioner (doctor, psychologist, coach, etc.) use the best available knowledge in his or her field. Second, the EBP practitioner needs to integrate this knowledge with his or her own expertise. Third, this integration must be accomplished in the context of each client's individual situation. When these three variables are taken into account, interventions will be uniquely customized for each client using a comprehensive and practical framework.

As such, EBP is not following a rigid protocol to avoid flying by the seat of your pants. It requires a (very) thoughtful approach in evaluating what is known about different techniques, what our experience tells us, and what our client specifically needs in order to

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