Overview
Few researchers have investigated the factors that differentiate exceptional executive coaches from their less able colleagues. A group of 20 HR professionals with extensive experience in purchasing and managing executive coaching services completed 90-minute interviews regarding their experiences of working with exceptional coaches.

Findings

#1: Average program structure was $10,800 for 9 sessions over 6 months.

#2: A “great outcome” from coaching is “behaviour change” - complex, idiosyncratic, personally-demanding behaviour change.

#3: The work of exceptional coaches seems to derive from identifiable factors that form a logical model.

#4: Exceptional coaching is characterised by eight coaching capabilities.

#5: Exceptional coaches can deliver against any and all of these capabilities with exceptional expertise.

#6: Most purchasers recommended and used informal and qualitative measurement methods. Quantitative methods are possible, but are subject to a number of constraints.

#7: If measurement is a requirement, then purchasers recommended a number of basic practices.

#8: Locating good coaches was done almost entirely through informal processes, mostly referral.

#9: Coach selection is not a straightforward process; the identification of exceptional coaches tends to occur over time; hiring an executive coach is hiring a person (rather than a skill-set, a method, or an experience-base); and selecting a good coach does not guarantee a good match with the executive.

#10: Recommended prerequisites to coach accreditation included: training in a broad range of coaching approaches, a practical organisational background, personal development components, supervised practice, and recognition of the need for ongoing development.
1.0 Research Structure & Demographics

1.1 Design and Demographics

This study is the first of three designed to better understand exceptional coaches and coaching. This study consisted of a series of 90-minute interviews with HR professionals who had extensive experience in purchasing and managing executive coaching programs. The purchasers as a group represented a roughly 50/50 mix of Melbourne- and Sydney-based people (with one purchaser from Queensland), and approximately equal numbers of women and men.

Figure 1. Respondent demographics.

1.2 Program Structures

Finding #1: Program Structures

- Average per executive cost - $10,800 ($2,800 to $37,000)
- for 9.2 sessions (6 to 13 sessions)
- over 6.6 months (3 to 12 months)
- median hourly rate - $667 ($346 to $3,333)
2.0 Key Assumptions & Definitions

2.1 Delivery Model

Figure 2: Model of relationships between factors in exceptional coaching delivery.

Figure 2 displays the logical relationships between the topics covered in the interview. The model indicates the central importance of understanding exceptional coaching practice to:

- measuring results,
- differentiating and selecting good coaches, and
- understanding the best methods for accrediting coaches.

2.2 “Great Outcomes”

Finding #2: “Great Outcomes”

Purchasers defined a “great outcome” from coaching as “behaviour change”:

- Such a definition is not new.
- These results, however, create a dilemma regarding how to manage the “remedial” flavour of such a definition, without weakening the necessary clarity around the coaching task.
- Exceptional coaches distinguish themselves where the work is complex, idiosyncratic, personally demanding, uncertain, and/or poorly communicated.
- Executives experiencing the work of exceptional coaches tend to find it both challenging and rewarding.
Early in the interview, purchasers addressed the question “what characterises a ‘great outcome’ from coaching?” The overwhelming response was that great coaching results in “behaviour change.”

“The superordinate goal [of coaching] is based around the belief that leaders shape culture, and improving the level of constructive behaviour of leaders is the underlying goal.”

“Behaviour change,” appears to be an insufficient description of the results of exceptional work. The sorts of changes observed by purchasers were idiosyncratic, complex, and around entrenched patterns (which might not be obvious at the outset of the work). Further, the outcomes seemed to be sustainable (rather than simply compliant), and such changes seemed to occur as a result of positive individual personal and/or professional growth. The emphasis on behaviour change may be because that is the work where exceptional coaches are likely to distinguish themselves – when the work is at its most difficult.

“I enjoy watching the executive uncover and develop an area which was a blind spot or something that was ‘unchangeable.’ I like to see a sizeable shift in behaviour - that they have taken the dialogue from the coach and put it into action.”

Definition of outcomes as about behaviour change has an unpalatably strong flavour of “remediation.” This taint may be a key factor regarding difficulties with: the positioning of executive coaching in organisations, the ability of sponsoring managers to provide clear feedback about the issues that they would like to see resolved, and (therefore) the ability to measure outcomes.

Executives did not, however, seem to find the coaching experience negative. Nor did they simply comply with a demand for change. The purchasers provided plenty of evidence of challenging and demanding moments in the work, but indicated that the executives’ experiences overall appeared to be positive, and often transformational.

One of the characteristics of the work of exceptional coaches may be the ability to identify and persist with difficult tasks in such a way that executives come away with a sense of accomplishment and increased self-belief at the end of the work.
3.0 Exceptional Coaching

**Finding #3: Coaching Model**

the work of exceptional coaches ... seems to derive from identifiable factors ... that form a logical model

### 3.1 Summary Model

Figure 3 is a high-level summary model of the exceptional coaching process. The model displays the process using three colour-coded levels.

The highest level (white) represents the parts of the work that are visible outside the coaching relationship (e.g., to the HR manager or the sponsoring leader). Those parts are the *task* and the *behaviour change*. 

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*Figure 3. Summary model of exceptional coaching process.*
The middle level (pink) represents the executive-coachee’s experiences of the process (i.e., “engagement” - with the coach and the task, “deeper conversations,” and “insight and responsibility” - the development of increased awareness and insight, along with motivation to take responsibility for action).

These three components interact to generate positive growth (in a personal and/or professional sense) for the executive, and that growth generates the visible behaviour change, and provides the basis for sustainability.

The lowest level (yellow) represents the exceptional coach intervention practices that facilitate the executive experiences.

3.2 What the Exceptional Coach Brings to the Work

**Finding #4: Exceptional Coach Capabilities**

The eight coaching practices or attributes demonstrated by exceptional coaches are:

A. Credibility
B. Empathy and respect
C. “Holding the professional self”
D. Diagnostic skill and insight
E. Flexibility and range in approach
F. Working to the business context
G. A philosophy of “personal responsibility”
H. Skilful challenging

Analysis of the purchasers’ responses indicated that the characteristics of exceptional coaches clustered around the executive-coachee’s experiences displayed in the Summary Model above (Figure 3).

**The following section describes the relationships between the executive-coachee’s experiences and the exceptional coach’s capabilities.**
Figure 4 displays the relationship between the Summary Model (Figure 3), the Component Models (described in section 3.3 and Figures 5, 6 and 7), and the Detailed Model of the coaching process (Figure 8).
### 3.3 Component Models

#### 1. Engagement

![Diagram showing Engagement component model]

Purchasers described three coaching practices and attributes that facilitate the construction of the working relationship (Figure 5): **credibility** (based on both accumulated experience and in-the-moment performance); **empathy and respect** (and other factors that build rapport and trust); and **“holding the professional self”** (professional attributes that allow the coach to stay in role when under personal or professional pressure).

“Holding the professional self” represents a complex mixture of attributes. Sub-themes include: maintaining integrity of approach; the ability to remain “un-phased” and effective in working with conflict, tension and anxiety; staying “ego-free”; maintaining professional separation and boundaries; humility; and remaining focused on the executive’s needs rather than on the coach’s own personal or business development needs.

“[Exceptional coaches] can sit with the ambiguity of the situation. They are comfortable in being uncomfortable. They are not overly concerned if the executive is uncomfortable and they are not tied up in their own egos about making the executive feel good. It is about getting the right result.”

These three characteristics (credibility, empathy and respect, and “holding the professional self”) interact **through** the coaching **task** with the **environmental conditions** (including sponsoring leader involvement, organisational culture, and the structure of the coaching program), and the particular characteristics that each **executive** brings to the work. These combined factors form the basis of the **working relationship**.
2. “Deeper Conversations”

A number of purchasers commented on exceptional coaches’ ability to get to the core of the work and the underlying issues. In the model, this practice has been labelled as “diagnostic skill and insight”. The purchasers commented that this ability relates to having a deep understanding of the human condition and an awareness of systemic issues at play.

“[It’s the ability to] really get to the nub of the issue - the difficult places that the individual doesn’t want to go. Other coaches can work with surface issues but haven’t the skills to get to the nub of the issue.”

The second factor relates to the ability of the coach to draw on a broad range of approaches to flexibly adapt to the needs of a particular executive and task.

“Weaker coaches have an ‘I have this ten-step method and I will apply it’ approach, rather than tailoring the work to each executive. It is not ‘one-size-fits-all.’ Weaker coaches work was a monologue, not a dialogue – it is not about engaging, not about discussing. They come with a preconceived notion and dump it onto the executive, give them homework, and then expect outcomes.”

The ability to work with deep conversations is underpinned by the strength of the working relationship. Exceptional coaches seem able to build and maintain a sufficiently robust relationship to be able to maintain connection while working with these demanding and challenging conversations.
3. Insight & Responsibility

Purchasers identified that an important part of the work is for executives to develop greater insight into themselves and the issues they face, and to develop a sense of personal responsibility for making changes. Exceptional coaches bring three practices to this experience: maintaining a focus on the business context of the work (“works to the business context”), remaining faithful to a philosophy that the responsibility for change rests with the executive (“personal responsibility”), and skill, courage, and sensitivity at bringing difficult and confronting messages and observations to the attention of the executive (“skilful challenging”).

Being able to work to the business context does not seem to imply that the coach is constrained by the brief. A few purchasers alluded to the need to satisfy the business brief and, where necessary and appropriate, go beyond the brief to get to what is important for the development of the executive.

“A key success factor was the flexibility of [the coach’s] approach and an open-mindedness and willingness to push the boundaries past what the organisation required.”

A philosophy of personal responsibility requires a coach to stay in role as a coach, rather than moving to an expert or consultant role. That is, exceptional coaches don’t provide answers. They ask good questions and never give advice.
“I’ve seen weaker coaches give misguided advice - choosing the path for the executive rather than the executive choosing - for example, advising a person about an important decision. You need to be careful with coaching as you can end up with more issues, particularly if the coach lets his or her ego get in the way.”

More than half of the respondents provided lengthy quotes about the importance to success of the coach’s skilful challenging of the executive, including the ability to deliver difficult messages.

“The skill was about delivering the feedback that no-one else in the organisation could give. The coach supported the person, while delivering the hard stuff. That was the exceptional bit. There is such a high potential for shame in those situations.”

The purchasers were clear that skilful challenging was more than just the ability to articulate difficult, uncomfortable or anxiety-provoking messages. The practice represents a combination of:

- courage,
- the (previously discussed) ability to hold the professional self,
- the ability to deliver the message with sensitivity and respect, and
- the ability to deliver the message while maintaining the connection and relationship.
3.4 Detailed Model

Figure 8. Detailed model of exceptional coaching.
Figure 8 displays the consolidation of the various component models into a single comprehensive model of exceptional coaching. On the horizontal axis the model differentiates the components on the basis of visibility – what an outsider could see (“observable components”), the components of the ‘executive experience” (displayed in pink), and the “executive coach factors” (displayed in yellow) that the exceptional coach brings to the work.

The model is divided vertically into the four areas of executive experience – engagement, deeper conversations, insight and responsibility, and great outcome.

3.5 The Exceptional Coach “Difference”

Finding #5: Exceptional Coach Delivery

The difference between exceptional and lesser coaches is they…
1. can produce any and all those practices and attributes as required, and
2. deliver with exceptional expertise.

The eight characteristics of exceptional coaches are not, in themselves, unique or surprising. They could easily be a list of basic skills for training coaches.

It is not the factors themselves that differentiate exceptional coaches, but the ability of the coach to deliver against any and all of these as required, and with remarkable expertise. Further, as can be seen from later comments, training and experience may not be a sufficient predictor of a coach’s ability to deliver against these factors.
4.0 Measurement

Finding #6: Measurement

1. Most purchasers measured coaching informally – and emphasised the value of qualitative data.
2. Quantitative measurement is possible but constrained by a number of factors depending on the context.

4.1 Measurement Methods

If “behavioural change” is the outcome ... then measurement should be easy ... so ... how did these experienced practitioners go about measurement?

Figure 9 is a graph of the principal and “sometimes used” methods of measurement described by the purchasers.

“People want quantitative data, but a big part of the change is at a personal level and you are not aware of what that is - but it is obvious behaviourally at work.”

“[Measurement] is very important. [But] the people here just intuitively know [coaching] is good, so no one is jumping up and down for results. They would probably see that as a waste of time.”

“We give more weight by far to qualitative data. Numbers alone don’t give a full picture. One question we rely on is whether the executive would recommend the coaching to others. Ninety-five percent say ‘yes.’”

![Figure 9. Use of executive coaching outcome measurement methods.](image-url)
Four respondents used primarily quantitative measures for evaluating coaching outcomes. The measures were generic business unit measures and various individual performance assessment methods. One purchaser, who appeared to be discussing coaching for very senior leaders, argued strongly for quantitative measurement. The measures he used consisted of the executives’ key performance indicators (KPIs) for their respective roles.

“Typically the evaluation would be both quantitative and qualitative, but the 90% weighting would be on the agreed outcome and its measurement. For example, for a CEO it would be ‘how did the business metrics improve as a result of the coaching?’”

This purchaser recommended that coaches must guarantee an improvement in their executive-coachee’s measured KPIs around role performance as part of the contracting process, while leaving delivery responsibility with the executive.

4.2 Measurement Constraints

Purchasers provided a list of factors that constrain outcome measurement (see Figure 10). The “measurability” of coaching outcomes can be presented graphically organised around three axes (see Figure 11). Those axes are the extent to which:

- the executive-coachee has direct influence on business unit measurement points,
- the coaching task includes explicit description of observable behaviour changes, and
- a sponsoring leader has direct involvement with the coaching program.

Overlaid on these “measurability” factors is the influence of organisational limitations, which tend to determine whether the measurement work actually occurs. Although organisational leaders may be keen to see data-driven results, it can be difficult to get organisational buy-in to the measurement process, due to such things as organisational culture, resourcing issues, and (combined with issues of hierarchy) reluctance to provide data about the coaching.
Although each of the factors that facilitate measurability seem relatively simple and desirable, purchasers gave a number of examples where pushing the program structure toward more measurable outcomes was either not possible or not desirable. For example, purchasers indicated that behaviour outcome requirements may not be clear due to poor feedback regarding the performance issues, a reluctance to taint the coaching with the label of “remedial,” or simply an inability to define issues clearly.

Purchaser responses highlighted the dilemma regarding coaching outcome measurement in an applied environment – the conflict between the importance of measurement and the difficulties of practical measurement delivery. The following questions may be helpful in determining the best approach in any given situation.

**Measurement Questions**

1. what measurement will be possible,
2. what sort and quality of data can be obtained,
3. what effects will attempting to measure have on the coaching work,
4. who are the measurement data for and what are their expectations and needs,
5. what measurement will suffice given organisational limitations and demands?
A number of purchasers suggested that the most effective approach was simply not to measure.

“We try to target our work very well and develop policies and strict criteria for using executive coaching, and we have a range of high-quality panel members to make sure it works well. We funnel our resources into that rather than into measurement.”

The availability of the option not to measure would vary on a case-by-case basis, depending on the answers to the above questions. Purchasers did, however, offer advice regarding the key features that need to be in place if effective measurement is to occur.

Finding #7: Measurement Advice

If measurement is a requirement, then:

- Specify and agree the expected outcomes
- Involve the sponsoring leader
- Set responsibilities for reporting

…. and set up these processes before coaching commences.
5.0 Location & Selection

5.1 Locating Coaches

Finding #8: Locating Good Coaches

… “it’s not what you know”…
1. Effective coach location is by referral or through networks.
2. To find good coaches there is a need to do the research – i.e., talk to people.

Almost all the purchasers recommended informal methods for finding coaches, most commonly referrals and networks. Purchasers were divided regarding the use of supplier organisations or broking firms, with some purchasers describing strongly held views for and against.

Finding #9: Selection

1. coach selection was not a straightforward process
2. the identification of exceptional coaches tends to occur over time
3. hiring an executive coach is hiring a person (rather than a skill-set, a method, or an experience-base)
4. selection is also about the match with the executive – about which coach has the best chance of producing change in the executive.
5.2.1 Selection Criteria

Purchasers provided ratings for 10 selection criteria using a 4-point scale. Table 1 presents these data as three groups based on average importance rating. (Statistically significant differences existed between the groups.)

Table 1 Criteria for Executive Coach Selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection Criteria</th>
<th>Average importance rating a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>face credibility</td>
<td>3.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professional/ethical code</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>executive coaching experience and client list</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qualifications and training</td>
<td>3.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>clarity around method(s)</td>
<td>2.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>business experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>industry-specific experience</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>use of supervision</td>
<td>2.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>psychologist</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: a Practitioners rated importance on a 4-point scale, with “4” indicating the factor was critically important, and “1” indicating the factor was not important.

The low ratings for counselling experience and registration as a psychologist seemed not to reflect purchasers’ comments (in case study examples and regarding accreditation) that the particular skills of experienced counsellors and psychologists can be important and valuable. These apparently paradoxical views may be the result of conflicting perceptions between psychologist/counsellor stereotypes and the particular skills their training provides.

“Cultural fit is important with us. Some coaches would just not fit well in our culture. ‘Caféan and crystals’ – we’re just not that sort of thing. ”
5.2.2 Selection Methods

Subjective judgment represented a large proportion of the coach selection decision (average 60.3%).

“[Sixty percent is subjective.] The other 40% is the baseline - the ‘right to play.’ Those [right to play] things are years of experience, reputation, some sort of behavioural training (psychology or the like), or a commercial background with very senior experience in an area.”

Figure 13 displays the selection methods used by purchasers. The overwhelming preference was to use an interview and reference checks. Purchasers indicated that, no matter what approach was used, identifying good coaches was difficult.

“I just haven’t found the selection criteria that guarantee any consistency in the ability of the coaches to be effective. I see much more from how they relate to me (with regard to challenge etc), than a list of criteria.”

Figure 13. Methods used in coach selection

A number of purchasers recommended trialling potential coaches.

“Find a coach, do the reference checking, assure yourself that they won’t do too much damage. Then test them with a [mid-level manager]. If the coach is any good, we will feed them more work and build up the workload over time.”
5.2.3 Selection Traps

**Slick presentation:** “What fooled me was the intellect and credentials and client list and the good connection. I liked him. But the feedback from executives was he didn’t listen. He talked about himself the whole time. Some small things were achieved, but executives wouldn’t recommend the coach.”

**Qualifications and experience:** “I am inclined to say ‘stated experience’ where there is no supporting evidence [can lead you astray]. It is more than just what you have done. It is also about personality - how you deal with people. It is a bigger picture, the same as with most jobs.”

**Industry and management experience:** “[You can be misled by] people with significant industry and management experience - the ones that say ‘I have been doing this for years!! It’s a natural step for me to tell people what to do and charge a pile of money for it.’ People who make that mistake are mistaking industry expertise for coaching expertise.”

**Rapid connection:** “I think I was seduced - in an intellectual sense. She was falling over me about how clever I was and all that. I mistook an affinity with this person as a reflection on their ability to coach.”

**Inability to move to a coaching mode:** “When they were in selling mode, they had a style that seemed to suit. But the coaching mode was different. They knew their stuff theoretically, but they were not up to scratch practically. It didn’t translate, although I was hearing the right things.”

**Hiring for the wrong reason:** “He sold himself on a specific capability that appealed to an executive. Hiring a coach for a technical skill is likely to fail. [The executive] thought they were hiring a consultant; someone who would solve the problem. The coach’s job is to ask the right questions and help the executive reach their own conclusions.”

**Operates at the wrong level:** “I probably fell into that trap. There was someone who was good at training and team facilitation and we took them on to do coaching and they were okay for low-end work, but not as good as those top-end coaches who were charging at that rate.”

**Bad match to the executive:** “[I was] not so much fooled, as I used a coach with the wrong person. He was a good coach, but that match was a mistake. I stopped the assignment. In his mind he was thinking ‘I’ll give this a go. It will test my metal.’ I wanted someone who would soften the executive, but she ate him up and spat him out. I should have got someone who would have gone toe-to-toe with her - and the second coach that worked with her did that.”
Additional factors include referrals from poor sources (e.g., “when they have been referred by senior management!”), where the referral is not relevant or not checked, an overly-mechanistic or overly-flexible approach, and selection based on attractive pricing.

... and getting the selection wrong can be uncomfortable: “I am a bit embarrassed. I trusted this guy to do a piece of work and it didn’t work out. He wanted to work with us and he offered to coach me for free. It was good work but nothing outstanding. I thought ‘I don’t think I would put him in front of a senior executive.’ But we had an issue with a senior GM who had issues in the way he was dealing with women. The GM had accepted that coaching would be a good approach and I organised for this coach to meet three of our executive team for them to brief him about what was going on and they were interested to talk with him. I didn’t attend the meeting. He made a hash of it and tried to sell them stuff and it reflected badly on me. All programs have to go well. Credibility is such a big thing.”
6.0 Accreditation

Finding #10: Accreditation

Purchasers’ comments indicated that:
1. coach development should include a broad range of applied models,
2. practical background in organisational leadership roles is important,
3. there should be an increased emphasis on both the personal development and supervised applied experience of training coaches, and
4. development should be ongoing, in recognition that competence is not an attained standard, so much as an incremental process that takes place over a number of years and experiences.

Purchasers provided responses to three questions about factors that influence the professional accreditation of executive coaches.

1. How well does the use of a single consistent model work in executive coaching?
Answer: “not well.” The purchasers indicated that a single narrow model is insufficient to deal with the variety and customisation required to work with the diversity of issues and people presented in coaching work.

“I am not favourable to a single model. For example, the GROW model is a great little model, but it’s not enough. It may be good for junior people [or] for those who work with specialist fields - for example, a communications trainer.”

… and …

“You have got the GROW model that most coaches apply, but they can’t rely on that. It just gets the conversation going. As a coach gets more experienced, they become less reliant on tools and processes, and connect with the executive at a deeper level, and talk about more important things - the things that are affecting the individual - and they are drawing on their own frames of reference.”

2. Can anyone be an excellent coach with appropriate training?
With only two exceptions (both of which were qualified responses), purchasers answered “no.”

“You can be a ‘good’ coach with training, but excellence takes more than training. After 35 years in the training business I know that training can make for competence, but there are personal elements overlaid on those basic skills.”
One area that purchasers identified as a common pitfall was the ability to *not* provide answers. A number of purchasers commented that this characteristic, of being tempted to provide solutions, frequently was related to the coach’s background.

“A common conversation I have had is with senior executives who are now out of work, and their outplacement advisors have commented that a portfolio career might be good and they are looking to do coaching as part of that. They call me asking similar questions to you, and trying to find out what I am looking for so they can frame their sales pitch. I will talk them out of doing coaching. They are action-oriented, ‘getting-things-done’ people and that’s not what coaches do.”

Those identified interpersonal characteristics seem to be related to the personal development of the coach.

“One critical thing is the ability to put your own baggage aside - a unique capacity to be in the moment with the executive - and some can’t do that.”

3. What would you require in terms of (1) training and (2) experience as the minimum for professional accreditation?

Training
Purchasers had some difficulty in providing specific answers to this question. The only common response regarding training was that *some level of coaching-specific training is important*, and that short courses were not recommended.

The purchasers indicated that there was a need for some consistent standards in training market, and that some programs may now be delivering that. Two training institutions that received specific mention were the University of Sydney, and the Institute of Executive Coaching, both of which received favourable comments.

The only other training to come well recommended was *training in psychology- and counselling-related disciplines*. That nearly a third of purchasers included this recommendation in their accreditation responses was a surprise, given the low rating such credentials received in the selection criteria evaluations.

Experience
Purchasers recommended that training coaches need solid experience of working in business, corporate, or organisational roles. They also discussed the need for supervised coaching experience, both in training, and in their ongoing work.

“There needs to be a baseline qualification as well as the right level of supervised practice. That is, professional standards observed by others (i.e., more than just ‘doing the training’).”

“Coaches need access to supervision. Like the executives they work with, they can’t see the back of their own heads.”
7.0 Final Comments

The development and growth of a discipline (or industry, or profession) that purports to hold integrity and human values at its core seems to demonstrate a remarkable resemblance to some of the stages of human social development described by Erikson (1963) – in particular, the striving for: a sense of professional adequacy, intellectual and applied competence, and an integrated image as a unique discipline. Unfortunately, when compared to Erikson’s model, executive coaching appears to be squarely in the middle of its teenage years.

Drake (2008) described a hope that the executive coaching industry may be moving toward an era that belongs to the artisan. That time may indeed be approaching, and a broad and thoughtful research base will mean that such an era can be embraced both on the basis of evidence-based principles and the recognition of artistry. One of the key messages from this research is that exceptional coaches may be artisans, and that what differentiates them is not what they do (the described factors are unsurprising), but the exquisite expertise in how they do it – and the essentially human and personal qualities that underpin such expertise.

The underlying purpose of this research goes beyond simple description of complex work. Research such as this has little value if it does not serve to inform (and possibly educate) the buying public. Positioned in that conflicted nexus between human development and organisational performance pragmatism, executive coaching can only flourish in the longer term in an environment of informed and critical purchasers.

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About the author:
Dr. Gavin Dagley is a researcher and executive coach, psychologist, and former Company Secretary. Gavin completed his Masters degree at Massey University (Auckland) studying cognitive performance in athletes, and Ph.D. at Victoria University (Melbourne) studying career transitions. Gavin spent 15 years in senior financial management and accounting roles before returning to full time study in 1995 to undertake his psychology training. Gavin has been a fulltime executive coach since 2004, and is director of a private executive coaching practice in Melbourne, Australia. Gavin can be contacted by email at gavin.dagley@bigpond.com or by phone on (+61) 425 795 675.

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8.0 References
