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the magazine of professional coaching

## Team & Group Coaching

Trends, Techniques,  
Distinctions &  
Success Factors



Why Groups?

Trends in Team Coaching

Targeted Approaches



# Team & Group COACHING

Foundations, distinctions and success factors

What are the differences between group and team coaching? Which one works best and in what situation(s)? Can we cause transformation in a coaching relationship with more than one person at a time? And how? How does a group or team (and its coach) leverage the energy of all its members? What is most important for a coach to know before getting started? How can companies use team or group coaching to achieve their most important initiatives more quickly and more cost effectively? This issue uncovers the secrets of successful group and team coaching experiences for both coach and clients.





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**T**eam and group coaching are continuing to be embraced by clients and coaches alike, providing sustained focus and conversation spaces, in person and virtually. Against the backdrop of need for increased collaboration, innovation and ongoing change, both approaches provide an important modality for individual, team and group capacity development.

This article will explore four foundations for any team or group coaching process, articulating key differences with other related learning disciplines. The second part of the article will look at distinctions between team and group coaching. The article will then explore critical success factors for this work and questions for you to consider as you move forward.

Coaching connects to the learning and development space which continues to experience radical transformation with mobile learning, MOOCs, and flipped classrooms. This past year, in 2014, the American Society for Training and Development rebranded itself as the Association for Talent Development, signaling a shift in the context learning, development and talent, operates.

As many of our disciplines – organization development, facilitation, training – become more closely related with cross-functional fertilization, it is important to continue to reemphasize the core coaching competencies. It is also important to notice what we lead from in our work as group and team coaches.

Core foundations of any coaching conversation include a focus on:

### Goal Setting

Coaching conversations are shaped by the goals of the individual group members, and collectively by team members. Action planning and goal setting are a core component of any group or team coaching process. Supporting clients early on in the coaching process of developing their own individual, and in teams, collective goal framework is foundational to

the coaching process. The hard focus on goals is not always present in related disciplines.

### Action & Awareness

Coaching occurs over the dual planes of action AND awareness. As coach practitioners it is important to notice where our client's comfort zone is and what will provide that useful stretch and movement forward, as well as the "unlayering" of new awareness. One of the challenges in a group is that this balance may be different for each group member, which can be supported by ensuring you have placed anchor points on individual goal setting, and commitments shaped by the individual group members.

### Ongoing Accountability

Coaching is not a one-off process. It is a process of change and as such takes time over a period of months. What happens in the coaching conversation is not always as important as the adjustments, and application of new insights those being coached take when they get back to the office or to their lives.

### What is the Difference Between Group and Team Coaching?

There are five important distinctions between group and team coaching conversations, including:

- relationships
- building individuals versus a collective
- lifespan of the grouping – how coaching and actions are sustained
- role of formal and informal leadership
- what's at stake?

Teams today come in a variety of shapes and sizes: intact teams, virtual teams, project teams. Another significant change occurring in the organizational space today is what Amy Edmondson calls "Teaming." Edmondson writes, "Fast-moving work environments need people who know how to team, people who have the skills and the flexibility to act in moments of potential collaboration when and where



they appear.” (pg. 14, 2012)

In coaching teams it is important to keep in mind the role of relationships and the history the team members bring. This provides the context for some interesting work around roles, status, habits or patterns. In bringing together groups, coaches may frequently find that people do not know each other, or know each other well, requiring more time spent in building trust and connections.

The relationships in group coaching usually do not sustain formally after the work with the group coach, unlike in a team coaching context where the development of stronger relationships, trust and understanding of each other may be a bulk of the work we do with teams. This systems and/or collective focus in team coaching is different than in a typical group coaching process. In a group coaching process, because groups are usually coming together from across an organization, or perhaps across the world, people join and leave alone. The focus for the most part is on their own individual development, versus the collective.

Formal and informal leadership plays a significant role in team coaching. Failure to engage the leader, or work with them to ensure that the coaching conversation, goals and priorities will be taken back to the office and prioritized against the work, is a critical success factor. Without this focus, while good conversation can happen amongst team members the overall results may not be realized due to lack of an enabling environment at the workplace.

It is also important to consider what’s at stake in this work. Team coaching takes place today in a high-

### Examples of Group & Team Coaching

Group and team coaching can take a variety of forms. Consider these examples:

#### Group Coaching

- Two-month program for people wanting to be better parents meeting every week at the community center.
- Nine-month face-to-face group coaching program at an organization bringing together groups of emerging leaders from across the organization twice a month, connected into training they are doing in the classroom.
- Six-month group coaching program to support leaders in their skill integration and deepened self-awareness, post training.
- Six-month group coaching program for women transitioning back to the same workplace. Sessions are held at lunchtime.

#### Team Coaching

- Team acquires a new team leader and wants to be proactive in setting a strong foundation going forward in the first six months of their post.
- A high-profile team recognizes they need urgent support focused on how they work together in tandem with the roll-out of a nine month project.
- A human resource investigation finds significant issues. Team coaches are engaged as a result.
- A virtual team knows it needs support in getting to know each other and getting results. Team coaches are engaged to work with them virtually bi-weekly for a four month process.

stakes environment of uncertainty, and is directly connected to the individual’s livelihood. Ensuring that there is trust, and that team members are willing to be transparent and “show up” is critical in the team coaching process. This issue may not be as prevalent with groups.

### Success Factors

Even with these differences, there are some key success factors in our work, including:

- **Ability of the coach to set a strong process and step back** – Team and group coaching both re-

quire that the coach brings mastery in being able to set a strong process for the group or team to step into for dialogue. In both modalities, it is not just about the coach and client relationship. The peer relationships are just as important. Trust, connection and understanding need to be built across all relationships. It is also important for the coach to be able to step back and allow the conversation to emerge amongst group and team members.

- **Conversations may start before the group starts** – This is where you will see another slight distinction.

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With group coaching work, creating connection early on, even before the first group touch point, can help you start to develop trust and rapport, and identify common issues of interest amongst group members. It will help you also identify areas of divergence and start to manage expectations about what people can expect from the group coaching process.

In a team coaching context, pre-calls may not be recommended, especially if the coach is going to be working with the team as a system where support to the entire entity is key. In that respect, working individually with team members may be best undertaken by a separate coach.

Remember that coaching conversations are part of a bigger context of change. Consider how pre work and post work can support the discovery, learning, insights, application and action. For virtual programs especially you may want to reserve the call time for conversation and dialogue. What pre work will support the group? Are there

particular assessments they can do? Reading? The peer connection is one of the most valuable components of the group coaching process. For clients who view technology as a communication medium, exploring how online applications and portals such as Journal Engine or Facebook private pages can sustain the conversation.

- **Ensuring coachability** – Part of the ICF Competency of Establishing the Coaching Agreement focuses on ensuring we discuss what coaching is and what coaching is not. As group and team coaches we need to ensure that our group and team members are ready, and able, to be coached. This issue may be even more pronounced in a team coaching engagement with livelihood issues at place. The topic of ensuring coachability of all parties involved, and ensuring that coaching is the best methodology to be following, warrants deep exploration at the start of any engagement.

### What's Possible for You?

Against the backdrop of continued change, complexity and need for pause and focus, the opportunity team and group coaching can bring to individuals and organizations in addressing these issues is immense.

As coaches it is also important to notice where our passion and talents reside. As I wrote back in 2013, “Group coaching is not going to be a preference for all coaches. Some coaches may prefer the ‘deep dive’ we take with individual coaching clients. Others may enjoy the width and breadth [of] a group coaching conversation ... The ability to create a safe environment where group members feel confident to engage in a coaching conversation, the ability to step back and let the group lead the process, can be a motivator for many group coaches.”

As coaches we will want to explore with our clients where team and group coaching can be positioned as a stand-alone program, as an alternative to training or individual coaching. It may also be positioned as follow-up to a current training initiative. In many leadership development programs today, coaching (individual, group and/or team) is being positioned as part of a learning design, as follow-up or a way to sustain the conversation and support. And group coaching continues to be seen as a standalone to facilitate conversations across the silos which exist in an organization.

In closing, what opportunities exist for you to expand your work into this realm? How would these approaches benefit your individual or organizational clients? What's possible for you?

### Further Reading

One of the challenges in today's learning environment is confusion about what group and team coaching really are and how they are different than other team development processes, or group facilitation. Peter Hawkins takes a look at the nuances of seven different types of team coaching in his book *Leadership Team Coaching*. David Clutterbuck touches on the topic as well in his book *Coaching the Team At Work*, and I do so in my books through the distinctions of the *Group Program Continuum*.

#### References:

“What are the benefits of group coaching?” article at Coaching Tools Company, July 3, 2013 retrieved at [www.thecoachingtoolscompany.com/group-coaching-benefits-coaches-clients-organizations-by-jennifer-britton/](http://www.thecoachingtoolscompany.com/group-coaching-benefits-coaches-clients-organizations-by-jennifer-britton/), December 12, 2014

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