



FROM ONE TO MANY

Best Practices for
Team and Group Coaching

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GROUP COACHING IN ACTION

*Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time.
Vision with action can change the world.*
—Joel A. Barker

What group coaching can look like is often a key area of interest for coaches. This chapter explores:

- The different approaches coaches can undertake in working with groups
- Four case studies that illustrate group coaching in action
- Successes and challenges in group coaching

As coaches consider what their group coaching conversations will look like, it is useful to draw attention to various approaches that can be incorporated into a group or team coaching process. Eight approaches are reviewed, including laser coaching, individual reflection, peer coaching, learning partners, group discussion and field work.

As we have seen, group coaching is rolling out in many different ways with different types of groups: corporate, nonprofit, in-person and virtual. This chapter spotlights four separate case studies. Our four case studies include a public program for writers and self-care, run by coach Lynda Monk; a virtual group coaching program for expats and international development projects that coach Shana Montesol offers; a group coaching program for participants of a re-employment program; and finally, two examples from Ray Rigoglioso, one a group coaching program for the nonprofit sector, and the second a public program he organizes.

The chapter wraps up with insights from practitioner coaches on the successes and challenges with group coaching. I also draw attention to five issues that can cause group coaching to fall off the rails.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO WORKING WITH GROUPS

Regardless of the type of group program you are offering—teleclass, group coaching, webinar, or retreat—there are different approaches to facilitating a group or team coaching conversation.¹ These include:

- Laser coaching
- Field work: pre-work/post-work
- Individual reflection
- Group discussion
- Peer coaching
- Learning partners/buddies
- Hybrid
- Body-centered coaching, somatic coaching or using geography

A description of these eight approaches, along with examples, what to keep in mind and when they are useful, follows in Table GCiA.1.

In deciding which approaches may work well, consider the groups you are working with and ask yourself:

- What are the key needs and focus areas of this group?
- What supports the group in setting better goals?
- What supports the group in deepening awareness around issues of importance to them (individually or collectively)?
- What structures are in place to sustain the conversation and exploration? For example, are partners meeting between sessions? If it is a system that you are coaching, what supports are there?
- What is the role of accountability and commitments within this group?
- What styles exist within the group?
- What does the group value in terms of approaches? Is it individual reflection? Small group conversation? Laser coaching? Conversation with a partner? Other?

¹Adapted from Jennifer Britton, “Different Approaches to Group Coaching,” *Group Coaching: Ins and Outs*, August 20, 2012, <http://groupcoaching.blogspot.ca/2012/08/different-types-of-groups-in-group.html>.

- How are you utilizing the core coaching competencies?
- What approaches will work best in ensuring that all group members have an equal opportunity for “airtime”?

As you read through the different approaches, check off those that you may wish to incorporate.

Table GCiA.1: Different Approaches to Working with Groups

Approach	Keep in Mind	Examples
<p>Laser Coaching <i>Laser coaching individual group members during the session on a topic of their choice or one related to the group topic. Short bursts of coaching, for example, seven to ten or fifteen minutes.</i> Useful with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small group • Large group • Virtual 	<p>Ensure everyone who wants to gets a chance to be laser-coached once throughout the program.</p> <p>The ensuing conversation about observations after the laser coaching is important with other group members. You may ask the rest of the group, “What was interesting or important about what you saw/listened to?” or “What did you connect with?” or “What’s the relevance for your work/world?”</p>	<p>Coaching one group member on a topic in front of others. For example, coaching around their strengths or their vision or values while others look on/ listen in.</p>
<p>Field Work: Pre-work/ Post-work <i>Could include a request, inquiry. Could include websites or reading lists. Could include an assessment or other work.</i> Important throughout the coaching process in support of action, awareness, deepening insights. Sustains the conversation and learning.</p>	<p>Include in expectations at start of program. Participants should know what they can expect in terms of amount of time, or the fact that accountability and ongoing focus are key to the coaching process.</p> <p>Discuss how coaching is about sustained focus.</p> <p>Not everyone may opt for the same focus.</p>	<p>Designed commitment (action, inquiry, challenge) with each participant.</p> <p>May also include reading list, websites of interest and related audio and video links.</p> <p>Can include a selection of choices for group or team members to choose from.</p>

(Continued)

Table GCiA.1: (Continued)

Approach	Keep in Mind	Examples
<p>Supports action and awareness between sessions.</p> <p>Can be very valuable for virtual programs: use the call time to discuss insights during field work.</p> <p>Provides an opportunity for those who value more time for reflection and preparation.</p>	<p>Leave time at the start of the next session for a check-in around insights. This can also be done by email between group members.</p>	
<p>Individual Reflection</p> <p><i>Pause points for individuals to reflect during the coaching process. May take place in person, online, during a session or between sessions.</i></p> <p>Provides a pause during the larger group or team conversation.</p> <p>Very useful when group/team members are not necessarily verbal processors or are more introverted.</p>	<p>Provide space for people to capture individual reflections: worksheet/journal/binder.</p> <p>Create opportunities for individuals to share their insights with others: small and large group.</p>	<p>Worksheets/workbooks created for group or team members to take notes in.</p> <p>For those looking to the virtual domain, JournalEngine provides an individual journaling process. Refer to the appendix for the Voices from the Field spotlight on JournalEngine.</p>
<p>Group Discussion</p> <p><i>Small and large group discussion can be useful in both contexts (in person and virtual)</i></p> <p>A mix of large and small group discussion can be used throughout coaching process.</p>	<p>Building capacity within our group members with enhanced listening and questioning skills is important.</p> <p>Provide groups with questions to explore as they get to know each other.</p> <p>Leave enough time for group members to share key insights.</p> <p>Note technical issues for facilitating large and small group discussion in virtual groups.</p>	<p>Fostering smaller group (dyad, triad) discussion in virtual groups.</p> <p>Does your technology support virtual break-outs with the click of a mouse (e.g., Maestro Conferencing) or do you need to set up a series of "breakout" bridge lines that people call into?</p>

<p>Peer Coaching <i>Peer to peer sharing, conversation and questioning</i> Useful throughout the coaching process: during group discussions and between group sessions (also refer to learning partners).</p>	<p>Capacity building and training process for the team/group. Supports skill development/awareness in the areas of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening • Questioning • Bottom lining/laser speak • Accountability 	<p>The capacity of peer coaching skills can be developed in many programs. Refer to Chapter 9 for more on peer coaching.</p>
<p>Learning Partners/Buddies <i>Assigning each participant a learning partner/buddy during the program for a specific period of time.</i> Sustains learning. Promotes connection, trust and intimacy within group. Deepens conversation around key topics in between sessions.</p>	<p>Notice impact on group if partners stay the same (may create pockets or cliques) as well as if partners rotate too quickly (not enough time for trust and connection to form).</p>	<p>In a 90-day process, learning partners may be assigned for the entire program or may rotate.</p>
<p>Hybrid <i>A mix of one-on-one and group coaching conversations.</i> <i>Call format.</i> <i>Focus on core foundations as well as areas client wants to explore.</i> Useful because participants get the breadth of the group coaching conversation, as well as the depth of the individual conversation.</p>	<p>Time commitment. Cost. Link and sharing within the group. Frequency of one-on-one sessions and group.</p>	<p>Most group coaching programs can have a mix of individual and group calls.</p>
<p>Body-Centered Coaching, Somatic Coaching, Using Geography <i>Connecting participants with their body using the coaching process.</i> Allows participants to access additional learning and wisdom through their body and other visceral responses.</p>	<p>Can undertake body-centered coaching in person as well as virtually. Not everyone may be comfortable in this: clear instructions and confidence about introducing this are key. Structure is important.</p>	<p>You may have people “walk” the Wheel of Life, Wheel of High-Performing Teams, or Wheel of Competencies such as Leadership. Tape a wheel on the floor and provide labels for each wheel. In a virtual environment, send clear instructions for setup prior to call.</p>

Question to Consider

What approaches may work well for you? Incorporate these into your own session planning.

GROUP COACHING ILLUSTRATED

As we have already seen, group coaching in action can take varied forms. The final part of the chapter introduces you to four coaches and their work in the realm of group coaching.

We will first meet Lynda Monk, CPCC, ACC, who was also spotlighted in *Effective Group Coaching*. Lynda talks about her Writing for Wellness Coaching Circle, which incorporates a group coaching approach.

Michael Cullen, PPCC, has been undertaking group coaching work since 2009, mostly with in-person groups. He shares his insights and experience with recent work with career groups.

Coach Shana Montesol, ACC, a coach based in the Philippines, started leading group coaching last year and has really enjoyed her experience. She writes, “I had been coaching for five years, and facilitating groups for 12-plus years, when I finally tried group coaching. Upon leading my first group coaching session, I saw the power and promise it carries. There is still a context in which individual coaching is a better choice, but there is something truly special about group coaching. I wish I had started group coaching sooner. To any coaches out there who are hesitating, I encourage you to get equipped with some tools and skills, and try it. You will likely be blown away by the insights and progress that your group members experience as a result.”

Finally, we will meet Raymond L. Rigoglioso, ACC, a coach who shares his experience and insights around two groups that he runs. One group is a peer coaching group for development professionals in the nonprofit world, the other a group coaching program for gay men.

As you read through these case studies, you will want to take note of what will be useful to incorporate or consider for your programs.

Voices from the Field: Writing for Wellness Coaching Circles by Lynda Monk, CPCC

I offer group coaching opportunities to nourish, support and inspire the self-care, burnout prevention and personal growth needs of heart-centered professionals who make a difference (coaches, counselors, therapists, social workers, health care providers, etc.).

My most recent six-week Writing for Wellness Coaching Circle (a group coaching program) is accessed via teleseminars (75-minute calls each week) and an online Google group (where I post their weekly writing assignment and offer participants online journal coaching between calls). This coaching program was developed as a result of offering numerous three-hour virtual Life Source Writing™ Retreats to Discover, Nourish + Renew YOU wherein participants expressed the desire for an opportunity to engage in journal coaching (life coaching plus journal writing) over a longer period of time. Hence, my new Writing for Wellness Coaching Circle was launched in September 2012.

The maximum size of this coaching program is six participants due to the intimate nature of the content and process within this program. For example, participants are writing and sharing their writing during our weekly calls, as well as posting their writing for coaching, comments and feedback each week.

This program offers a hybrid of coaching, training and facilitation in which I teach six different expressive writing and journaling techniques applied to weekly wellness themes (these themes are co-created with the participants based on their unique goals and needs for the program). For example, the overview of the Writing for Wellness Coaching Circle that ran throughout September and October 2012 was the following:

Week 1: Free Writing

Theme: Self-Care in Mind, Body, Heart & Spirit, The Self-Care/Other-Care Continuum, Work/Life Balance and Integration

Week 2: Transactional Writing

Theme: Deep Self-Compassion, Receiving + Not Having to Do It All

Week 3: Dialogue Writing

Theme: Releasing Stress, Creating Clarity + Moving Forward

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Week 4: Poetic Writing

Theme: Mindfulness, Inner Peace + The Power of Story

Week 5: Affirmative Writing

Theme: Contribution, Unique Gifts + Making a Difference

Week 6: Gratitude Writing

Theme: The Heart & Soul of Helping Work + Celebrating Caring

What were key outcomes of the engagement? What benefits did participants/clients note? What learning did they identify? How was this measured?

According to participants of the Writing for Wellness Coaching Circle, some of the key outcomes and benefits they experienced included:

- Giving more attention to their self-care
- Shifting perspective from “self-care is self-indulgent” to “self-care is soulful and replenishing”
- Tapping into inner wisdom and intuition through writing (answers are within)
- Feeling validated as a writer (and gaining inspiration to write their book); one participant said this program gave her the confidence she was lacking to pursue writing her book
- Reduced feelings of stress and overwhelm (participants reported feeling more grounded, more centered and less stressed)
- Feeling honored and recognized by one another and themselves throughout the program (felt that both they and their work were honored and appreciated)
- Realizing the transformational power of journaling
- Engaging congruence; “walking our talk” through journaling and coaching
- Being inspired through peer support, dialogue and shared learning

This feedback was provided verbally and in writing through program evaluation, therefore qualitative in nature.

What made the engagement successful?

This program was successful due to the following:

- The intimate size of the group (four participants)
- The 100 percent commitment and full participation of each member of the group (all four women were on all six calls and they each posted their weekly writing assignments and commented on one another's writing and lives in meaningful ways)
- The blend of weekly calls (very personal) and online coaching

What challenges did you face with the work?

Given that this was a new program, I was creating the content and the overall process as I went along based on the needs and goals of the participants. This was not a challenge per se, but a reality that required a lot of thought, time and creativity for the duration of the program. I provided structure, coaching and facilitation, and this was all being done both on the live calls and virtually within our Google group. I had minimal experience with Google groups so the tech end of things was something I was making sure was always running smoothly (and stress free for participants!), which was not always stress free for me.

What lessons did you learn as a coach?

I learned that I could offer journal coaching in a dynamic and inspiring way through this virtually designed program. It is a radical and intimate act to engage in “writing alone together”—which is at the heart of this program where personal expressive writing plus journaling offer the foundation for me to provide journal coaching. By its essence, this requires that participants be willing to write—to take risks, express themselves, share their stories and be witnessed by one another. The growth, learning, client actions and program success of a coaching program of this nature are all contingent on participants being willing to be seen and heard—by both the self and others.

I have just started my second Writing for Wellness Coaching Circle and I am excited to see how it will manifest over the next six weeks.

What best practices for team or group coaching are illustrated through this example?

As a group coach, I offer my journal coaching services in a one-to-many format through programs such as the one highlighted here, as well as through

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one-day workshops, three-hour virtual retreats and keynote speaking events. Obviously the various program design and implementation needs for each service delivery model vary depending on the focus, medium (online versus in-person events) and size of the group. That being said, the best practices, in my experience, that support this work are fairly foundational and include some of the following:

- Confidentiality
- Participants own their learning objectives and needs
- No one gets to be wrong (whatever you write is right)
- Feedback on the writing is never about critiquing the writing but rather about providing empowering comments that let the writer (storyteller, client) know what had resonance for the listener (what stood out, what raised awareness or provided new thinking, etc.)
- Creating an emotionally safe and respectful learning/coaching environment is always my top priority
- Facilitating pre-assessments with individuals (or corporate organizers for workplace or conference events) to ensure clarity regarding client goals and outcomes is critical for setting up events for success

If you know, how has the team or group sustained the conversation/focus/structures? What other impact has this led to?

The participants from this program are all interested in doing a second phase of this program, which I will be calling “Going Deeper with Writing for Wellness.” They formed powerful connections with one another and with me throughout this program. This second phase of the program will be open to all graduates of phase 1, so participants will meet new people while also having familiar and consistent relationships to draw upon for the next level of learning and growth.

Lynda Monk, CPCC, RSW Writing for Wellness Coach|Speaker|Author
Creative Wellness, <http://creativewellnessworks.com>

Questions to Consider

What do you want to highlight from Lynda’s case study?
What could you incorporate into your own work?

Voices from the Field: What's Next for Expats and International Development Professionals by Shana Montesol, ACC

I lead a group coaching program called What's Next? for expats and international development professionals who want to figure out what is next in their careers and lives. Many group members are puzzling over whether to change jobs or organizations, move to a new country, or move back home after living and working overseas for a number of years. Some of the group members have been "trailing spouses"; that is, they have left their home country to follow a partner who took an overseas job. Having gotten settled in a new environment, these trailing spouses are trying to figure out how to make their careers and lives overseas thrive.

I have led in-person groups in Manila, Philippines (where I am based) as well as virtual groups with members calling in from various countries (such as Laos, Singapore, U.S.A., Australia, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea). The group itself tends to be very international, and over the past year of offering this program group members have hailed from 12 countries, from Australia to China to Swaziland.

There are usually about six people in the group, which meets once a week for six times, for 90-minute sessions. There is pre-work to complete individually prior to each session.

The What's Next? program was developed by master coach Michele Woodward (www.michelewoodward.com) and trained coaches offer it in a variety of contexts—for recent college graduates, empty nesters, people grappling with divorce, stay-at-home moms returning to the workforce, military veterans, etc.

What were key outcomes of the engagement?

Group members report that as a result of participating in the What's Next? program, they feel less stuck, more clear, and more excited about the future. Through their participation in the program, they have already taken action to move them toward what they want, both professionally and personally.

In addition, group members typically feel close to one another, although they started off as strangers, and, in the case of virtual programs, have never met each other. They end up feeling that the group belongs to them as opposed to being "Shana's group."

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What benefits did participants/clients note? What learning did they identify? How was this measured?

At the end of the six-session program, participants complete a written evaluation. Participants often remark that they have learned a great deal about their own strengths, core values, and priorities. Some characterize the What's Next? experience as one of "self-discovery" or a process of "awakening" to one's self. Many participants, who are in the midst of career transitions, have said that as a result of the program, they now have a new set of "lenses" through which to view career opportunities. Using these lenses, they report that they are able to much more quickly and easily assess if a potential job would be a good fit for them.

Participants also share that they experience a deep sense of support and encouragement from other group members. Even those who may have been initially hesitant at the idea of a group coaching program have found the group interaction to be extremely valuable. One group member said, "When I heard about the What's Next? program, I knew it was exactly what I needed to get clear on my career goals. The only thing I was not really excited about was the 'group' aspect of the program. I was afraid the other participants would talk too much and it wouldn't allow me to reflect on my own career questions. Thanks to excellent facilitation by Shana, this fear was completely unfounded. On the contrary, the diversity of the group was a great added value and I believe the program has brought me more than individual coaching would have."

What made the engagement successful?

The combination of a structured, tested process and participants who are ready to delve into the What's Next? question makes for success. (Of course, coaching and facilitation skills on the part of the coach are needed as well.) As I tell prospective clients, the program is not for everyone—but for those who are ready and willing to make an investment of effort, time and money into getting clear and taking action, the results are great.

What challenges did you face with the work?

With group members based in multiple countries, it can be tricky to find a time of day that works for everyone to hold the group coaching calls. Also, many of the prospective group members are living in remote areas with inconsistent Internet connections (e.g., Laos, Papua New Guinea). Even the

teleconferencing services that boast “international phone numbers” do not offer local numbers in those countries. I’ve run into all sorts of tech problems getting people connected in such a way that they can all hear each other. I have tried a number of teleconferencing options, both paid and unpaid, and there is no hands-down best solution.

What lessons did you learn as a coach?

In implementing these group coaching programs, I have learned the importance of keeping the focus and the ownership of the group with the participants rather than with myself or my own agenda. It’s not *the coach’s* program or group—it’s the participants’. When I have taken this approach, I have seen groups flourish. Participants have gained so much from hearing the experience and insights of others, people have jumped in to support and help each other, and group members have been spurred to take action (and make changes they probably would not have done without the group).

What best practices for team or group coaching are illustrated through this example?

The What’s Next? process is fairly structured, with a defined agenda and pre-work for each of the six sessions. However, in order to keep the ownership of the group with the participants, I have employed the “accordion” approach to content. This is a terrific concept that I learned from Jennifer in her Group Coaching Essentials course—you can prepare to cover a variety of topics, questions, and exercises, but if there is more interest in one particular component, one can squeeze the accordion and condense the content. Conversely, if there is less energy than expected on a specific piece, one can expand the accordion to lengthen the content. I simply identify before each session which pieces of content are “anchor points” that I want to be sure the group covers. This allows me the freedom and flexibility to allow the group to focus where there is interest and energy.

If you know, how has the team or group sustained the conversation/focus/structures? What other impact has this led to?

Some members of one of the groups said at the end of the six sessions that they weren’t “ready” for it to end. I have facilitated group coaching sessions
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for them on a monthly basis that consist of sharing, accountability, coaching, and a mini-workshop on topics selected by the group (e.g., Navigating Transitions, Playing to Your Strengths, etc.) This has helped these group members stay connected to each other and feel supported on their continuing journey.

Other groups have continued to periodically meet on their own (without me as the coach/facilitator), to catch up, support each other and socialize. For in-person groups, this takes place face to face. For virtual groups, it takes the form of a Skype conference call. Participants share updates, offer support, and network with each other.

Shana Montesol Johnson, Career Coach/Executive Coach, www.developmentcrossroads.com

Questions to Consider

What do you want to highlight from Shana's case study?

What could you incorporate into your own work?

Voices from the Field: Group Coaching as Part of Re-employment Program by Michael Cullen, PPCC, ACC

I am currently providing bi-weekly, two-hour, group coaching sessions for a maximum 15 participants enrolled in a re-employment program for unemployed people aged 40-plus.

A typical session begins with everyone seated on chairs in a circle giving a three-minute check-in on (a) what has transpired between the previous session and now and (b) what their current challenge is. In order to keep the session on track, I will intervene whenever the participant goes into too many details or is not clear in describing the current challenge.

We then take a 10-minute break. Not only does this allow group members to interact on shared current challenges, but allows me time to ponder the emerged theme (e.g., non-respect/non-recognition from not having any replies from submissions to companies for jobs) and for me to formulate a model, example, and/or exercise for them to incorporate into the session that day that would further their awareness, understanding and acceptance (of the

reality), in such a way that they can be more at ease, more proactive, and better prepared for the next time.

Once I have presented a simplified model (usually on a whiteboard), related a pertinent example and allowed enough time for the individual exercise to be completed, I ask each participant in turn to relate their insights from the exercise to their particular challenge. I ask them what they propose to do about it, when, and to what degree (of commitment). By declaring it to me and the group, they, de facto, become accountable beyond themselves. Interestingly, many participants will voluntarily offer to help out other struggling participants—thus furthering the life-affirming nature of the session—which is so vitally important to everyone there. Indeed, by sharing their stories, challenges, and exploring options, opportunities and resources, the group coaching process benefits both the individual and the group, creating truly win-win results.

What were key outcomes of the engagement?

- Invariably, each participant realizes, and appreciates, that they are not alone or facing unique challenges particular to (only) themselves.
- By actively listening to other people's stories, something gets triggered in the participants (i.e., an experience hitherto unrecalled) that sets them off on a new direction of possibility.
- They realize they have access to more resources than previously thought.
- They realize they are incredibly resilient despite current, dire circumstances.
- They appreciate and learn to be part of a process rather than fighting a (largely) faceless, impersonal system.
- They leave inspired, optimistic and empowered to better handle current and future challenges.

What benefits did participants/clients note?

Being better able to stay focused on their goals; to question and challenge their limiting beliefs in a way that made sense for them; to be able to better/ clearly express their desires by means of purposeful discussion and (written) exercises, thus giving them (new) perspective.

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What learning did group members identify?

Creating and establishing an individualized, workable, balanced approach. A better understanding of their (un)conscious thoughts and actions. This was measured anecdotally and through feedback sheets.

What made the engagement successful?

Comments received on the feedback sheets noted: my open-mindedness, compassion, diplomacy, being non-judgmental, and ability to distil complex issues into simple models and exercises that allowed for possibilities to emerge.

What challenges did you face with the work?

Not knowing. Not knowing what to expect, who would show up and what would emerge.

What lessons did you learn as a coach?

That as much as I need to be prepared (with models, exercises and examples), I need to be even more prepared as a coach and to be present in a “pure” coaching way.

What best practices for team or group coaching are illustrated through this example?

That group coaching is all about the participants and their needs to explore, understand, intrinsically develop and maintain self-growth—albeit aided and abetted by a qualified coach.

If you know, how has the team or group sustained the conversation/focus/structures?

Frequently members of the cohort connect through LinkedIn and also relate progress, appreciation, mutual support and success to others and me via emails.

What other impact has this led to?

Word-of-mouth recommendation and promotion of my services, skills, abilities, and impact as a (group) coach.

Michael Cullen, Certified Professional, Personal, and Group Coach, Michael Cullen Coaching, www.michaelcullencoaching.com, info@michaelcullencoaching.com

Questions to Consider

What do you want to highlight from Michael's case study?
What could you incorporate into your own work?

Voices from the Field: Peer Coaching Group and Open Community Group by Raymond L. Rigoglioso, ACC

I run two coaching groups: 1) a six-session peer coaching group for development directors in the nonprofit sector, and 2) a monthly open community group called the Gay Men of Wisdom Discussion Group. I run both groups in New York City.

The peer coaching group for development directors takes two approaches, and evenly splits its time between them. The first approach is that of a facilitated group discussion. I elicit the topic from the group, ask the group to set a goal around the topic, and enter into the discussion as a coaching conversation, with the explicit intention to help members learn about themselves through the topic. The second approach is more traditional coaching, where one member receives coaching by the group and me.

As for the themes we explored, several came up:

Relationships with executive directors: As the coach, I found myself asking questions such as, "How can you manage up?," "What does your executive director need from you?," and "How does your executive director need to hear information?" We spent time assessing members' own responsibility for communicating clearly, and strategizing on how to navigate this sometimes complicated relationship.

What does it take to be a successful fundraiser? Several discussions focused on whether there is a "development personality" that enables some people

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to be more effective than others. (The answer: there is more than one right way to fundraise effectively.)

Leading through fundraising: As the position responsible for bringing in a nonprofit's income, yet without full executive authority, members explored how they could serve as leaders within their organizations, and how they could win over reluctant staff and board to engage in fundraising.

Sabotaging statements: This came up because I brought it up. I did my Sabotaging Statements exercise (see below), and the results were profound. What began as a painful experience became ludicrous when members realized how common, and how inaccurate, their sabotaging beliefs are.

My second group, the Gay Men of Wisdom Discussion Group, employs a coaching conversation to achieve personal growth and development. I have structured the group to explore questions that start more broadly, then focus in on the individuals. For instance, our topic this week was, "Why does the world need gay men? Why does the world need me?" I set the working agreements for this group each session, handing each person a copy. I close the door at 15 minutes past the hour to ensure that everyone in the group has heard and agreed to the working agreements, and to create a safe, confidential space. The feedback I get is that people feel very comfortable sharing, and I have heard several people express surprise at how much they shared with the group.

What are the key skills you use as a group coach?

The most important skill is to be able to facilitate a group discussion using a coaching approach. It is not something I have been taught per se, but it is what makes the difference between a discussion and a coaching conversation.

Intrinsic to this is the ability to acknowledge what I'm hearing, to gently redirect conversation when it strays off topic or too far from the "I," and the ability to challenge people's sabotaging statements or judgments as they arise. This latter skill is the one I find the most challenging.

What have been your biggest lessons learned in designing, marketing and/or implementing team and group coaching?

I'm still learning. I made the right decision launching my six-session peer coaching group at the Support Center for Nonprofit Management, which has

a large email list and handles all the marketing and registration for me. In exchange I split the cost, but it is well worth it.

My community group is very low cost, but still I located it at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center, which has a printed monthly newsletter and sends weekly e-blasts to members with events. This type of publicity has proven invaluable.

So the takeaway: find a home for your group coaching program where there is a built-in marketing and registration infrastructure, even if that infrastructure is MeetUp.com.

What is one of your favorite group coaching activities?

My favorite so far has been the Sabotaging Statements exercise. I ask members of the group to think about those thoughts that limit them, their insecurities, etc. I have them write each statement on an index card. When they're done, they throw their stack in a bowl in the center of the table. I mix the cards, then ask members to pull one card at a time and read it aloud. We go around the circle until all the cards have been read.

The feedback I got is that it starts as a painful exercise, then becomes ridiculous and ultimately affirming as everyone hears their sabotaging statements and those of their peers. It normalizes people's fears and neutralizes them. I plan on doing a version of this exercise in which I lead the group through a meditation that releases the power of these statements, followed by ritual tearing of the index cards.

What have been your successes with group and team coaching? What have been your challenges?

My biggest successes have been achieving intimacy, trust, and group ownership in both of my groups. This has led to major personal growth, which has been magical to witness. The six-session peer group lends itself to delving deeper, but the open nature of the community group may yet prove to forge more lasting relationships.

The biggest challenge is getting people in the room. With the closed peer group, attendance dropped to about half of enrollment by midway through, despite the fact that I received stated commitments from everyone that they

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would attend each session. Life and work get in the way. The community group—because there is no obligation—has ironically gained a core group of members who regularly attend. With this said, my community group is not designed as income producing, but more as a marketing tool through which I can sell individual coaching and small-group coaching programs.

What is your most important best practice you would like to share regarding group and team coaching work?

I would say it is facilitating a group discussion using a coaching approach. As a trained coach, I look for opportunities to ask powerful questions of participants. I set the working agreements so the conversation, to the extent possible, focuses on the “I.” In the working agreements, I state that any member can invite another member to return to the “I.” As I facilitate the group, I remind myself that this is not a casual discussion or conversation—it is an opportunity to help members learn about themselves, and to help members facilitate that discovery for each other. It is a skill set that is not explicitly taught, but one that comes in very handy.

Also, I find it is extremely important, especially in my community group, to make the group a judgment-free zone. No judgments of gay men are allowed. This focuses the conversation on what members are capable of. It’s intrinsic to my mission with the group.

What has been your experience of bringing group coaching into the nonprofit context?

As for insights about working with nonprofits, I would share the following:

- The nonprofit world has not yet fully embraced coaching. It is still largely resistant to and/or not knowledgeable about coaching.
- As a result, selling coaching to nonprofits is a big challenge. The nonprofit that embraces coaching is the exception.
- Cost is a huge issue. Getting nonprofits to invest in senior staff (even executive directors) can be a challenge, let alone people at the development director level. So many nonprofits are struggling, and yet despite the fact that coaching can improve performance, nonprofits are reluctant to pay for it.

- It's not for the faint of heart. If you want to coach nonprofit professionals, you'll need connections, advocates and lots of persistence.

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Questions to Consider

What do you want to highlight from Ray's examples?
What could you incorporate into your own work?

We can encounter pitfalls in any group coaching process. You will want to contrast this to some of the tricky issues identified with team coaching, as well as with virtual programming. To paraphrase an old adage, "An ounce of insight is an ounce of prevention." The following post, which originally appeared in my group coaching monthly newsletter,² is offered in the spirit of pointing to the pitfalls that can emerge in our work.

WHY GROUP COACHING CAN FALL OFF THE RAILS

I have spent a lot of time over the past few years writing about why group coaching works, but what leads to unsuccessful groups? Here are five issues to keep an eye on as you move forward with your own programs.

1. **Lack of alignment around expectations:** Does everyone know what to expect? Are people coming for training or to get coaching? I continue to reinforce the importance of designing a strong relationship with your group members in the first session, or even before you get together. A 15-minute pre-program connection can go a long way in learning about your participants, their needs and preferences, and what they want to get out of the program. Build this into your proposals and/

²Adapted from Jennifer Britton, "Why Group Coaching Can Fall Off the Rails," Group Coaching: Ins and Outs, March 2012, <http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs043/1011348522019/archive/1109457377472.html>.

or pricing. If you can't meet, make sure you spend time looking at expectations in session #1. The Hopes, Fears and Fantasies exercise found on pages 248-249 of *Effective Group Coaching* is a great exercise to bring in.

2. **Groups not really wanting coaching:** Not every group is ready to be coached. Remember the Continuum of Group Processes (Chapter 2). Recognize that different groups may have different needs—starting off perhaps with more of a need for training and tips, and over time moving squarely into the coaching realm of deepening awareness, goal setting and action steps.
3. **No anchor point:** I have usually found that groups get more out of the coaching process when there is one anchor point, or focus area/theme area, for each coaching conversation. You may run the risk of dilution if there is no common theme or anchor for the group to explore.
4. **Too many diverse experiences:** Having a session theme is useful, especially when there are very diverse experiences in the group. The challenge of too much difference in a group often revolves around how easily group members can connect and build relationships. Different groups will have varying experiences in working across diversity.
5. **Lack of safe, and confidential, group environment:** The lack of safety and confidentiality is probably one of the things most likely to shut a group down, or prevent it from even forming. If people do not trust each other, it is unlikely that they will open up with each other. As you start to build trust within the group, you may lead with smaller group discussions and individual reflection work, rather than jumping into full group discussions. Keep noticing the comfort areas of participants.

Voices from the Field: Successes and Challenges in Group Coaching

The benefits of group coaching were outlined in Chapter 2. In addition to these, it is interesting to note what practitioner coaches find as successes and challenges in their work. Common successes mentioned by many coaches include the camaraderie and accountability created in a group context, along with the commitment to action supported through the peer process. Many of the challenges revolve around marketing and/or logistics. Here are some additional insights from group coaching practitioners.

Kevin Stebbings: An area of significant success with group coaching is the sense of camaraderie that develops between and among group members. Something I hear frequently from members of a group is, “Even though I know I am not the only person who finds this particular area of life a challenge, it is still so helpful to hear the stories of others and know that they empathize.” Being part of a group also reinforces the commitment to take action. The most common response with individuals in group coaching has been noting how powerful the accountability is compared with individual coaching. Knowing that a group will follow up on your action steps has been a high leverage point for group members and has helped them maintain momentum toward their individual goals.

The biggest challenge with a group of individuals has been the scheduling of dates and times for group coaching. In individual coaching it is easier to reschedule and be flexible with dates and times. With group coaching that takes place over a 12-week period, it has not always been easy for group members to attend every group. Unlike individual coaching it is difficult to simply reschedule an appointment.

Renee Brotman:

Challenges: Groups are designed to be small and intimate, yet when one or two members are not present it affects the quality and quantity of interactions and thus minimizes learning from each other.

Successes: When a participant finds a new way of looking at a situation; when they are willing to try a new behavior in the future; when the participant holds themselves accountable for their actions and/or when they realize they can’t change others, only how they react/ behave based on others’ behaviors.

Shana Montesol: In terms of successes, people seem to consistently get what they are seeking from the What’s Next? program—they feel less stuck, more clear, and more excited about the future. They have also already taken steps toward what they want. I would also count as a success the fact that people recommend the program to friends and colleagues. Finally, the fact that group members bond with each other, feel close to one another and feel this is their group more than the coach’s group is also a success in my eyes.

Challenges, as outlined earlier, include the logistics of working with individuals in multiple locations.

Michael Cullen:

Successes: My biggest success is getting overwhelmingly positive feedback along with the consistent “negative” feedback comments such as “I wish it was longer,” or “Not long enough.”

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Challenges: Overcoming my initial nervousness and concern that the participants won't participate or that some will (and do!) challenge me based on their convictions/expertise—and my learning how to effectively handle the situation in a professional, non-dismissive manner.

Ursula Lesic: Successes include an appreciation for the group coaching venue as a safe environment to share struggles and support one another in growth and development. Challenges have been not having a coaching partner for grounding/debriefing.

Questions to Consider

What do you think will be easy for you with this work?

What challenges might emerge in your own group coaching processes?

In this chapter we have explored different approaches to working with groups as a coach, four different examples of how this work is rolling out: with public groups, nonprofit groups, in the virtual domain and with in-person groups. We also looked at some of the successes and challenges with this work. As we wrap up this chapter, note for yourself what approaches you want to incorporate with your own work, going forward.

Chapter 6 in the book looks at team coaching. You will also want to read the digital chapter “Team Coaching in Action”. As you explore these, note once again the similarities and subtle differences between the related sisters of team and group coaching.

End-of-Chapter Questions

What program designs will work best for the clients you work with?

What approaches do you want to incorporate into your work?

What lessons can you learn from the Voices from the Field?

What successes and challenges do you think you might face with your work?

What or who can support you with this?