

Five Big Questions About the Practice and Profession of Executive Coaching

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SIOP 4th Annual Leading Edge Consortium

Executive Coaching

17 October 2008 – Cincinnati, OH

One REALLY Big Question About Executive Coaching

*and lots of related questions and implications
(admittedly with little regard for the learning objectives submitted a long time ago)*

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What *is* an executive coach?



But first, a few small questions...

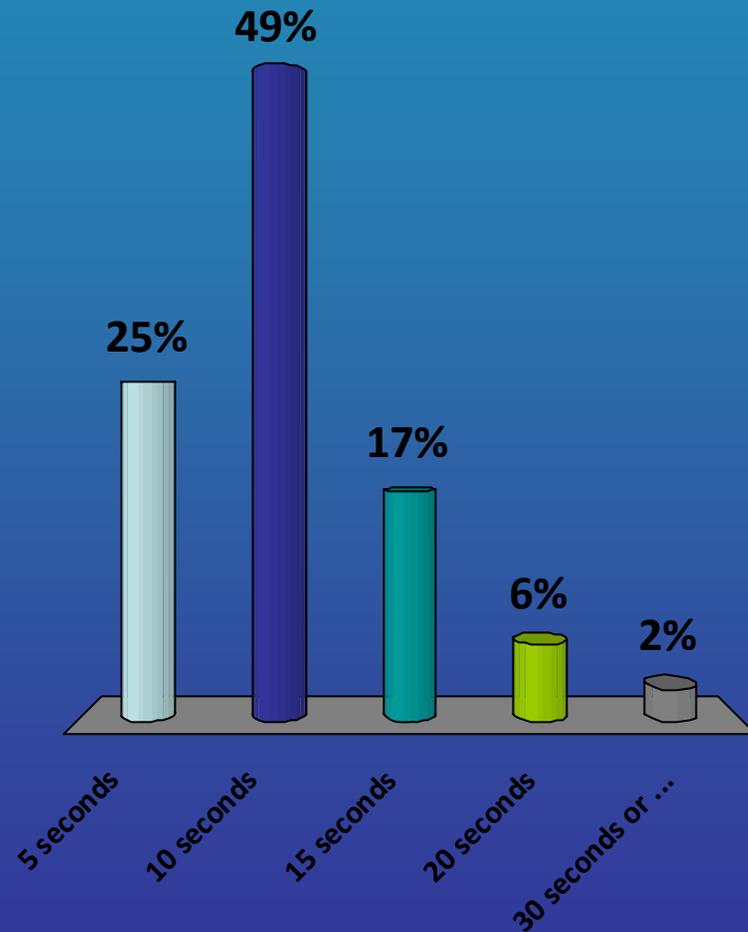
- ◆ Please pair up
- ◆ The person with the least visible hair is now the “calendar expert”
- ◆ The other person is now the “hand-raising” expert
- ◆ For the three questions:
 - Everyone: estimate how long you think it will take
 - When “calendar expert” completes each task successfully, “hand-raising” expert raises their hand
 - David will track the time

1. How long will it take you to name the months of the year in order?

1. 5 seconds
2. 10 seconds
3. 15 seconds
4. 20 seconds
5. 30 seconds or more

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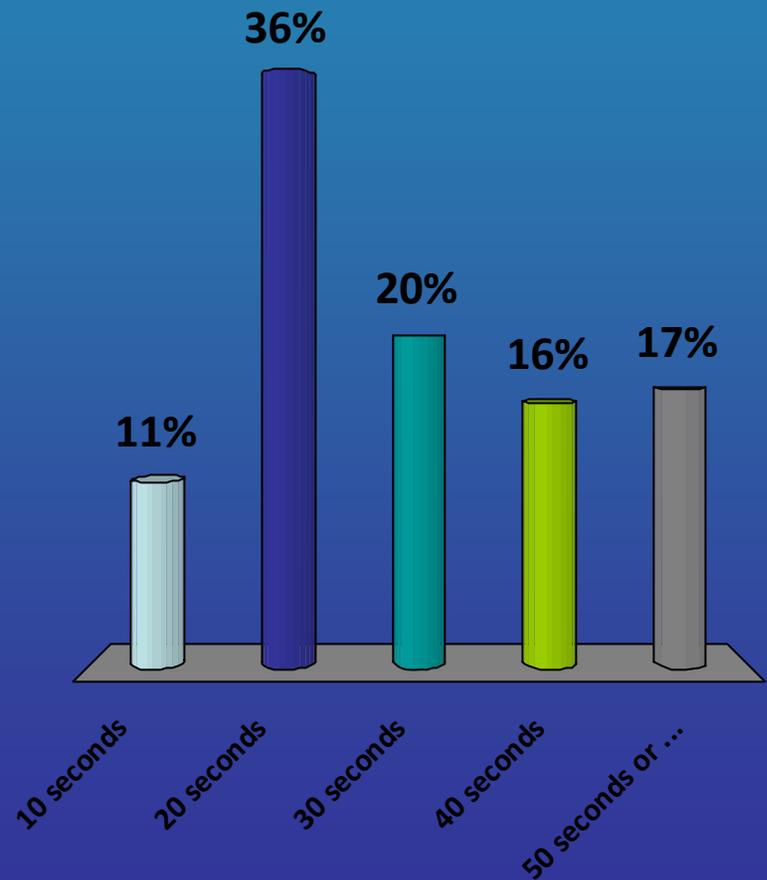


2. How long to name them in reverse order?

1. 10 seconds
2. 20 seconds
3. 30 seconds
4. 40 seconds
5. 50 seconds or
more

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1. 10 seconds
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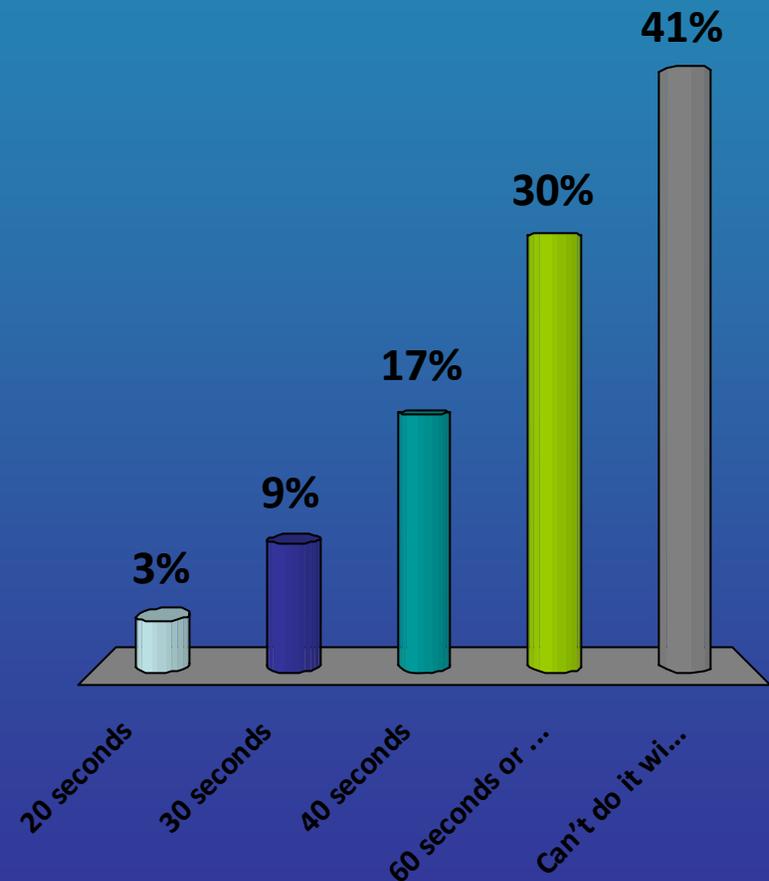


3. How long to name them in *alphabetical* order?

1. 20 seconds
2. 30 seconds
3. 40 seconds
4. 60 seconds or
more
5. Can't do it without
writing them down

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OK, why “Big Questions”?

The most common source of mistakes in management decisions is the emphasis on finding the right answer rather than the right questions. The most serious mistakes are not being made as a result of wrong answers, but of asking the wrong question.

— *Peter Drucker* —



One big question...

- ◆ Why is it so easy to be a good coach and so hard to be a great coach?
- ◆ With implications for:
 1. What are the qualifications for being a coach?
 2. Why is doing research on coaching so difficult?
 3. Where is the learner in coaching?
 4. Why do so many coaches emphasize feedback as such a core element of coaching?
 5. What do psychologists bring to coaching and why should anyone care?
 6. What do coaches do that really makes a difference?
 7. Why are people so hung up ROI?
 8. What value do you bring as a coach and how can you add more?
 9. Why is coaching so popular and growing so quickly?
 10. Why do so many coaches think their way is the best?

OK, it's two questions...

◆ Good coaches?

- Competent, generally effective
- Experienced: At least 3 years, 30 clients

◆ Great coaches?

- Mastery, deep expertise, versatile
- Generally put the learner in the foreground:
 - Customized, adaptive approach
 - Teach clients how to learn for themselves
- Effective even with difficult, complex, challenging engagements (e.g., resistant, narcissistic)
- Highly experienced: At least 10 years, 300 clients

Why is it so easy to be a good coach?

1. External, objective perspective
 - Validate or challenge assumptions
 - Offer new perspectives
2. Create space for reflection, thoughtful planning
3. Relationship itself is often a vehicle for change (McKenna & Davis, 2008)
4. First steps of change are often easy and obvious
5. Provides accountability
 - Follow-up conversation
 - Going public with one's commitment

Why is it so easy to be a good coach?

5. Coaches get multiple tries
 - No particular techniques always work
 - Keep trying until something works
 - Cumulative benefit of multiple approaches
6. Simple coaching formulas readily available (e.g., GROW)
7. Wide range of easy-to-leverage backgrounds:
Psychology (I/O, clinical, counseling, social, developmental, etc.), HR, OD, management, teacher, helper...

Why is it so easy to **STAY** a good coach?

8. Sometimes good is good enough
9. Coaches fall in love with their tools
10. Want to maintain a great relationship that is mutually rewarding – reluctant to really stretch, challenge client
11. Easy to place blame elsewhere when it doesn't work, rather than ask yourself what you could have done differently

Why is it so hard to be a great coach?

1. Long cycle time with slow, distal outcome feedback
 - Immediate feedback is often deceptive
 - Difficult to connect any specific factor to outcomes
2. Complex, multifaceted process
 - Probabilistic – Nothing works 100% of the time
 - Pleiotropic – Same coaching behavior can produce different outcomes
 - Polygenic – Different coaching behaviors may produce same outcome

Why is it so hard to be a great coach?

3. Demanding requirements for developing great expertise
 - Hours of practice: 10,000 or more for complex behaviors
 - *Systematic* practice & reflection
 - Specific goals
 - Critically examine minute behaviors and skills -
Concentrate on technique as much as outcome
 - Systematic experimentation with other approaches
 - Self-reflection and objective feedback

Why is it so hard to be a great coach?

4. There is so much to be learned
 - Coaching process and techniques
 - Methodologies of change, learning, and development
 - Assessment and feedback
 - Contracting
 - Coaching content
 - Leadership skills
 - Business savvy
 - Personal effectiveness (e.g., time management)
 - Contextual knowledge
 - Systems thinking
 - Organizational effectiveness
 - Relationship skills, EQ
 - Business development and project management
 - Getting and managing engagements

Why is it so hard to be a great coach?

Many more reasons...

5. Generally helps to be smarter and more cognitively complex than your clients
6. Becoming great requires personal risk, vulnerability
7. Often challenge/stretch clients to points of intense discomfort
8. Widely different styles and skill sets required at different stages of coaching
 - Divergent - convergent thinking
 - People skills – accountability, action planning, follow-through
9. Requires continuous conscious processing effort rather than relying on automaticity
 - No script: Customized, spontaneous, adaptive process
 - Big tool-kit, lots of readily available tools, methods

Why is it so hard to be a great coach?

10. Seductive nature of certain parts of the coaching process.... E.g.,
 - ◆ Insight and giving advice are:
 - Relatively easy, quick, tangible
 - Something the coach can directly impact and get credit for
 - Ultimately of little value without action
 - ◆ Real-World Practice (transfer, generalization, follow-through) is:
 - Often slow, tedious, awkward, frustrating
 - Rarely directly attributable to the coach
 - May be boring for the coach, too
 - No guarantee of better results
 - Absolutely necessary for real change
 - ◆ Great coaching appears relatively effortless
 - The person feels like they're doing most of the work
 - The coach doesn't get as much credit for specific actions

Conclusion: Five big questions

1. Who do you want to be as a coach?
2. What is your responsibility to your clients to continually improve?
3. What is your role as a coach in promoting ethical behavior in leaders? (Jeff? Sandy?)
4. What other questions do you need to ask yourself about who you are and what you do as a coach?
5. What question would you ask this audience to stimulate thinking and progress in the field of coaching?

Three *really* big questions



There are only three important questions in life. Who am I? What am I doing here? Who the hell are these other people?

— *Eric Berne (allegedly)* —

It just never ends....

- ◆ What are the qualifications of a competent coach? Master coach? How do we evaluate a coach's qualifications?
- ◆ How do we help coaching participants get the most out of their coaching and become better self-guided learners?
- ◆ Why are people so interested in creating a “coaching culture?” What do they mean by that? What do they hope to accomplish?
- ◆ Where does coaching go from here and what's our role in shaping that future? What will replace coaching? How do we incorporate technology?
- ◆ Why does coaching tap into such strong personal values?
- ◆ What's up with “matching”? Why do people work so hard to match on “chemistry” but less on participant need and coach capabilities?
- ◆ Why do so many people assume therapeutic models can be easily adapted to coaching? Why do so many people assume that their past experiences transfer so readily to coaching?
- ◆ Where is the taxonomy of coaching?
- ◆ Under what conditions is coaching most effective?
- ◆ What's the best way to learn coaching?

Why is this question so important?

- ◆ Good coaching becomes a commodity
- ◆ We don't deliver the real value we are capable of, as coaches and as a discipline

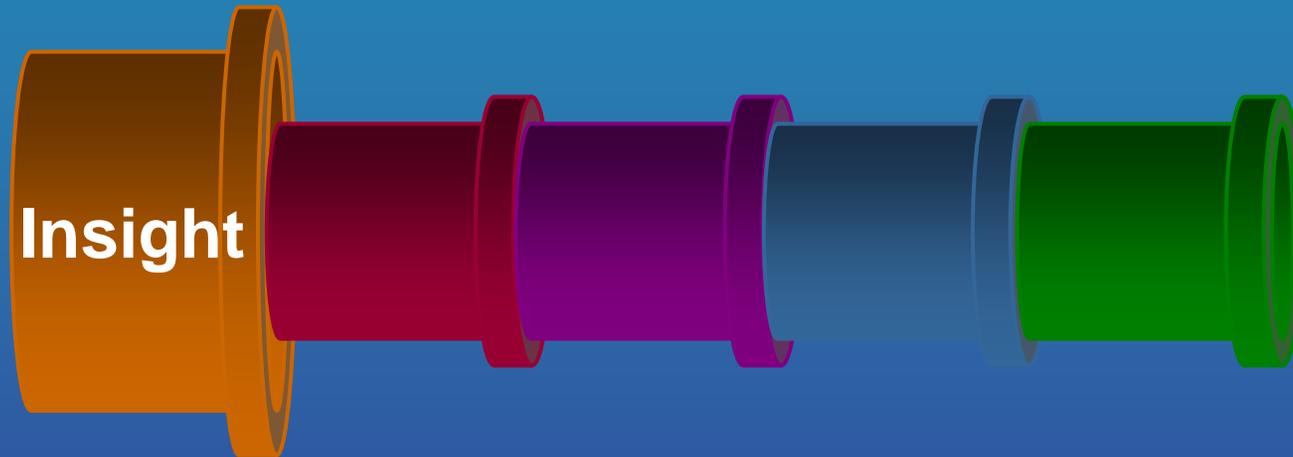
Where is the learner in coaching?

- ◆ “The client is the primary agent of change.” McKenna & Davis (2008)
- ◆ “Coachee”
- ◆ Coach-focused, not client-focused
 - “Asking powerful questions” vs. “cultivating compelling insights”
- ◆ Over-emphasis on external feedback
 - vs. insight -- broader than mere perceptions of others
- ◆ Focus on “giving feedback” vs. helping people gain insight
 - Seeking feedback from others
 - Structured self-reflection, Cosmo quizzes
 - Self-observation and monitoring
 - Systematic experimentation and reflection

Why is research on coaching so difficult?

- ◆ Typical answers
 - Logistics issues
 - Hard to find real subjects
 - Long cycle times
 - Etc.
- ◆ Coaching is:
 - Probabilistic – Nothing works 100% of the time
 - Pleiotropic - The same behavior can produce different outcomes
 - Polygenic - Different behaviors may produce the same outcome
- ◆ Coaches get multiple tries
- ◆ Design challenges: Coaching is an individual intervention

Insight



- ◆ Do people know what areas they need to develop?

Motivation



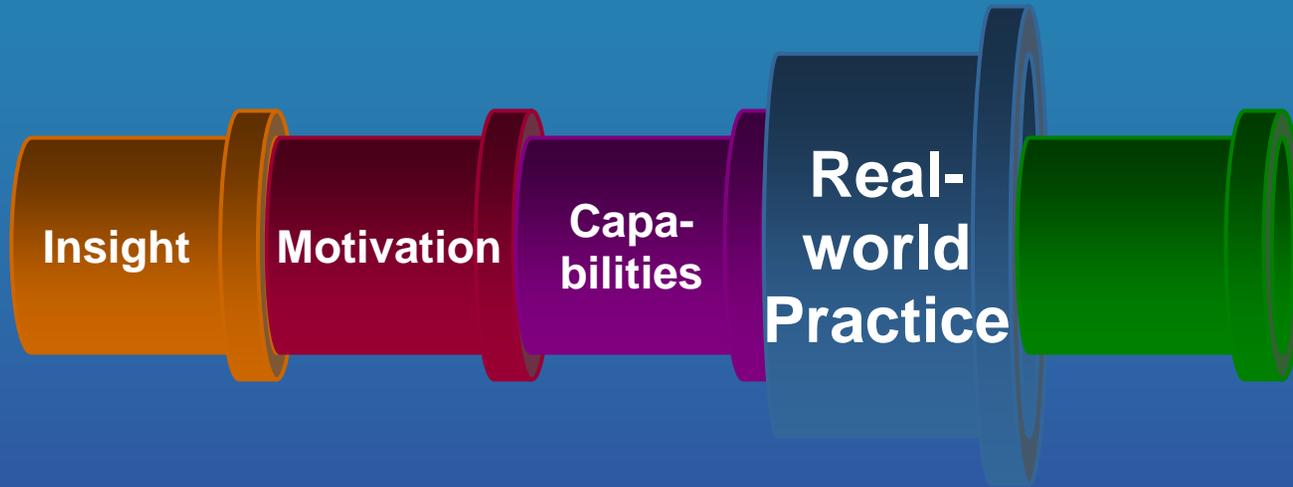
- ◆ Are they willing to invest the time and energy it takes?

Capabilities



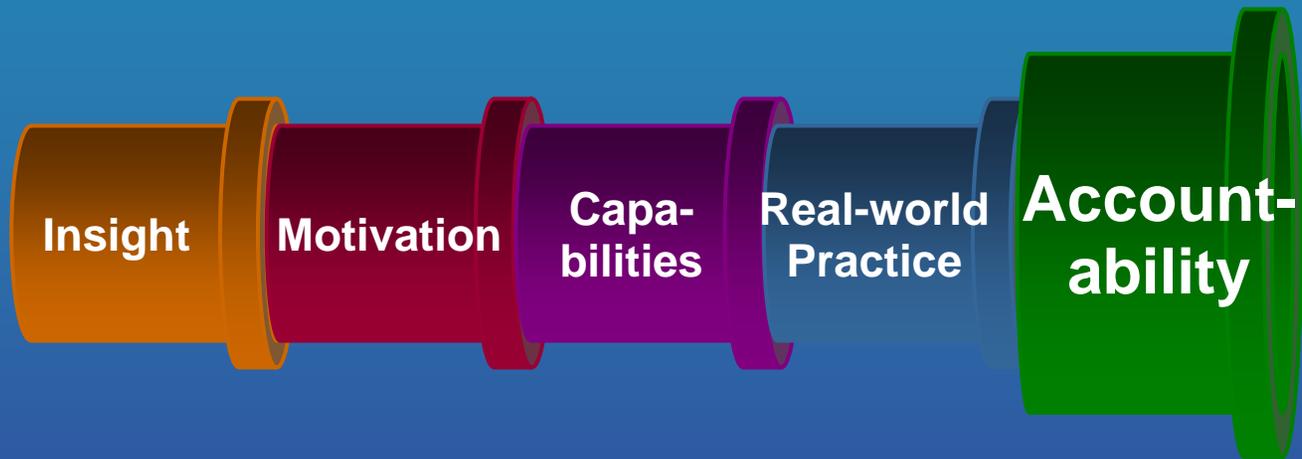
- ◆ Do they have the skills and knowledge they need?

Real-world practice



- ◆ Do they have the opportunities they need to apply their capabilities at work?

Accountability



- ◆ Will they internalize their new capabilities to actually improve performance and results?