



The International  
Consortium  
For Coaching  
In Organizations

## Coaching in VUCA Times *Animation Questions*

The concept of operating in a chaotic environment is not new. Tom Peters has been talking about managing under chaos for years, and “decision-making under uncertainty” is a well-established academic field. What is new is that most economic, business, and political leaders have realized that the VUCA environment is a permanent condition.

VUCA is an acronym for ‘volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.’ VUCA was developed by the Army War College a dozen years ago. As the world struggles economically with recession and politically on many other fronts, think of VUCA as a “post-modern SWOT analysis”.

### DEFINITIONS:

- ❖ *Volatility* refers the dynamics of change: its accelerating rate, intensity and speed as well as its unexpected catalysts.
- ❖ *Uncertainty* refers to the lack of predictability, the increasing prospects for surprising, “disruptive” changes that often overwhelm our awareness, understanding and ability to cope with events.
- ❖ *Complexity* entails the multiplex of forces, the apparently contradictory information flow, the sensitive interdependence of everything we touch, leading to the sense of confusion in which it’s hard to make smart decisions, steeped as we are in the moving dance of reality.
- ❖ *Ambiguity* is the ‘haziness’ in which cause-and-effect are hard to attribute, relativity seems to trump established rules, weighing heavily on our ability to hold contradictory data and still function and make choices.

*“Business executives have been preparing for the VUCA environment for years. Although most of the initial work was done by the military and in counterterrorism, VUCA planning has been part of business processes like supply chain and risk management for years. A few firms like GE, Unilever, and McDonald’s have even begun changing their leadership development model to fit the VUCA environment. But unfortunately, often those of us in charge of recruiting, retention, skill development, compensation, performance management, onboarding, etc. have paid no more than lip surface attention to this strategic problem.”*

*(Dr. John Sullivan, ere.net)*

### WORKING QUESTIONS

1. Some of the disruptive factors that firms deal with might include generational shifts that occur every six years, social media changing the way we communicate, and simultaneous talent surpluses and shortages. What does **planning, forecasting,**

**and training** mean, if the environment that you are preparing for never appears?  
What best enables firms to manage against these conditions?

2. If **agile models and learning-agile** people are part of the answer to VUCA conditions, how does our *own* thinking as coaches and Talent leaders have to evolve in order not to put new wine in old bottles?
3. How do our ideas about **organizational coaching** serve powerfully in VUCA times, and how, on the other hand, do they need to change? What would new coaching applications look like?
4. Examine the **shifting meaning** of these terms:
  - Job description
  - Office
  - Career planning
  - Department
  - Supervision
  - Accountability
  - Leadership Competencies
  - Training
  - Work-life balance

How do these shifts have to transform coaching practices?

5. Here are some things organizations have been advised to **STOP** doing:
  - Assuming long term retention is possible and desirable
  - Assuming the culture and values are sacred and fixed
  - Benchmarking best practices and solutions to most current problems

Discuss what a talent environment deprived of these foundations might look like.

6. What approaches are you as a coach using to **develop leadership** talent that is **resilient** and able to thrive during VUCA times?
7. How can coaches help leaders **manage their energy** and resiliency so they stay balanced, centered and engaged during VUCA times - versus just coping?
8. How **sustainable** is the way in which we and our coachees work and live and what are some of the most powerful decisions and practice choices that coaches are making in answer to these conditions?