



## Research Paper Assessment

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# **‘AHA’ MOMENTS – REASONS FOR EMERGENCE AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS IN IMPROVING THE EFFICACY OF COACHING.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The International Coach Federation defines coaching as: “**Professional coaches provide an ongoing partnership designed to help clients produce fulfilling results in their personal and professional lives**”. Coaches’ help people improve their performances and enhance the quality of their lives.

“Coaching is an emerging and evolving field, complex and dynamic, integrating the substance of many fields and the innovative thinking of great pioneers” (Brock, 2008). “Coaching has also been extensively defined as a learning process” (Brock, 2008).

“Coaching involves dialogue between a coach and clients with the aim of supporting the client obtain a fulfilling life.” (International Coach Academy, 2002)

“Coaching is a rapidly expanding field with interdisciplinary roots and broad application. However, despite abundant prescriptive literature, research into the process of coaching is minimal”. (Griffiths & Campbell, 2009)

Worldwide, coaching research is being conducted in order to better understand and refine the process of coaching and thereby improve its outcomes. On a more focused note, for a coaching practitioner, the research should be able to identify the active ingredients of the process that leads to successful achievement of client goals or long term outcomes.

Successful short term and long term outcomes often start in a coaching session with the realization that the goal is achievable. Such moments generally termed as ‘**AHA moments**’ usually occur during a coaching session. This AHA moment can come at any moment and could be due to any reason. While it is reported that such AHA moments occur regularly in coaching sessions, not much literature or material is available on them. In the above context, it may be important for us, as coaches, to first recognize the emergence of the ‘**AHA**’ moments and then more importantly understand the reason for the emergence of these moments.

The **Aha! Effect** refers to the common human experience of suddenly understanding a previously incomprehensible problem or concept. The Aha! Effect is also known as the **Eureka** effect, which is named after Greek polymath Archimedes. (Wikipedia, 2102)

Interestingly researchers say **Aha!** moments are marked by a surge of electrical activity in the brain. It is believed, that distinct computational and neural mechanisms lead to these breakthrough moments. (Mark Jung-Beeman, 2004)

*For the purpose of this study, an AHA moment is defined as the moment when the client has become aware or recognizes the fact that it is **highly possible to achieve a goal** that is being pursued.*

## SCOPE OF STUDY

The purpose of the study was to understand the reasons of ‘AHA’ moments and understand the perceived role of AHA movements and their potential implications\ applications in improving the efficacy of coaching”. This study is expected to contribute to the larger question of - *What works in coaching.*

The following questions underpin the study reported in this paper:

- Occurrence of ‘**AHA! moment**’ during a coaching session
- The main reason/s for the ‘AHA!’ moment.
- Occurrence of successful outcomes / results (as a result of coaching
- Reasons for successful outcomes during a coaching session.

## METHODOLOGY

The grounded theory approach was used in this study. The study was not based on any pre-conceived theory or assumptions. It was aimed at finding the implications of ‘AHA’ moments in the process of coaching, if any. Review of current literature did not show any significant work being carried out on AHA moments.

Two questionnaires were designed – one for clients and one for coaches. An attempt was made to compare the responses of both the groups to the same question. These two questionnaires were then hosted on the web and responses invited from student and practicing coaches. The invitations were posted in coaching groups on LinkedIn & Facebook and on the ICA forum.

Data collected was then collated and analyzed. Quantitative data was analyzed using a basic spreadsheet program. Analysis of text was done on responses to answers of qualitative / textual questions to understand and highlight any significant information.

## FINDINGS

### General respondent information

A total of 62 people responded to the survey, of which 20 were clients and 42 were coaches. The study was primarily carried out through ICA students/alumni though others also took part.

- **Country** – Amongst clients - 50% of the survey responses were from North America, 20% from India, 10% from Australia and the remaining 16% from the rest of the

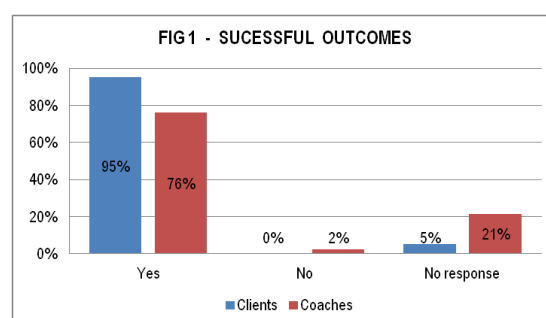
world. Amongst the coaches - 25% of the survey responses were from North America, 5% from India, 2% from Australia and the remaining 10% from the rest of the world.

- **Gender** - Amongst the clients, 15% were males and 85% were females. Amongst the coaches, 26% were males and 74% were females 3
- **ICA student or alumni?** - Amongst clients 95 % belonged to ICA others constituted 5 %. Amongst the coaches 76 % belonged to ICA others constituted 24 %.
- The **experience** of the coaches varied from .5 years to 20 years. The average experience was 4.6 years

*The responses to the various questions were as follows:*

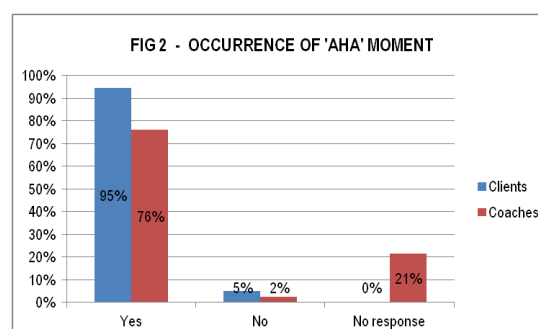
### 1. Successful outcomes to coaching:

95% of the responding clients reported successful outcomes to coaching, while 5% did not respond. From the coaches, 76% reported a successful outcome. There was no response from 22% and 2% gave a negative reply. *Fig 1*



### 2. Occurrence of an 'AHA!' movement:

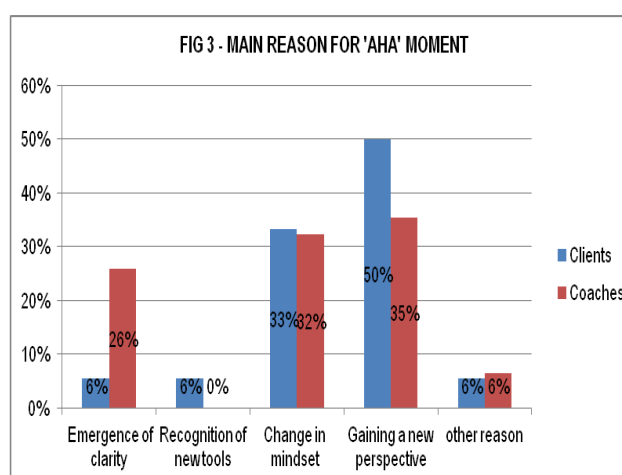
95% of the clients indicated experiencing such a moment whereas only 5% indicated otherwise. Amongst the coaches, 76% indicated that their clients experienced AHA moments, 22% did not respond to the question and 2% reported otherwise. *Fig 2*



### 3. On the main reasons for the emergence of AHA movement:

Of those who responded, 50% of the clients indicated, gaining a new perspective as the main reason, while 33% indicated change in mindset. The other three reasons (options) constituted 6% each.

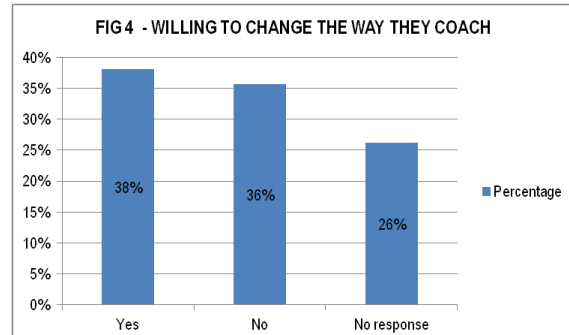
Amongst the coaches, 35% reported gaining new perspective as the main reason for a client AHA moment, 32% indicated change in mindset, 26%



quoted emergence of clarity and 6% quoted other reasons. Notably, none of the coaches quoted recognition of new tools as the reason. *Fig 3*

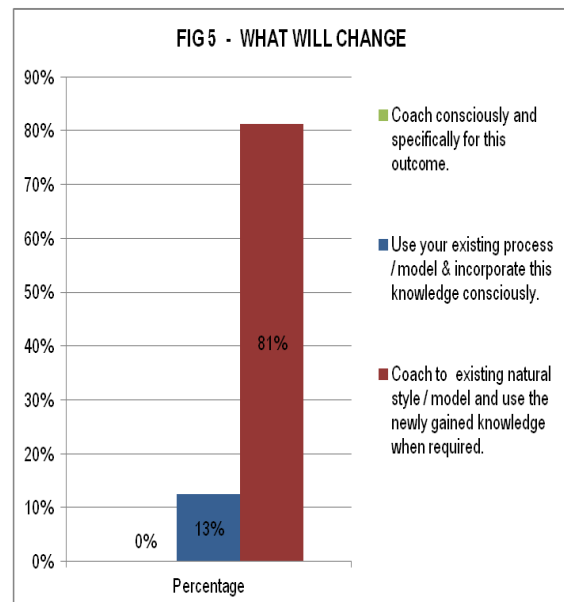
**4. Willingness of the coaches to change the way they coach and coach only to that specific reason on becoming aware of the reasons for the emergence of an AHA moment :**

38% of the coaches indicated willingness, 36% indicated that they would not coach only to a specific outcome and 26% of the coaches did not respond to the question. *Fig 4*



**5. What will change for the coaches and how the coaches will use the new information or knowledge?**

81% indicated that they will coach to their existing natural style and model and use the newly gained knowledge as and when required. 13% indicated that they would use their existing process / model but incorporate the new knowledge consciously in your coaching process every time they coach. Significantly, none of the coaches (0%) said that they will coach consciously and specifically for a particular outcome. 6% did not respond. *Fig 5*



**Qualitative / textual responses**

**6. Reasons for successful outcomes**

The textual responses to the coaching on what lead in particular in to successful outcomes (e.g. goals / resolving concerns, etc.) are summarized in the table 1 below. Analysis of the reasons indicates that powerful questioning is by far the most quoted reason followed by reframing, listening and providing a non-judgmental and trusting space. Building self awareness and accountability are other commonly quoted reasons. It is interesting to note that both the clients as well as coaches see powerful questioning as the prime reason.

**Table 1 – Reasons for successful outcomes**

<b>CLIENTS</b>	<b>COACHES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarity in my coach.</li> <li>• Powerful questions that helped change perspectives</li> <li>• Clarification of the goal statement</li> <li>• Accountability from my coach</li> <li>• Reframe the existing situation</li> <li>• Unravel the underlying belief</li> <li>• Questions that helped me to reframe my perspective or discover an underlying belief.</li> <li>• Reframing has been the most consistent tool a coach has used</li> <li>• Powerful questions</li> <li>• I appreciate having an accountability partner and someone who provides me with acknowledgement.</li> <li>• Being coached, where I became aware of what's coming in the way of me achieving something</li> <li>• A very simple question.</li> <li>• Building a safe relationship</li> <li>• Questions that have helped me look just that little bit deeper</li> <li>• The Silence provided after questioning leading to the emergence of many solutions to the prevalent issues.</li> <li>• Coach being non-judgmental</li> <li>• Powerful questions, great listening skills, visualizations, accountability,</li> <li>• Powerful questioning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening deeply,</li> <li>• Powerful questioning to reflect on.</li> <li>• Deep Listening</li> <li>• Being non-judgmental</li> <li>• Powerful listening</li> <li>• Use of power tools to change perspectives</li> <li>• Use of visualization.</li> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Powerful questions that challenge perspectives.</li> <li>• Help people look deep within and let go of their self-sabotage</li> <li>• Being able to establish the pattern of what isn't working for the client and brainstorm new ways to break the pattern.</li> <li>• Our focus is on following the energy and asking what wants to happen.</li> <li>• The non-judgmental space created for self-discovery</li> <li>• Allowance for insights</li> <li>• Non judgmental attitude</li> <li>• Powerful questions</li> <li>• Accountability and acknowledgement</li> <li>• Clarification of the goal has also been important.</li> <li>• Gaining a belief in themselves</li> <li>• powerful questioning &amp; good listening</li> <li>• Having crystal clarity about what they actually want – a very clear goal</li> <li>• Feeling supported and not being alone in their journey.</li> </ul>

## 7. What will change for them (coaches)?

Here, the coaches were asked to assume that they were provided with consolidated information collected as a result of a study. Overall the response from the coaches was that they would incorporate the new body of knowledge in their natural style / process of coaching. A summary of the responses is included in Table 2.

**Table 2 – What will change?**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>How they will incorporate the new knowledge?</b>
<b>Emergence of clarity in thought</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create lists of questions that generate clarity in thoughts for clients and these questions to speed up the process of successful results</li><li>• Reiterating the AHA discovery as it is often lost once they leave the coach and go back to real life.</li><li>• If I knew there was a tool that could help clients w/clarity, I would share that with.</li><li>• Asking thought provoking questions</li></ul>
<b>Recognition of new tools / resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Receive training on use and application on new tool/resource to be able to provide clients greatest assistance to be successful.</li><li>• When a client recognizes a new tool, we help them use it and provide clarity to incorporate it in their daily life.</li><li>• Will deliberately make these available to my clients.</li><li>• Will provide my clients with new tools to help them.</li><li>• Incorporating new tools / resources</li><li>• Will be seen as a fresh opportunity</li></ul>
<b>Change in mindset (Overcame a limiting underlying belief)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use techniques that overcome limiting beliefs.</li><li>• The client then goes out into their "real life"; using curiosity, to discover the effects of the new mindset.</li><li>• Self discovery, the client repeating back and focusing on the new self awareness and how it impacts possible choices in their coming week.</li><li>• Role play/what if this scenarios</li><li>• Will definitely research and implement new resources and tools to supplement the original technique that led to the AHA</li><li>• I would provide the information to them and then allow them to see if it "fits" for them</li><li>• Helping the client to replace a limiting belief with an inspiring belief &amp; working on practical actions aligned to the change in mindset</li><li>• Communicate my conviction about the new learning</li></ul>

<b>Gaining a new perspective</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a model approach to be used consistently to gain the desired result quicker</li> <li>• Once the client has the data from a "real life" perspective we help them retrain their brain to maintain the new healthier mindset and deepening the connection with their true "goal".</li> <li>• Again, their choice. I'd share the information; they'd determine whether to use it.</li> <li>• Looking at their situation from different perspectives, feedback from others &amp; / or using tools which allow the client to review where they are now with where they want to be</li> <li>• Benefits of the new learning</li> </ul>
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## DISCUSSION

The above study was primarily focused on two aspects – Occurrence of successful outcomes and emergence of ‘AHA’ moments. The study was also aimed at finding the reasons for the emergence or non emergence of the AHA moments and of successful outcomes.

Expectedly, almost all the respondents (clients as well as coaches) reported, the emergence of an ‘AHA!’ moment, as well as successful outcomes due to coaching. Gaining a new perspective was the most important reason quoted by the respondents (50% of the clients, 35% of the coaches). Change in mindset was the next most quoted reason (33 % clients and 32% of the coaches). Notably, none of the coaches quoted recognition of new tools as a reason.

Interestingly, almost an equal number of coaches indicated that they will (38%) and will not (36%) coach to a specific reason. Significantly, in response to the next question, none of the coaches (0%) said that they will coach consciously and specifically for a particular outcome and 81% indicted that they will coach to their existing natural style and model and use the newly gained knowledge as and when required. This in a way contradicts the response to the earlier question and needs to be probed further. However, it may be safe to conclude that new information / knowledge gained from empirical and scientific research will definitely add to the efficacy of the coaching process.

Analysis of the responses to the other important aspect of the study - reasons for successful outcomes confirms the widely held belief that powerful questioning is one of the most important parameter for successful outcomes. Reframing, listening and providing a non-judgmental and trusting space, helping build self awareness and accountability are other commonly quoted reasons.



## SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

As the field of coaching expands and the demand for it increases, it will become vital to understand the reasons for building successful outcomes as a result of coaching. What works in coaching will probably be the most widely asked question both in daily practice as well as in the research domain. As stated earlier, this study was initiated and carried out to broadly understand the reasons for the success of coaching and more specifically to understand the role of 'AHA' moments in coaching. It must be noted that the above study is very preliminary in nature and needs to be followed up by more extensive research.

In conclusion, the results of the study indicate that AHA moments do occur in almost all coaching sessions and that gaining a new perspective was by far the most quoted reason for occurrence of such moments. Powerful questioning followed by effective listening is a vital tool in gaining successful outcomes through the process of coaching. Given fresh inputs, coaches are more than willing to incorporate this information in their future coaching process.

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