

Coaching High Potential and High Performance Clients

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A three-day symposium was convened on November 11-13, 2009 in Istanbul, Turkey under the auspices of the International Consortium for Coaching in Organizations. This three-day meeting was organized to explore the relationship between executive coaching and leadership development. During this meeting extensive attention was given to two related coaching challenges: how to work most effectively with men and women who have been identified as high potential performers, and how to work most effectively with men and women who have already been acknowledged for high levels of performance. As a first step in making sense of these challenges, we have identified five different kinds of clients (two of which are high potentials and high performers) and have suggested ways in which these five types pose both different and similar coaching challenges. Perhaps most importantly, three of these types tend to be deficit-based whereas the high potential (HPOT) and the high performance (HPER) clients

were identified as coming from a position of envisioned (HPOT) or real (HPER) strength and accomplishment. It is our belief that the executive coach requires specific strategies and competencies to serve the developmental needs of all five of these diverse client populations, but that the high potential and high performance clients in particular require unique coaching strategies and competencies.

From Deficit-Based to Strength-Based Coaching

Following are the five types of clients that coaches in an organizational setting are likely to encounter. We have used the term “level” when identifying and describing each of these five types, because we believe that there are a set of assumptions underlying the way coaches work with each type that infer (appropriately or inappropriately) a hierarchy of competency and motivation.

Level One: Remediation: Available to Problematic Employees

Many organizations offer coaching at this first level, and organizational coaching has acquired a very negative reputation in many organizations precisely because it is associated with “losers.” These problematic employees may have never lived up to their potential or may have leveled off or declined in their performance. In some instances these are employees who have recently made a series of mistakes or been disruptive in their work with other employees or customers (inside and outside the organization). Two major case studies have been featured in the *International Journal of Coaching in Organizations (IJCO)* over the past seven years that concern problematic employees who have received coaching (Surrenda & Thompson, 2003; Hill, 2007; see also Rothaizer, 2007). In both of these cases, the coaching was not successful, highlighting the exceptional challenge associated with coaching at this first level. Typically, level one clients are not motivated to either examine or change their behavior and often feel quite threatened by the entire coaching process. The identified client may resist the benefits of the coaching engagement as a way of limiting self-awareness of limitations or the need for improvement.

Level Two: Available to All Employees at a Certain Level

As professional coaching has become more widespread and acceptable in many countries, it has in many instances simply become one of the standard offerings of the Human Resource Department—along with such activities as leadership development programs, software training sessions, and career awareness days. While any employee at a certain level of the organization (usually at least at a managerial level) may be able to avail themselves of coaching services, it is usually provided under the assumption that the coaching client is in need of some support—the coach provides an opportunity for reflection and dialogue on the part of the client (combining the role of confidant and counselor), motivation and guidance regarding a specific performance issue (combining the role of coach and performance manager), or some knowledge or skills training (often blending the role of coach and educator). In each case the client is assumed to be lacking something that the coach can assist the client in discovering. At the very least, the coach can help the client find clarity regarding the deficit and work with the client to identify resources that can be used to overcome this deficit. The executive coach must be prepared to

assist the client in recognizing the opportunities available and encourage the motivation for work optimization.

Level Three: Developmental

Increasingly, we are finding that organizational coaching is being linked to (even coupled with) other developmental initiatives so that the impact of these initiatives can be strengthened and sustained. We find this to be particularly the case with leadership and management development programs. There is substantial evidence suggesting a much greater retention and use of the knowledge and skills offered in leadership and management development programs if each participant has a coach who is knowledgeable about the principles and competencies embedded in the developmental program.

This third level is certainly framed as a positive step which enables a leader or manager intentionally to call forth their emotional intelligence or do an even better job of influencing other people. It is still founded, however, on the assumption that something is lacking in the leader or manager that the developmental program and coaching can address. In many instances, the deficit is nothing more than a lack of experience: the newly appointed manager or the woman or man who has just assumed a major leadership role is given an opportunity to accelerate their learning while assuming this increased responsibility. In other cases, the deficit may be framed as an overuse of existing strengths, the alteration of tactics or strategies in response to shifting technology or customer needs, or the movement into a new organizational culture. Framing the deficit as due to lack of experience rather than overuse of existing strengths poses subtle differences for development. The coach can positively present the need for more developmental experience as an obvious enhancement. When the deficits occur from overused strengths, the rationale for those strengths must be honored while encouraging the need for balance with the underused polarity. We frequently encounter high performing executives who have achieved their position through use of their existing strengths while underusing attributes that were not perceived as valuable to their work.

Level Four: High Potential

Obviously, there is not clear line to be drawn between these five levels. Certainly a developmental approach to coaching can be blended with a level four focus on the high potential employee. The man or woman showing great promise often will be given the opportunity to participate in leadership or managerial development programs – this is a frequent component of “fast-track” programs. There is something more, however, that operates at level four. This form of coaching focuses on the high potential’s strengths and on the leveraging of these strengths for the benefit of the organization. The high potential typically possesses some distinctive abilities that are not easily learned by or “trained into” the average manager or formal leader. The high potential, metaphorically, is a race horse who should never be strapped to a plow. As we will note throughout this article, many of the strategies that can be effectively employed in level one, two, and three coaching are also appropriate for level four coaching. There are some distinctive challenges, however, that require distinctive strategies or, at the very least, variants on the more traditional level one, two, and three strategies. We will identify some of these coaching strategies in this article.

Level Five: High Performance

What about the level five coaching client? This is a person who is already performing at a very high level. This is not only a race horse that shows great promise—this person is like a horse that has already won many races in a specific class. The challenge is to help this “race horse” move up to an even higher class of performance and to win even higher class stakes for the organization that is fortunate to have the person in its “stable.” Once again, many of the level one, two, three (and four) strategies are applicable. We propose, however, that there are some coaching strategies that only make sense for these high performance employees. They face distinctive challenges in part because of their success. They can benefit from exceptional organizational coaching precisely because they are often placed in a class by themselves, and as a result feel isolated and even under-appreciated (or frequently misunderstood). By definition, uniqueness creates a paradoxical sense of loneliness that could be reduced through the appreciative support—that comes from coaching. And in that experience of appreciation and reflection, a place and space for development emerges. As in the case of level four, we will suggest several distinctive coaching strategies for high performance employees.

We will first identify several of the key principles of effective coaching that underlie all five levels of coaching, then we will turn to ways in which these key principles get applied distinctively when working with high potential and high performance clients.

Fundamental Coaching Perspectives

As we specifically review the coaching strategies that could be engaged when working with high potential and high performance clients, it is important first to identify several of the fundamental perspectives that underlie effective coaching. In each case we will identify ways in which these perspectives are tailored for work with these two client populations.

Challenge and Support

First, coaching will be effective if it balances *challenge and support*. To the extent that the coach challenges the client—by offering penetrating questions, encouraging ambitious goals, or confronting the client’s assumptions, the coach must then also provide support—by offering encouragement, identifying strengths and opportunities (an appreciative perspective), or suggesting resources that the client might engage that can be used to meet the challenge. Nevitt Sanford (1980) suggested that all significant adult learning requires this balancing of challenge and support. In a similar manner, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) indicated that high levels of motivation and performance (what he identifies as a “flow” experience) are inevitably associated with the threshold between anxiety (challenge without support) and boredom (support without challenge). The effective coach demonstrates the capacity for and artful skill of collaboratively identifying what the client recognizes as “challenge” and “support” in relation to the learning agenda.

We propose that levels of both challenge and support are distinctive for high potential and high performance clients. High potential and high performance clients are likely to bring their own challenge to the coaching session. Such clients are likely to be perfectionists and workaholics. The coach often

assists high potential and high performance clients in finding ways by which to build support that matches the challenge. This often means encouraging these clients to establish better work/life balance, to recognize the potential for “burn out,” and to recognize the need for more external support (doing more delegating, seeking out expert advice from other people, learning how to open up regarding their own personal vulnerabilities). While the troubled employee/client is likely to avoid challenges (yet must take on the challenge of developmental improvement), the high potential and high performance clients are likely to overlook the support that they need to sustain their exceptional or potentially exceptional work. The proclivity towards ignoring the need for support makes the concept of support an “alienated need” that the coach can help these clients identify and embrace as a move in service of their own development. Lack of support or the unwillingness to accept support has been a factor in derailment for high potential and high performance clients. A skillful executive coach can normalize this beneficial need for the high potential and high performance client.

Information, Intentions, and Ideas

A second fundamental perspective concerns the domains in which coaching takes place. At times, the coach and client must focus on issues related to the domain of information. These are the moments when the coach and client become “realistic”—seeking to gain a clear understanding and appreciation of the current situation in which the client finds herself. At other times, the coach and client must operate in the domain of intentions. In this domain, the coach and client become “idealistic”—seeking to gain a clear understanding and appreciation of the situation in which the client would like to find herself. What are the outcomes, the aspirations, the purposes of the client’s work? The third domain is that of ideas—what actions should be taken to move from the current situation (“real” state) to the desired situation (“ideal” state)? An effective coaching engagement is one in which the coach and client move through all three of these domains: information (current situation), intentions (ideal situation), and ideas (strategies for moving from the current to the ideal). We will propose that high potential and high performance clients work in a somewhat different manner than other coaching clients with regard to these three domains.

Organizational coaches will often find that their high potential and high performance clients like to linger in the domains of intentions and ideas. These clients are often high-stake dreamers who readily translate their dreams (domain of intentions) into action (domain of ideas). Conversely, troubled clients are likely to be stuck in the domain of information. They are struggling to understand and appreciate the situation in which they now find themselves or to accept the reality of their troubling conditions. This, in turn, means that the coaching of high potential and high performance clients may require that the coach encourages the client to focus on the third domain—information. High potential and high performance clients are often not very realistic. They are workaholics in part because they ignore or seek to overcome the limitations inherent in their current situation. Conversely, the troubled employee must move beyond the domain of information by identifying personal aspirations and the action steps necessary to move out of the current situation. These troubled employees need a *motivating vision* and *energizing action plan*, whereas the high potential and high performance clients already have enough motivation and enough energy. They need to find a way in which this motivation and energy can be sustained – and

this usually requires greater attention to the reality of their current situation and the need to better sustain themselves in concrete ways.

Puzzles, Problems, and Mysteries

A third fundamental perspective concerns the nature of the issues being addressed. In some instances, the coaching engagement focuses on issues that can be labeled “puzzles.” These issues are uni-dimensional, with clear outcomes. Clients will typically discover that they have considerable control over the context in which the issue exists (an internal locus of control), and the primary role of the coach is to assist in building a tactical solution to this puzzle.

A second kind of issue can be labeled a “problem.” These coaching issues are “messy.” They are multi-dimensional and embrace outcomes that may be contradictory. There are times when clients need to be assisted in harnessing their capacity to hold conflicting possibilities.

“Mysteries” comprise a third kind of coaching issue. Coaching issues that are filled with mystery will inevitably be profound and encompass many large, elusive, and unmeasurable challenges. A coaching mystery is usually outside the control of the client (external locus of control). The coach can assist clients by helping them recognize that the issue is in fact a mystery (and not either a puzzle or a problem), and that it is to be appreciated but not necessarily addressed in any direct manner. Rather than having a solution, a mystery, paradoxically, is an enigma to be managed. Perspective, tolerance, and acceptance of paradox are part of managing the enigma.

As in the case of the other two fundamental perspectives, high potential and high performance clients are likely to differ in some important ways from the troubled employees/clients. First, high potential and high performance clients are likely to frame all coaching issues as puzzles and assume that they ultimately have control of the issue being addressed (a strong internal locus of control). The coach plays an important role by helping the client recognize that many of the issues being faced are problems (or even mysteries), not puzzles. Organizational problems and mysteries are not readily solved; therefore, patience and tolerance are required (characteristics which are not always found among high potential and high performance clients). Furthermore, it is not even clear when the issue has been successfully addressed if it is a problem or a mystery. High potential and high performance clients like to know that they have been successful—that is part of the reason they work so hard. As a result, they are readily frustrated when facing issues that have no simple solutions or readily measurable results. In addition, these clients must acknowledge that many of the issues they are bringing to the coaching session require the assistance of other people. They can’t solve these problems and mysteries by individually working harder, smarter, or with more commitment. Collaboration and trade-offs are often required if the coaching issue is an organizational problem; acceptance and patience may be required if the coaching issue is a mystery. A supportive coach can serve an invaluable role in helping the high potential and high performance client face these major personal challenges of collaboration and trade-off, acceptance and patience.

The Terrain of Possibilities for HPOTs and HPERs

Client Terrain of Possibilities: HPOT & HPER					
	Puzzles, Problems, Mysteries	Challenges	Support	Domains	Alignment
Coach's Commitment to Facilitate	Puzzles: The belief that there is a "right" answer which requires focused effort to find	*Calls for innovation, flexibility, adaptability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity for management of uncertainty and anxiety 	Lingering in the domains of information (current state) and intentions (desired state), not just the domain of ideas (how to move from current to desired state)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizational Values & Ethics Vision & Purpose Personal & Professional Balance
	Problems: Solutions to problems generate further problem(s). Need for systemic, multi problem-solution focus in turbulence and high change	*Capacity and skill in designing and implementing experiments (The Unit of Work structure)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening resilience Learning from failure 		
	Mysteries: Uncertainty in relation to unknown challenge and lack of clarity – require a stance of optimism, groundedness, and existential readiness	* Locus of control shifts across puzzles, problems, mysteries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of emotional intelligence work to generate client-based solutions 		

Most importantly, problems often involve dilemmas, paradoxes, and polarities. By being highly successful in resolving one aspect of a problem, the high potential or high performance client may be unsuccessful in resolving another aspect, or may actually create a new problem as a result of success. High potential clients might create conditions in which unrealistic expectations are created about their ability to perform a specific task—thus leading to failure and a future under-estimation of the high potential's abilities (or motivation). Similarly, other employees may grow too dependent on the high performance client, hence making the high performer "indispensable" and the organization more vulnerable. There are often polarities with regard to control when a client is faced with a problem (rather than a puzzle). The client typically has control over part of the context but not all of it (a combination of internal and external locus of control). The coach can help this client discern the areas in which she does and does not have control, and help the client build a strategic solution to the problem. The coach therefore needs to be skilled in assisting the client to work adaptively with strengths and limitations in shaping experimental strategies towards implementation. In assisting the new learning strategies, coaches work as "travel agents" in guiding their clients towards imagining new terrains and then acting in new ways, using overused and underused behaviors in novel ways that help the clients arrive at their desired destination. The coach is charged with teaching adaptability, innovation, and resilience.

Distinctive Strategies When Coaching High Potentials or High Performers

While these fundamental strategies must be applied when working with any coaching client, we believe several specific strategies to be distinctively important when working with high potential and high performance clients. These specific strategies have to do with flexibility, results, alignment, and experimentation.

Flexibility

While organizational coaches must always be flexible in their work with colleagues, the challenge of flexibility is particularly important when working with high potential and high performance clients. As we noted above, these two kinds of coaching clients are inclined to assume an internal locus of control. They tend to “take charge,” even when interacting with their coach. This means that the coach must move with the client. These clients set the agenda and shift from session to session with respect to the issues they want to address and the way in which they want to work with their coach. This also means that a coach must often encourage these clients to find their own solution to the issue being addressed. While all coaching should focus on client-generated solutions, this orientation is particularly important when working with the high potential and high performance client. The coach must therefore be flexible and responsive with regard not only to setting agendas and to a client’s identification of and definition of coaching issues, but also to the solutions being generated by the client in response to these coaching issues.

This flexibility and responsiveness comes with a caveat. On occasion, a coach must take a firm stance or at least a persuasive attitude with regard to the client’s issues and ways of working in the coaching relationship. As we noted, high potential and high performance clients are inclined to frame their coaching issues as puzzles rather than as either problems or mysteries. They want to believe in their own ability to resolve the issue using their own expertise and energy. The coach must, at times, challenge the client to recognize the complexity of the issue being faced—such that it will only be successfully addressed with the assistance and support of other people—because the client is unaware of the need for more information and of the creative benefit of dialogue. In conjunction with an internal locus of control (so familiar to these clients), an external locus of control must also be recognized if the coaching problem or mystery is to be confronted in a realistic manner. This recognition may, in turn, mean that the coach encourages the client to move into the domain of information (realism) when seeking to more fully understand and appreciate the nature of the problem or mystery faced. Thus, flexibility on the part of the coach must at times be tempered with a dose of coaching persistence and confrontation.

Results

We have mentioned that high potential and high performance clients often dwell in the domain of intentions as well as the domain of ideas. This preference often translates into a focus on results. They want to know that they are doing a good job; they want to be able to measure or at least see tangible evidence of their productivity. High performance clients are accustomed to delivering results and to being rewarded (tangibly and intangibly). They are also inclined to savor successful performance for a very short period of time—they soon ask, “What’s next?” An organizational coach might wish to slow down this process and encourage clients to reflect on the reasons for success (the domains of information and ideas), as well as the reason why their performance is being identified as a success by both themselves and the organization (the domain of intentions). Often it is particularly challenging when high performance clients are encouraged to stop for a minute to reflect on what has just occurred. They would rather push forward than look backwards. Under these conditions, the challenge offered by the coach must be matched by support. The coach needs to reassure the client that reflection will benefit future performance and help avoid burn-out.

The high potentials are probably already performing above expectations and are ready to excel in their current job or in a new job. An organizational coach who works with high potential clients must be prepared to focus frequently on the domains of intention and ideas, and on the ways in which intentions are realized through the translation of ideas into actions. As in the case of high performance clients, the high potential clients might be encouraged by their coach to pause for a moment to reflect on the reasons why they are considered to be above-expectation performers. This challenge must be balanced with support from the coach. High potential employees are often worried that they can't meet the expectations—they might be “found out” and be a disappointment to people they wish to impress. The coach can be supportive by being empathetic, and by assuring these clients that it is common for high potential employees to be concerned about their future performance. In coaching a high potential, the coach must be able to assist this high potential client in facing uncertainty with imagination and best practices.

Sometimes, an organizational coach must be ready to assist in the identification or definition of results. The client can benefit greatly from articulate statements from the coach regarding what successful results look like in a specific organizational context. Results are congruent with the culture of the organization and with the tactical or strategic plans of the organization. At other times, the organizational coach asks the provocative questions that challenges the client to be more thoughtful about the results she wishes to achieve or is already achieving: “How will you know that you have been successful?” “How will other members of this organization interpret the outcomes of your work?” “What are the short-term and the long-term implications of your successful performance in this organization?” These provocative questions often lead the client and coach into the domain of information: “What exactly are the expectations of this organization regarding your performance?” For the high potential client, the more specific question might be: “Why do you think you have been identified as a high potential employee?” A similar question can be asked of the high performance client: “Why do you think you have been identified as a high performing employee?” In both cases, the answer to this question may say something about the values of the organization and about the alignment between these organizational values and those held by the client.

Alignment

While a high potential or high performance client may dwell and want to work extensively in the domains of intentions and ideas, they are not necessarily skillful or successful in addressing all of the issues that reside in these domains. The challenges of work/life balance and workaholism are often wrapped up in these clients' inability or unwillingness to identify all of the intentions (vision, values, and purposes) that are operating in their life. To what extent are the intentions embedded in their work life aligned with the intentions embedded in their personal life? When they spend that extra four hours at the office or bring two hours of work home with them every night, are they damaging their family life? What about devoting time to their own restoration? As Roger Rosenblatt has noted, the appointment we are most likely to cancel is the appointment we have made with ourselves (healthy exercise, an unhurried lunch, an evening spent with a novel).

There are also the alignment issues associated with ethics and organizational values. Are there times during the coaching session when the coach and client should explore the extent to which the client's exceptional or potentially exceptional performance is misaligned with specific organizational values or with fundamental ethics? Do the ends always justify the means? Are the client's personal values aligned with formal organizational values or with the unacknowledged values that "really" operate in the organization? While being very busy and very successful (or potentially very successful), has the client spent sufficient time reflecting on these deeper levels of the intentional domain? Is it appropriate for the organizational coach to challenge the client regarding these alignment issues? While employees who are "in trouble" may try to deflect the challenges they face by focusing on the misalignment between their own values and aspirations and those of the organization, the high potential and high performance clients are more likely to ignore this misalignment, having focused their attention and energy on getting the work done rather than on the reasons why their work is of value to themselves and their organization.

Experimentation

Both high potential and high performance employees are often risk-takers. They like to leap over the cliff, and are confident about their own ability to fly when leaping over that cliff. They set the challenges high and find "flow" by progressively moving the bar up. This also means that these clients sometimes take the wrong risk and not only crash themselves, but also bring other employees down with them. Alternatively, they may often expect their co-workers to be risk-takers or make great demands on other employees in order to tackle unrealistic goals. As we already mentioned, the high potentials and high performers often do not pay sufficient attention to the domain of information—and when they leap off the cliff, they do so without knowing how far they will fall or the size of their parachute (or even if they have a parachute!).

Under these conditions, the coach can be very helpful by encouraging and guiding the client in the identification of and strategic planning for a responsible and reasonable risk. This often means that the coach helps the client set up one or more possibilities for "experiments"—pilot testing a new idea, running demonstration projects, creating a "sanctuary" in which new ideas can be moved to action in a manner that allows for "safe risks" and encourages organizational learning (Senge, 1990; Argyris & Schon, 1978). The coach might ask: "Where can you safely test out this idea?" or "What are some ways in which you can learn much more about the feasibility/practicality of this idea?"

The safe space in a coaching encounter is the ideal "incubator" for these learning experiments—events that can produce new possibilities. Contemporary Gestalt theory and practice has developed the "Unit of Work" (UOW), a process structure for managing the "safe emergency" that is needed in any learning experiment. Such experiments are experienced as the "pragmatics of magic" (Siminovitch & Van Eron, 2006). The carefully constructed four-part structure of the UOW assists in the safe exploration of risky possibilities. The coach uses this orderly and artfully facilitated structure to collaboratively guide a client towards new possibilities by:

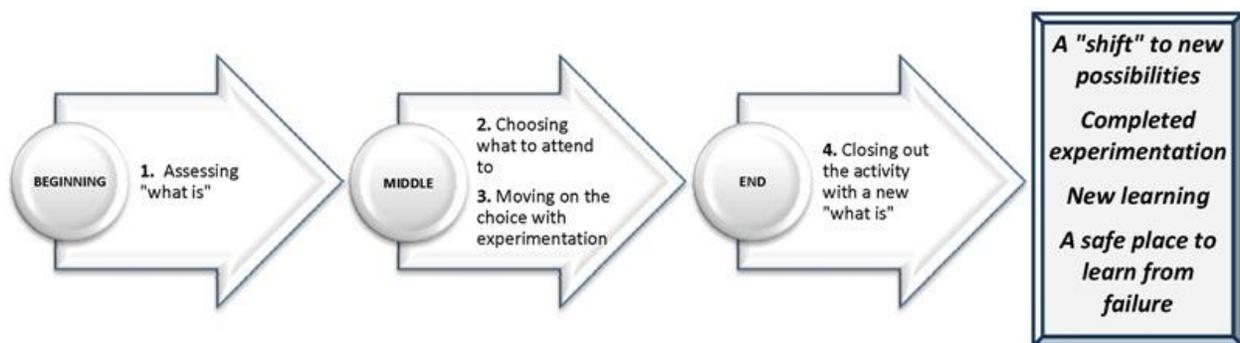
- (1) Engaging the client in a determination and assessment of the current picture or issue: the "what is"

- (2) Collaboratively assisting the client in choosing what to attend to, while honoring resistance patterns (an old behavior that no longer serves, the learning from failure, or a desired new but “risky” possibility)
- (3) Assisting and guiding the client’s engagement in a small experiment conducted in relation to what has been chosen for attention, while simultaneously exploring the habitual obstacles to new possibilities
- (4) Articulating the new insights gained in order to identify new possibilities that have emerged from this short exploration: the “new what is”

When completed, a Unit of Work enables: “a clear idea of what has been done, of what has not been done, and/or of what the system is not ready to deal with at that time” (Nevis, 1987, pp. 44-45). A UOW needs to be carefully and scrupulously defined and designed so as “to achieve closure around problem areas and unfinished business” (p. 91). However, surprise is always a possibility. A model of the UOW illustrates its process (step-by-step) orientation and indicates its anticipation and acceptance of unexpected dynamics in its procedural enactment.

The Structure of Experimentation: The Unit of Work Model

Dorothy Siminovitch, as adapted from original work at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland



Failure creates significant emotion, a factor which has long been recognized as important for new learning. The UOW structure is a useful process to safely explore learning derived from failure experiences. Rapaille (2006) has elaborated on the high performance benefits of learning from failure, particularly when a good method is provided to do so. The “safe emergency” tension which the coach facilitates in the UOW structure offers an excellent modality for significant exploration. The coaching relationship is one of the safe containers for the high potential/high performance client within which to examine the failures en route to successful innovation.

Conclusions: The Authentic Engagement

In our ongoing conversations during our three-day symposium about the art and science of providing coaching services to high potential and high performance clients, we frequently returned to the essential character of the coaching engagement, particularly within an organizational context. The term “authentic” was inevitably part of all these conversations, and was commonly associated with the term

“trustworthiness.” It seems that these two terms, and the dynamics underlying them, are often intertwined. We concluded that high potential and high performance clients are likely to be very bright with regard to interpersonal relationships. These clients are highly resonant to important details that underlie success. They can readily discern inauthentic behavior, and expect the people with whom they work and interact to be honest and straight-forward. This expectation usually means that authenticity has to be steadily exhibited even while both parties to the interaction are “on the move.” A spontaneous authenticity is required—a sense of being “present” in the moment and conjuring the invisible power brought by trust to the relationship. The capacity to create, evoke, and re-create trust is embedded in the experience of authenticity.

Clearly, there is no playbook or formula that can tell us how to *be* “authentic” or “present” in relationship with our client. Indeed, any preplanned or formulaic responses would, by definition, be inauthentic. Our own sense is that the risk-taking exhibited by high potentials and high performers should also be embraced by the coach, especially in those moments when feedback affords an opportunity for learning and development. More than is the case with other coaching clients, the work with these two challenging client groups requires the application of new approaches to coaching and an open and ongoing dialogue regarding the nature and purpose of the coaching engagement (what is often called the “meta-conversation” that occurs in effective organizational coaching). High potential and high performance clients appreciate the willingness of their coach to be candid about the challenges being faced in their mutual engagement, and are likely, in turn, to be candid themselves in talking about their hopes and concerns. High potential clients are best served by understanding what qualities and factors identify them as having “high potential.” High performance clients benefit from understanding what qualities and factors have brought them recognition as high performers, as well as what new development possibilities can serve to keep them engaged rather than complacent in the deployment of overused strengths. With the assistance of their coach, both client populations can identify and/or design safe environments in which experimentation is supported. Both the high potential and the high performance client benefit from the artful mixture of challenge and support offered by the coach, such that organizational derailment is minimized. Both types of organizational clients benefit from opportunities inherent in an appreciative coaching process.

The effective and successful coach embodies the concept of *shugyo*, what Strozzi-Heckler (2007) has identified as the achievement of a level of maturity that generates positive emotional states and manages dissonance. In embracing and realizing this embodied self-cultivation, the coach activates a resonance with the client that engenders vibrant and exhilarating learning possibilities. The striving for *shugyo* is revealed by ongoing practices for self-mastery—practices which serve commitments beyond one’s self. We posit that those who are identified as high potential and high performance clients are in fact striving for *shugyo*. They wish to develop their own mastery for the sake of the larger calling that their organization is working to serve. The coach and client who engage in the exhilarating demands of high potential and high performance coaching will need to address the substance and relevance of *courage* to learning, success, and possibility. Learning and development herald change, and change evokes strong resistance. The courage to learn must be met by coaches who are striving to bring out greatness in their clients, and who can support the intensity of their clients’ learning experiences. To be

truly authentic, challenging, and supportive with each other in the coaching engagement requires risk, and risk can only be taken where and when courage is available.

Organizational coaching is complex. It requires a corresponding complex “requisite variety” from the coach—multiple facets of being human and of being effective in the practice of one’s skills. The perception of possibility that the coaching engagement allows serves to enhance commitment and investment from the high potential and high performance client. The work of the coach is to guide this high potential or high performance client through the terrain of possibilities. In such a setting, the high potential of the coaching engagement is likely to evolve into high performance for both the coach and client, where the successes that come to the client ultimately affect the success of the organization.

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