

# **Development of Coaches: I. Tactics and Strategies**

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This report is the first in a series that will convey and interpret results from two version of a questionnaire that was initially prepared by the Development of Coaches Research Collaborative in cooperation with the Collaborative Research Network of the Society for Psychotherapy Research. The initial survey was completed in 2009 by 153 coaches from throughout the world. The second version, distributed in 2015, was based on the first (with only minor editing changes) by the Library of Professional Coaching in cooperation with ITLCInsights. Fifty eight coaches provided responses to the second questionnaire -- yielding a total of 211 responses to the two surveys. The time interval between the two surveys was six years, enabling us to get a preliminary sense of possible changes in coaching attitudes over this period of time, as well as a sense of stability (low levels of difference in mean scores and variance) in the attitudes of professional coaches regarding their own development.

Unlike most coaching surveys, the two surveys conducted in 2009 and 2015 were directed toward those actually doing the coaching, rather than the users of coaching services. Furthermore, these surveys were completed by a widely ranging groups of coaches -- coming from several different countries and from several different coaching schools and perspectives, as well as ranging widely in age and years of experience in providing coaching services. While many surveys of practitioners in a specific field are funded and sponsored by organizations with a particular stake in the outcomes (such as surveys in medicine and psychotherapy that are funded by pharmaceutical companies) or are conducted by faculty in high prestige, research-oriented universities (who tend to seek responses from others of similar status), these two surveys are being conducted by sponsors (the Library of Professional Coaching and ITLCInsights) who have no specific stake in the outcomes, and are being distributed to practitioners at many levels of practice and status. These surveys are truly "neutral" and "democratizing."

## **Methods**

Both versions of the Development of Coaches questionnaire are based on one devised by the Collaborative Research Network of the Society for Psychotherapy Research in their international study of development among professional psychotherapists described by Orlinsky and Rønnestad in *How Psychotherapists Develop* (Orlinsky & Rønnestad (2005). Both of the coaching studies include questions that parallel those used in the Society's Development of Psychotherapists Common Core Questionnaire. This enables us not only to study varied aspects of coaches' development, but also compare responses of coaches to these made by psychotherapists. Many questions have been posed over the past twenty years concerning the similarities and differences between professional coaching and psychotherapy. The data being gathered in these two surveys will provide some of the first (and preliminary) answers regarding this comparison.

### **Modification of Development of Psychotherapists Survey**

In adapting the questionnaire, members of the Development of Coaches Research Collaborative drew on their own experiences as coaches to ask questions that they hoped would seem meaningful and relevant to those responding to the questionnaire. Most of the questions could be answered quickly by checking the response alternatives that most closely reflected the respondent's own experience.

### **Instructions to the Respondents**

In the case of both surveys, respondents were asked to answer all of the questions and were provided with the following framework:

The complete set of responses provides us with a fuller understanding of your own work and the context in which you work. You may find these questions offer a useful opportunity to reflect on your own coaching career. If any seem difficult to answer exactly, give your best estimate and continue. To ensure confidentiality, the

questionnaire is completed anonymously. Information you provide will be used only for research purposes.

Designers of the original survey proposed that the respondents would benefit in two ways. These two benefits made this truly a collaborative effort between those who designed the questionnaire and those who completing it. Following is a statement offered to those considering completion of the second survey:

You can sign up to receive the report findings from this study when they become available. . . These reports will also be made available at no charge to the general coaching public through the Library of Professional coaching. The reports will identify which modes of development have been found to be the most effective. . . . [Furthermore, results from this survey may] increase the credibility of the coaching profession. As Francine Campone, one of the creators and initiators of the original survey has indicated, a culture of research and evidence needs to be created in the field of professional coaching. The more we learn from one another about professional coaching practices, the more collectively knowledgeable we will become. The more knowledgeable we become, the greater the opportunity for building evidence-based coaching strategies and tools. The better the strategies and tools the more effective we will be as coaching professionals. The more effective we become as a profession, the greater the demand will be for our services.

As noted at the end of this appeal to prospective respondents, the benefits are potentially widespread with regard to the credibility of coaching when a research and evidence-based culture is created: "A rising tide lifts all ships".

## **Results**

Two of the founders of the original project, Francine Campone and Deepa Awal, reported on results from one qualitative question in the first questionnaire. This report is contained in their 2012 article published in *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice* (Campone and Awal, 1012). We will reference the findings from their report in our own

discussion in this article and future articles regarding the results we obtained from analysis of the responses to other questions in the first study as well as results we obtained from analysis of all responses to the second study.

While there were 76 questions in each of the coaching surveys, we will concentrate in this first study on responses to only two of the questions (questions #29 and #31 in the first survey and questions #28 and #30 in second survey):

*Question One: Since you began formally working as a coach (i.e. identifying what you do as coaching):*

- a. How much have you changed overall as a coach?*
- b. How much do you regard this as progress or improvement?*
- c. How much do you regard this as a decline or impairment?*
- d. How much have you succeeded in overcoming any part limitations in your coaching skill and knowledge?*
- e. How much have you realized your potential as a coach?*

*Question Two: Overall at the PRESENT time:*

- a. How effective are you at co-creating the working partnership with clients?*
- b. How authentically personal do you feel while working with clients?*
- c. How good is your general theoretical understanding of coaching?*
- d. How empathetic are you in relating to clients with whom you have relatively little in common?*
- e. How effective are you in communicating your understanding and concern to your clients?*
- f. How much mastery do you feel you have of the techniques and strategies involved in practicing coaching?*
- g. How well do you understand what happens moment by moment during coaching sessions?*
- h. How effective are you at stimulating client insight?*
- i. How much precision, subtlety and finesse have you attained in your coaching work?*
- j. How confident do you feel in your role as a coach?*

Respondents were asked to answer each of the items under each of these two questions using a five -point rating scale:

0 = *Not at all*

1 = *Slightly*

2 = *Somewhat*

3 = *Moderately*

4 = *Much*

5 = *Very Much*

In future reports we will provide results from the other 74 questions, as well as offer more detailed analyses about relationships between responses to the two questions on which we focus in this article and the other questions -- including the potential differences in responses between various demographic groups and correlations between responses to various questions. We will also offer more advanced statistical analyses (multiple regression and factor) as we seek to provide a more comprehensive and systemic portrait of the respondents' sense of their own development as coaches.

In this first report we will offer only basic descriptive statistics (mean and variance) for all of the statements associated with each of these two questions. The mean scores will give us an initial impression regarding the extent to which respondents rated themselves low or high on each item, while the variance scores will give us an initial impression of the extent to which respondents tend to agree with one another in their rating of each item.

### **Question One: Since you began formally working as a coach**

We begin by providing a summary of the responses to this initial question about the extent to which coaches feel that they have changed in their work as a person who does "coaching."

First, a table for the first study with mean scores and variance for each item:

**Table One: Study One: Since you began formally working as a coach . . .**

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Variance</b>
How much have you changed overall as a coach?	4.01	0.90

How much do you regard this as progress or improvement?	4.37	0.83
How much do you regard this as a decline or impairment?	0.24	0.43
How much have you succeeded in overcoming any past limitations in your coaching skills and knowledge?	3.88	0.80
How much have you realized your potential as a coach?	3.83	1.07

Second, we present the means and variance scores for the same question as it was posed in the second survey -- six years later.

**Table Two: Study Two: Since you began formally working as a coach . . .**

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Variance</b>
How much have you changed overall as a coach?	4.10	0.83
How much do you regard this as progress or improvement?	4.46	0.71
How much do you regard this as a decline or impairment?	0.07	0.07
How much have you succeeded in overcoming any past limitations in your coaching skills and knowledge?	3.90	1.04

How much have you realized your potential as a coach?	3.71	1.47
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Several approaches can be taken as we attempt to make sense of these two set of means and variances. One approach, with regard to the means, is to take these mean (average) scores at "face-value." If a respondent indicates that her level of agreement with a specific statement is "Much" or "Very Much", then we should accept this level of agreement for this respondent and not attempt to manipulate this assessment in some manner. Therefore, as we discuss the results of these first two surveys, we will first consider these mean scores as accurate representations of the respondents' self-perceptions of their own personal development and work as professional coaches.

We also can make a legitimate claim that the mean scores need to be interpreted in a comparative manner. It is not simply a matter of reporting on the mean scores recorded for this question. There are several ways in which we must be cautious in accepting the mean scores for this question (and many of the other questions in these two surveys). Specifically, there are several so-called "response set" factors that can legitimately be considered when seeking to make sense of the scores recorded for this question.

Clearly, there is a strong judgmental factor ("social desirability") to be assigned to this question. It is better to be successful than unsuccessful when engaging in coaching and to have reached your potential rather than to have not begun to realize your potential. In a long questionnaire such as this one, response fatigue is also likely to settle in by question 27 or 28, and respondents are often likely to simply click on one end of the response spectrum (usually the positive end). This acquiescence response set can be particularly prevalent when the survey requires no more than clicking of the mouse on a specific response bullet.

Given these concerns, it is legitimate to provide a comparative analysis--looking at means in terms of not just their absolute value, but also their value in comparison with

the mean scores on other items listed within a specific question. We will approach the mean scores for this first question from both the absolute and comparative perspectives.

There is not as much of a problem in making sense of the variance scores. In many ways, this is most interesting descriptive statistic when considering the meaning of scores in a questionnaire such as this one--which was completed by a diverse set of respondents. The variance scores tell you about the extent to which respondents tend to agree with one another. A low variance scores indicates that there is a high level of agreement, whereas a high variance score indicates low levels of agreement (and potential controversy). Some caution does have to be engaged when interpreting variance scores, for an item that pulls for social desirability or acquiescence tends to "squish" everyone at one end of the scale: there is not a higher (or lower) point on the scale when respondents are making their choice.

Given these preliminary considerations, alternative approaches, and cautionary notes, we present the mean scores and variances in a hierarchical manner--from high to low. We turn first to the mean scores for the first survey, listing the means from highest to lowest:

How much do you regard this as progress or improvement? (mean = 4.37)

How much have you changed (mean = 4.01)

How much have you succeeded in overcoming any past limitations in your coaching skills and knowledge? (mean = 3.88)

How much have you realized your potential as a coach? (mean = 3.83)

How much do you regard this as a decline or impairment? (mean = 0.43)

We now list the means in order of magnitude for this question from the second survey:

How much do you regard this as progress or improvement? (mean = 4.46)

How much have you changed (mean = 4.10)

How much have you succeeded in overcoming any past limitations in your coaching skills and knowledge? (mean = 3.90)

How much have you realized your potential as a coach? (mean = 3.71)

How much do you regard this as a decline or impairment? (mean = 0.07)

The variance scores for the items on question one will provide us with some idea about the level of agreement among the respondents to both surveys. We begin with the variance scores for the first survey from highest (least agreement) to lowest (most agreement):

How much have you realized your potential as a coach? (variance = 1.07)

How much have you changed (variance = 0.90)

How much do you regard this as progress or improvement? (variance = 0.83)

How much have you succeeded in overcoming any past limitations in your coaching skills and knowledge? (variance = 0.80)

How much do you regard this as a decline or impairment? (variance = 0.43)

The second set of variance scores comes from the Study Two responses to our first question. They are once again listed from highest variance to lowest:

How much have you realized your potential as a coach? (variance = 1.47)

How much have you succeeded in overcoming any past limitations in your coaching skills and knowledge? (variance = 1.04)

How much have you changed (variance = 0.83)

How much do you regard this as progress or improvement? (variance = 0.71)

How much do you regard this as a decline or impairment? (variance = 0.07)

### **Question Two: Overall at the PRESENT time**

We turn now to reporting on the means and variance scores for responses to the second question we focus on in this initial article. The means and variance scores for the first group of respondents are provided in Table Three.

**Table Three: Study One: Overall at the PRESENT time . . .**

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	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Variance</b>
How effective are you at co-creating the working partnership with clients?	4.34	0.52
How authentically personal do you feel while working with clients?	4.52	0.38
How good is your general theoretical understanding of coaching?	4.21	0.67
How empathetic are you in relating to clients with whom you have relativity little in common?	4.33	0.56
How effective are you in communicating your understanding and concern to your clients?	4.44	0.45
How much mastery do you feel you have of the techniques and strategies involved in practicing coaching?	3.92	0.69
How well do you understand what happens moment by moment during coaching sessions?	4.09	0.65
How effective are you at stimulating client insight?	4.32	0.51
How much precision, subtlety and finesse have you attained in your coaching work?	3.88	0.81

How confident do you feel in your role as a coach?	4.25	0.57
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Our fourth table contains the means and variance scores for respondents to our second survey.

**Table Four: Study Two: Overall at the PRESENT time . . .**

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Variance</b>
How effective are you at co-creating the working partnership with clients?	4.36	0.59
How authentically personal do you feel while working with clients?	4.59	0.49
How good is your general theoretical understanding of coaching?	4.41	0.46
How empathetic are you in relating to clients with whom you have relativity little in common?	4.40	0.70
How effective are you in communicating your understanding and concern to your clients?	4.36	0.59
How much mastery do you feel you have of the techniques and strategies involved in practicing coaching?	4.12	0.60

How well do you understand what happens moment by moment during coaching sessions?	4.12	1.02
How effective are you at stimulating client insight?	4.28	0.62
How much precision, subtlety and finesse have you attained in your coaching work?	4.20	0.76
How confident do you feel in your role as a coach?	4.26	0.80

The same set of considerations will be taken into account when attempting to make sense of mean scores and variance scores for this second question. The absolute value associated with each of the mean scores must be considered and we will do so when discussing the results from this second question. It is also important for us to compare the mean and variance scores, given the same potential response set distortions in the data derived from responses to this second question. Given these response set concerns, we offer the following listing of mean scores (from high to low) for this second question from our Study One respondents:

- How authentically personal do you feel while working with clients? (mean = 4.52)
- How effective are you in communicating your understanding and concern to your clients? (mean = 4.44)
- How effective are you at co-creating the working partnership with clients? (mean = 4.34)
- How empathetic are you in relating to clients with whom you have relativity little in common? (mean=4.33)
- How effective are you at stimulating client insight? (mean = 4.32)
- How confident do you feel in your role as a coach? (mean = 4.25)
- How good is your general theoretical understanding of coaching? (mean = 4.21)
- How well do you understand what happens moment by moment during coaching sessions? (mean = 4.09)

How much mastery do you feel you have of the techniques and strategies involved in practicing coaching?  
{mean = 3.92}

How much precision, subtlety and finesse have you attained in your coaching work? (mean = 3.88)

We turn now to the mean scores (listed from high to low) for the Second Study:

How authentically personal do you feel while working with clients? (mean = 4.59)

How good is your general theoretical understanding of coaching? (mean = 4.41)

How empathetic are you in relating to clients with whom you have relatively little in common?  
(mean=4.40)

How effective are you in communicating your understanding and concern to your clients? (mean = 4.36)

How effective are you at co-creating the working partnership with clients? (mean = 4.36)

How effective are you at stimulating client insight? (mean = 4.28)

How confident do you feel in your role as a coach? (mean = 4.26)

How much precision, subtlety and finesse have you attained in your coaching work? (mean = 4.20)

How well do you understand what happens moment by moment during coaching sessions? (mean = 4.12)

How much mastery do you feel you have of the techniques and strategies involved in practicing coaching?  
{mean = 4.12}

The final set of scores we provide are variance scores for this second survey question. We begin with the variance scores for the first survey listed from high (least agreement) to low (most agreement):

How much precision, subtlety and finesse have you attained in your coaching work? (variance = 0.81)

How much mastery do you feel you have of the techniques and strategies involved in practicing coaching?  
(variance = 0.69)

How good is your general theoretical understanding of coaching? (variance = 0.67)

How well do you understand what happens moment by moment during coaching sessions? (variance = 0.65)

How confident do you feel in your role as a coach? (variance = 0.57)

How empathetic are you in relating to clients with whom you have relatively little in common? (variance = 0.56)

How effective are you at co-creating the working partnership with clients? (variance = 0.52)

How effective are you at stimulating client insight? (variance = 0.51)

How effective are you in communicating your understanding and concern to your clients? (variance = 0.45)

How authentically personal do you feel while working with clients? (variance = 0.38)

We have similarly listed the variance scores for items in the Second Survey from high scores (least agreement) to low scores (most agreement):

How well do you understand what happens moment by moment during coaching sessions? (variance = 1.02)

How confident do you feel in your role as a coach? (variance = 0.80)

How much precision, subtlety and finesse have you attained in your coaching work? (variance = 0.76)

How empathetic are you in relating to clients with whom you have relatively little in common? (variance = 0.70)

How effective are you at stimulating client insight? (variance = 0.62)

How much mastery do you feel you have of the techniques and strategies involved in practicing coaching? (variance = 0.60)

How effective are you in communicating your understanding and concern to your clients? (variance = 0.59)

How effective are you at co-creating the working partnership with clients? (variance = 0.59)

How authentically personal do you feel while working with clients? (variance = 0.49)

How good is your general theoretical understanding of coaching? (variance = 0.46)

## **Comparisons Between Two Studies**

**Table Five: Study One and Two**

**Question One: Since you began formally working as a coach . . .**

	<b>Study One Mean</b>	<b>Study One Mean (Ranking)</b>	<b>Study One Variance</b>	<b>Study One Variance (Ranking)</b>	<b>Study Two Mean</b>	<b>Study Two Mean (Ranking)</b>	<b>Study Two Variance</b>	<b>Study Two Variance (Ranking)</b>
How much have you changed overall as a coach?	4.01	2	0.90	2	4.10	2	0.83	3
How much do you regard this as progress or improvement?	4.37	1	0.83	3	4.46	1	0.71	4
How much do you regard this as a decline or impairment?	0.24	5	0.43	5	0.07	5	0.07	5
How much have you succeeded in overcoming any past limitations in your coaching	3.88	3	0.80	4	3.90	3	1.04	2

skills and knowledge?								
How much have you realized your potential as a coach?	<b>3.83</b>	4	1.07	1	3.71	4	<b>1.47</b>	1

**Table Six: Study One and Two**

**Question Two: Overall at the PRESENT time . . .**

	<b>Study One Mean</b>	<b>Study One Mean (Ranking)</b>	<b>Study One Variance</b>	<b>Study One Variance (Ranking)</b>	<b>Study Two Mean</b>	<b>Student Two Mean (Ranking)</b>	<b>Study Two Variance</b>	<b>Study Two Variance (Ranking)</b>
How effective are you at co-creating the working partnership with clients?	4.34	3	0.52	7	4.36	5	0.59	8
How authentically personal do you feel while working with clients?	4.52	1	0.38	10	4.59	1	0.49	9
How good is your general theoretical	4.21	7	0.67	3	4.41	2	0.46	10

understanding of coaching?								
How empathetic are you in relating to clients with whom you have relativity little in common?	<b>4.33</b>	4	<b>0.56</b>	6	4.40	3	<b>0.70</b>	4
How effective are you in communicating your understanding and concern to your clients?	<b>4.44</b>	2	<b>0.45</b>	9	4.36	4	<b>0.59</b>	7
How much mastery do you feel you have of the techniques and strategies involved in practicing coaching?	<b>3.92</b>	9	<b>0.69</b>	2	4.12	10	<b>0.60</b>	6
How well do you understand what happens moment by moment during coaching sessions?	<b>4.09</b>	8	<b>0.65</b>	4	4.12	9	<b>1.02</b>	1

How effective are you at stimulating client insight?	4.32	5	0.51	8	4.28	6	0.62	5
How much precision, subtlety and finesse have you attained in your coaching work?	3.88	10	0.81	1	4.20	8	0.76	3
How confident do you feel in your role as a coach?	4.25	6	0.57	5	4.26	7	0.80	2

## Discussion

### Comparison Between Two Surveys

As we look at the means scores for the two studies, there is often a high level of concurrence. The means are often quite similar and the rank order of means for both studies is similar. Even the variance scores are similar with regard to both amount of variance in responses to a specific item and with regard to the rank order of the variance scores for each item.

There are a few interesting differences between the two surveys -- the most dramatic being the item referring to theoretical understanding. As we will see when turning to the most controversial and lowest ranked items -- compared to the least controversial and highest ranked items--there is a fair amount of low rating and high variance of items related to the so-called "hard" skills and knowledge of coaching (strategy, tactics, theory), whereas items related to the so-called "soft" skills and knowledge of coaching (authenticity, presence, partnership,

communication, etc.) tend to yield high scores and concurrence (low variance) among the respondents.

### **Positive Attitude**

Both surveys seem to be replete with optimism and a positive attitude. Taking the absolute scores as "reality," there seems to be an "up" to almost every self perception of the coach respondents. It is only the one negative item ("How much do you regard this [change] as a decline or impairment?") that gets a low rating -- actually a very low rating. The other items on question one were rated consistently high by respondents to both surveys:

*How much do you regard this as progress or improvement?*

*How much have you succeeded in overcoming any part limitations in your coaching skill and knowledge?*

*How much have you realized your potential as a coach?*

Change seems to be a good thing for our respondents -- even, in this instance, when related to changes occurring among the coaches themselves. They overcome limitations and have begun to realize their potential as a coach. In commenting on the qualitative responses of respondents to the first survey, Campone and Awal (2011, P. 11) note that "while most coach training and education experiences might be construed as positive, even disappointing experiences seemed to have a constructive impact." Later in their article, Campone and Awal (2011, p. 13) offer an even broader conclusion concerning the positive attitude of the survey respondents: "coaches learn from both positive and disappointing experiences. Adverse personal experiences lead to the development of empathy." In many ways these findings can be expected, given that coaches are often encouraging their clients to embrace change or at least plan for ways in which to successfully engage the changes they are confronting in their life and/or work. The coaches become cheerleaders for their client's ongoing development and overcoming of limitations.

We might introduce an even broader scope--the culture in which the coaches live. The positive attitude and optimism about change might be embedded in the social unconscious of the environment pervading the world in which the responding coaches live and work. Given that many coaches come from the United States or have been trained in programs that originated in the United States, we might find the traditional (and once sustained) optimism of America in the hearts and souls of the coaches. As noted in the title of a very American country song: "I'm

just an old chunk of coal, but I'll be a diamond soon . . . " Change will be positive, we keep saying in the United States, despite the many political and environmental woes we are facing as a country and as a world.

It is also possible that the high ratings for virtually all of the items is in some way a distortion of reality that should not be considered definitive for most coaches (or even the coaches completing these two surveys). The social desirability factor that we mentioned earlier might be in play. To what extent would one expect the respondents to "air their dirty linen" in a survey should have we distributed -- even if it is anonymous. Perhaps, at an even more fundamental level, one wonders if someone who has a poor concept of themselves as a coach would even complete a survey such as this one or would remain a coach for very long if they felt like a failure or at least not clearly a success as a coach.

It may be that many people who become coaches have already explored multiple careers in their life and are now trying out coaching. If they succeed then they stay around, if not then they move on. In a previous article (Bergquist, ) I have used the metaphor of a frontier town when describing the inhabitant of the coaching world. This world is inhabited not just by the homesteader who are in the field to stay, as well as the preachers and teachers who are persistent advocates for highly ethical and knowledgeable coaching, but also by those who are "drifters" or "prospectors" looking for a short-term lucrative venture and (as a result) tend to be attracted to fads, fashion and fantasized futures.

In a more respectful manner, we might think of the inhabitants of the coaching frontier town as women and men who are dreamers, visionaries and optimists (Everett Rodgers' innovators and early adopters). Just as they typically encourage their clients to follow their bliss and do only those things that bring short (or long) term gratification, so they themselves might be biased in the direction of dreams, visions and optimistic images of their own performance. If they were not so aligned then we might consider them to be "snake oil" salesmen in the village or at the very least hypocrites.

If nothing else, we can reflect on the kind of people who fill out surveys like this--whether it is about coaching development or one's attitudes toward a new software product or a new dishwashing detergent. Most of the respondents to surveys will tend to lean toward one extreme or the other in their responses. They often will not fill it out if they don't have strong

opinions: "I hate this new software program. Why do they keep making it difficult for me!" or "I love this new dishwashing detergent and will recommend it to all of my friends." Are the kind of people who fill out a survey about the development of coaches likely to be those who are committed to the field and want to homestead in the village and perhaps are even among those who preach or teach about the importance of coaching and the processes of personal change and development?

### **The "Soft side" of coaching**

As we noted above, the results are quite striking in terms of the respondents rating of specific items that relate to the quality of their interactions and relationships with their clients. The respondents conveyed very positive self-images regarding interpersonal connections with clients. The following items on Question Two were all rated consistently high by respondents to both surveys:

*How effective are you at co-creating the working partnership with clients?*

*How authentically personal do you feel while working with clients?*

*How empathetic are you in relating to clients with whom you have relatively little in common?*

*How effective are you in communicating your understanding and concern to your clients?*

*How effective are you at stimulating client insight?*

Given these positive responses to many of the question two items, it is not surprising that the respondents were also inclined to rate their overall performance at the high end of the response continuum when considering the final question two item:

*How confident do you feel in your role as a coach?*

The time concerns with having "little in common" might be the source of particular optimism for those concerned with the future of professional coaching. It very important that coaches are comfortable and confident when working with those with a different perspective given the increasing engagement of coaches in international work. Let's hope that the self-appraisal being made by these respondents is accurate and indicative of other coaches working with diverse client populations.

As we have already mentioned on several occasions in this report, the fundamental issue is accuracy of self-perceptions. We must take seriously the respondents sense of self-confidence,

but is this self-confidence justified--even when it comes to reporting on the soft skills and knowledge of coaching? Can these coaches objectively assess their own competence and would their clients arrive at similar conclusions regarding the quality and success of their interpersonal relationship? While these two surveys can't provide answers to these challenging questions, the results we report in this article and will report in future articles regarding results from the Development of Coaches surveys certainly bring these questions to the fore and open the door for other studies that directly address the matter of coach/client congruence.

## **Coaching Tactics**

We turn now to the so-called "hard" skills and knowledge of coaching. These competencies were highlighted in the report prepared by Campone and Awal (2011), based on the qualitative responses to the first Development of Coaches survey. Referencing the work of David Drake (2009, 2011) and Hawkins and Smith (2006), Campone and Awal noted that the survey results confirmed an emphasis placed by these other authors on the hard skills and knowledge of coaching. In concluding, their own report on the survey, Campone and Awal (2011, p. 13) suggested that: "formal coaching preparation which includes both theory and skills development can serve as the basis for informed decision-making by coaches and provides the ground for deepening professional reasoning and decision-making skills."

Our analysis of data from both the first and second survey is certainly aligned with the conclusions reached by Campone and Awal. The challenge seems to be how to make this happen and how to identify what needs to be taught and learned and how mentors and supervisors might assist in this learning. The survey results suggest that this is not a simple challenge. When it comes to the "harder" side of coaching, there is more uncertainty in the self-perceptions of coaches about their development and competence--though this uncertainty is in relative terms--the coach respondents are still quite positive about their work as coaches and believe that the changes they are undergoing are all for the best.

At the immediate, moment-to-moment level, respondents indicate that they are competent as coaches, though their ratings on this item are among the lowest (8th and 9th) on both surveys for this second question (at the PRESENT time). Furthermore, this item yielded the highest variance on the second survey and 4th highest of the first survey. So, what does it mean when a coach is asked: "How well do you understand what happens moment by moment during

coaching sessions?" We would propose that this item is calling for a self-assessment of tactical reasoning -- what sometimes is called "meta-cognition" (thinking about one's own thinking or reasoning about one's own reasoning).

This moment-to-moment processing might also relate to the concept of "fast thinking" that has been offered by the Nobel-prize winning economist Daniel Kahneman (2011). As one of the founders of the rapidly growing field known as behavioral economics, Kahneman suggests that much of the important thinking and reasoning we do every day is engaged in a manner that is very quick, deeply-embedded -- often biased. For Kahneman, it is important that we balance off our fast thinking with a process that he calls "slow thinking" (to which we turn in the next section of this discussion). It might be critical for professional coaches to be aware of their own fast-thinking, in part because they are being asked to respond quickly and with insight to their client's own thinking and because they are often in the business of helping their clients uncover their own fast thinking patterns and biases.

Before passing too quick a judgement on the respondents rating of this item, it is important to note that this item might yield high variance scores and relatively low means for several very obvious reasons. First, it is hard to understand what is happening moment by moment. This requires that we "slow think" about our "fast thinking." Are any of us very good at doing this? Second, it might be quite difficult to make a self-assessment regarding something as subtle as moment-to-moment thinking. This item and the item regarding "precision, subtlety and finesse" both might be rated low and with little agreement because they are hard to grasp. Do any of us really know how to self-rate these items? We look forward to assessing whether the responses to these two items differ among coaches of different ages, gender, years of experience in the field, and nationality. Culture and experience might play a major role.

Given that the moment-to-moment item might indicate something important about coaching tactics, we must ask what that something important might be. Do the mean and variance scores indicate that coaches in training might not get enough training and/or supervision in the tactics of coaching? Do these results indicate, instead, that these moment-to-moment tactics simply are less important than the softer interpersonal dimensions of coaching? Is it more important to be authentic and empathetic than to be tactical? We will be exploring this question further as we

dig deeper into the results of these surveys. At the present time, it might be sufficient to suggest that an inquiry into the relative importance of soft and hard skills in coaching might be of value.

## **Coaching Strategies**

There are other items in both surveys that yield either low mean scores on both surveys or quite different mean scores on the first and second survey. Furthermore, they tend to yield variance scores that are comparatively high, indicating that respondents do not agree in their self-assessments. These items (from question two) have to do with coaching tools and strategies, and with the theoretical underpinnings of the coaching process: (1) How good is your general theoretical understanding of coaching? and (2) How much mastery do you feel you have of the techniques and strategies involved in practicing coaching?

As in the case of the moment-to-moment item, these two items might simply be quite challenging for any respondent, "A general theoretical understanding" might readily be declared a large task: what does it mean to have a general understanding of anything? How wide are the boundaries? How deep must we delve into anything to gain an "understanding." "Mastery" is also a very challenging word. It presents us with a very high bar -- when can any of us declare that we are "masters" of anything?

Given these cautionary notes, we can still pursue the implications of these relatively low mean scores and high variance scores. As mentioned previously, the challenge of coaching might be represented in part by what Kahneman calls "slow thinking" -- which is the ability to stop for a time of reflection and reconsideration. It is a time for not just thinking-about-our-thinking, but also rethinking-about-our-thinking. We begin to strategize about what we are doing and plan for the next set of steps to be taken and the nature of outcomes we are seeking to achieve. This slow thinking is frequently the primary task we are taking on with our clients. We are encouraging them (and helping them) to slow down and reflect on their values, options, assumptions, visions, plans, support systems, and so forth. Perhaps, as coaches we need to consider all of these things with regard to our own work--and not just the work of our clients.

In order to do this slow thinking, do we need a strong theoretical base on which to base our reflections and reconsideration. Do we need a set of coaching strategies in our "hip pocket" that we can pull out when engaging in slow thinking? Should our tool bag of coaching techniques be

full, so that we don't have to always view our client's challenges from the perspective of the few coaching tools and techniques that we have in our bag. Do we need to be cautious about treating everything as a "nail" because all we have is a "hammer"? As we go about inviting our clients to rethink and re-envision, do we also, as coaches, have to rethink and re-envision? Are the coach training programs we now offer in our field and the criteria we use to certify coaches need to be reconsidered? Do we need a greater emphasis on the "hard" skills and knowledge of coaching---and perhaps less of an emphasis on the "soft" skills and knowledge?

All of this is based on the assumption that the results from these two surveys indicate that something is needed (relatively speaking) rather than the possibility that these "hard" skills and knowledge are identified as less important for the respondents to our surveys. At the very least, the high variance scores indicate that the presence and value of a theoretical foundation and coaching techniques and strategies is a bit controversial right now and perhaps can be a source of valuable dialogue within the coaching profession.

### **The Bridge: Subtle Coaching**

We conclude this initial analysis by turning to one other item (from question two) that yielded relatively low mean scores and high variance: "How much precision, subtlety and finesse have you attained in your coaching work?" This is another of the items that might be very hard for any of us to answer. It is perhaps ironic that the answer any of us might give regarding the precision, subtlety and finesse required to be an effective coach will itself have to be precise, subtle and finessed. It would be hard to measure our own competence by clicking on a bullet point. Our answer might vary from one client to another, or even from one specific coaching episode to another. This is perhaps what makes effective coaching more of an art form than a scientific formula.

I would suggest that the finesse, subtlety and precision needed to be an effective coach requires a bridging between fast and slow thinking -- and a mastery of both the tactics and strategies of coaching, based on a strong foundation of coaching theory. All of this alongside the competencies that virtually all of our respondents considered important: the authenticity, empathy, and to further inform through our further exploration and analysis of the results from our two Development of Coaching Surveys.

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