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JOURNEY TO EXCELLENCE

Activating mentor coaching and coaching supervision



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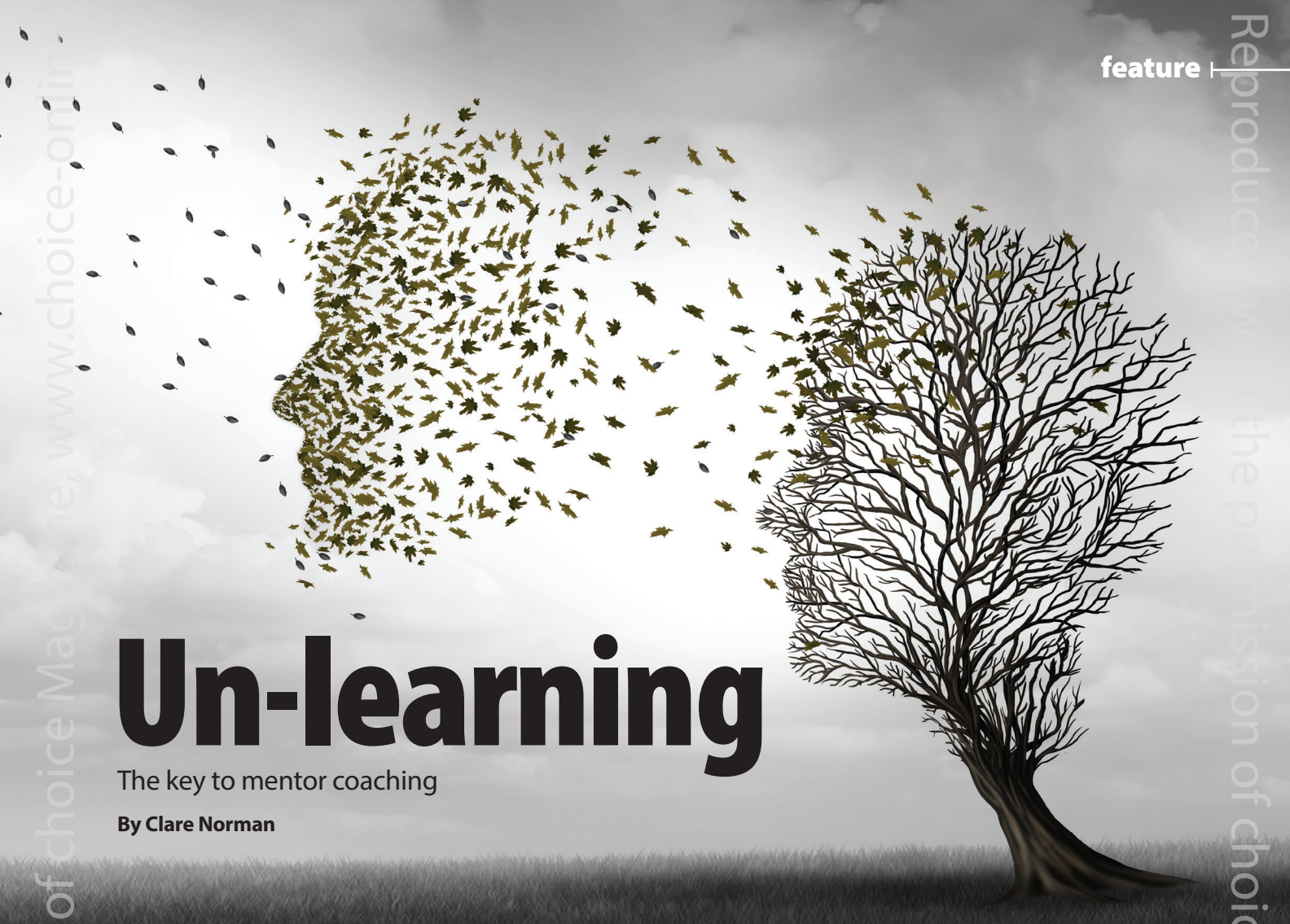
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JOURNEY TO EXCELLENCE

ACTIVATING MENTOR COACHING AND COACHING SUPERVISION

What's the difference between mentor coaching and coaching supervision? When would you access either? What are the benefits? What are mentor coaching and coaching supervision best practices? When is it required or just the right thing to do? What are the ways people engage with mentor coaching and/or coaching supervision? What to look for in terms of the coach and process? Join us as we activate mentor coaching and coaching supervision.





Un-learning

The key to mentor coaching

By Clare Norman

“Transformation is often more about un-learning than learning,” wrote Richard Rohr. If you believe that to be the case, as I do, what does it mean for us as coaches?

What do we need to unlearn in order to go through our own transformation towards mastery in our coaching?

Before we became coaches, we each developed ways of seeing the world that kept us safe or gave us a sense of belonging to the “tribe,” whether that tribe was a family system, a peer group, a team or our coach training cohort.

Through field research, observing and giving feedback to more than 250 coaches on their coaching, I have noticed that it is these previously formed mindsets that we need to unlearn.

The best coaching works on the “who” of the thinker, so that the “what” falls into place with ease (per Marcia Reynolds in *Coach the Person, Not the Problem*). The same holds true for learning to coach.

The best training and the best mentor coaching work on the “who” of the coach, their beliefs, mindsets and paradigms, so that the “what” of the coaching competencies falls into place with ease. Perhaps we should call this mentor coaching the person, not the competencies?

So what kind of mindsets am I referring to? The impor-

tance of coaching the person, not the problem is a belief in and of itself, but so often I see the opposite happening in practice, that I start to wonder whether the coach really believes that solving the *problem* is more important than coaching the person. Some of the tell-tale signs that the coach believes that coaching is about problem-solving and improving performance show up as:

- Few, if any, questions about the thinker’s emotions and feelings, even when the thinker drops those into the conversation. More questions that are about the perceived task in hand.
- Asking action-orientated questions really early in a session; questions like: “so what could you do?” It’s too early to be asking solution-based questions before they have explored the root causes, the barriers to action, the beliefs that are stopping them, the values that are being triggered, etc.
- Pushing from the coach to resolve everything that has been brought to the session rather than helping the thinker to identify the most important aspect to be working on and going deep on that.
- Creating lists, to-dos and action plans as an output from the coaching that aren’t underpinned by changes in mindset.

CHOOSE A MENTOR COACH WHO:

- ✓ you trust to provide you with enough psychological safety to do this unlearning, whilst also challenging you to step away from those mindsets that no longer serve your thinkers;
- ✓ understands the connection between mindset shift and competency development;
- ✓ is laser-focused on mindsets;
- ✓ can take you through a process of unlearning those unhelpful mindsets and learning replacement mindsets that will enable you to help your thinker to get to new thinking;
- ✓ can help you to spot marginal gains;
- ✓ will give you objective, evidence-based feedback about your strengths and your stretches.

Let's take another mindset example: the favorite expression that those we work with are "creative, resourceful and whole" (Whitworth et al). We might say this aloud, as *though* we believe it, and yet I so often see coaching in practice that belies this belief.

When the coach is asked about this, they might disclose their real belief that value is created when they lead the thinker to what the coach knows to be "the" answer – an answer that has worked for them and others in the past. Or the belief that the person they are working with doesn't have enough experience to access the "right" answer. There is no one right answer, except where there is a law or a policy that needs to be followed.

Neither of these beliefs allows the coach to treat the thinker as creative, resourceful and whole, but rather uncreative, unresourceful and deficient.

I hear coaches talking a good game when it comes to the mindsets that guide us towards coaching mastery. But then I see something different in practice, which tells me that these are espoused values rather than values in action. In mentor coaching, we need to uncover the real values and mindsets and support the coach to make a different choice that will then influence their competency development.

Changing behavior without changing our mental model is certainly possible in the short-term, just to be able to record a coaching session that passes an assessment, but the coach will quickly fall back into their old ways, because they have not updated their operating system that runs in the background.

Just as we know happens with our thinkers, when we have not worked with them on their own operating systems, but moved directly to a transactional list of things to do differently. If they are not seeing the world differently, they will not do things differently (at least not on a consistent,

long-term basis) and will therefore get the same results that they have always got (Covey).

This goes for coaches, too – if they do not identify and detach themselves from old beliefs and replace them with new ones, they will not *do* things differently and will therefore *get* the same results that they have always got.

Transformation might feel a bit big; a bit scary; a bit hard. It will take us to and through a liminal space, to a place where we have shed our old identity and are slowly attempting to embrace a new identity.

I get how tough that is, having stepped over that threshold myself. It caused me to feel vulnerable – and at times deficient and not quite belonging to my old identity nor a new one. It's a space of not knowing (good practice for being a great coach) and that is uncomfortable. But if you take one mindset at a time, your coaching will make leaps and bounds. I can promise you that, as I have seen it with my own eyes in the people I have worked with, and I have experienced it myself.

With a growth mindset and a beginner's mind, even the most seasoned coaches have upped their game, by updating the mindsets that are holding them back.

But sometimes we need a fresh pair of ears to listen to our coaching, so that we can amplify the things we don't know about ourselves. Tatiana Bachkirova has found that we coaches are self-deceiving when we reflect on our own coaching – maybe exaggerating or underplaying our strengths. So it's useful to work with an experienced coach who can listen with you for the clues in your coaching that reveal your underlying mindsets.

There is so much to unlearn, so let's keep returning to mentor coaching as a way of supporting our growth for the benefit of our thinkers. •

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