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Coaching Education in Flux:

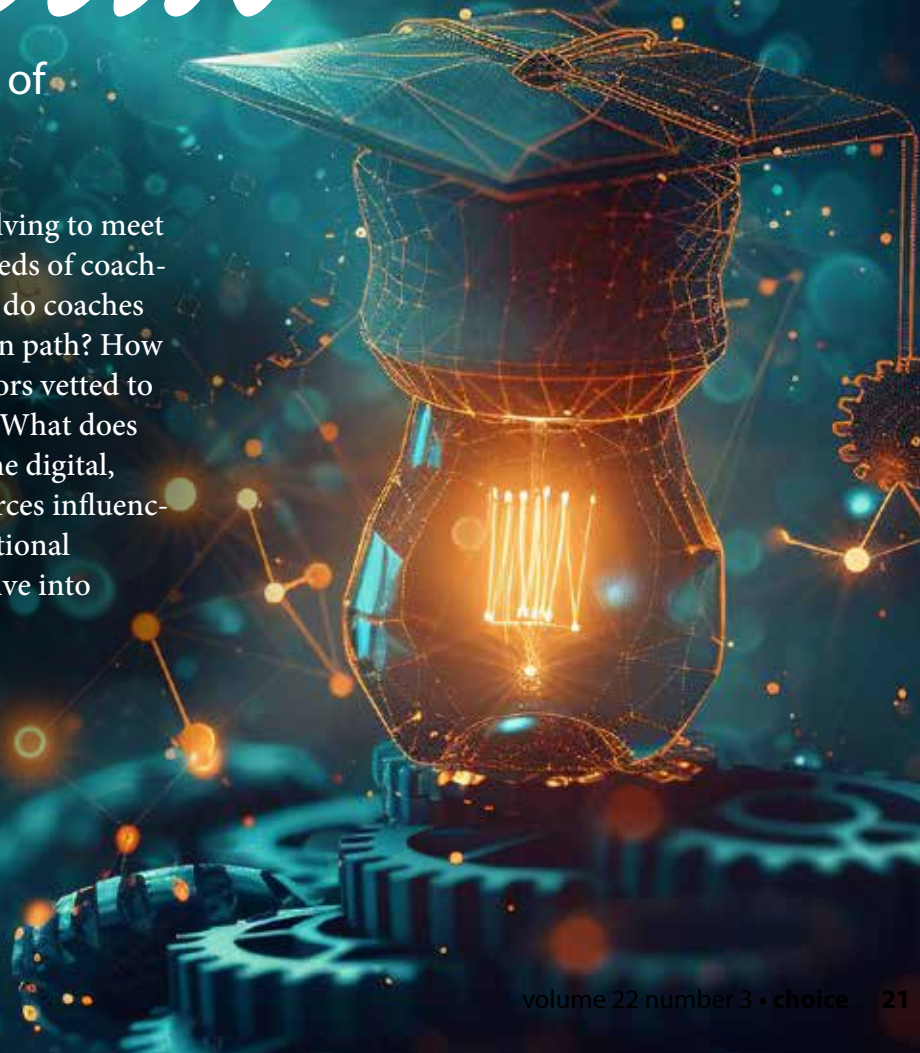
The ongoing evolution of
a dynamic field

COACHING EDUCATION

in Flux

The ongoing evolution of
a dynamic field

Is coaching education evolving to meet the current and future needs of coaches and their clients? How do coaches choose the right education path? How are programs and educators vetted to the ICF or EMCC levels? What does coaching education look like in the digital, AI-powered age? What are the forces influencing what's needed to shape educational programs? Join us for this deep dive into coaching education.



Finding the Thinker

Screening for coaching readiness and coachability

By Clare Norman, MSc, MCC

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Coach training companies teach people to coach. No surprise there, you might think. But what I've come to realize is that this focuses on the coaching session. Again, no surprise there. I'm all for that focus on how you coach, not how you talk about your coaching. That's why I endorse and invest in mentor coaching (observed coaching using a benchmark set of competencies to give feedback).

But what about all the other parts of the coaching experience? Not the sales and marketing aspects (which also deserve a place in coach training programs) but the thinker's experience.

You've heard talk about user experience. This is similar: what is the thinker's experience from the very first touch-point to the last? And how could this be improved, in a way that builds their agency at every step of the way?

Where does a coach learn about all of that? And not just the program of coaching itself, which the coach has control over, but also the essential wrap-around parts of the experience that involve other stakeholders – particularly in organizational coaching conducts.

COACHING READINESS & COACHABILITY

It's not all up to the coach to draw out coaching readiness. We're designing an end-to-end experience here. There are many other stakeholders involved in this experience: for example, the coaching custodian in an organization, the sponsor, peer support. The dyad of coach and thinker do not operate in isolation.

Masterful coaching only really works if you focus on the thinker's coaching readiness as well as your own.

I'm fascinated by this idea of coaching readiness and have been exploring the coaching experience through that lens.

Coachability was a term I heard frequently about 15 to 20 years ago, but it seems to have died away, even though coaches' frustrations with it have not. Now that I've been coaching for more than 20 years, I wanted to revisit what I prefer to call coaching readiness through a more experienced lens but still with a beginner's mindset.

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That coaching readiness isn't necessarily innate. If the thinker has never experienced coaching before, or if they've had a different form of coaching to that which you offer, they'll come to coaching in a naïve and innocent state about what it is and how to get the most from it.

You know much more than they do about how the process of coaching works, so it's up to you – and other stakeholders in this whole experience – to open their eyes to the potential of coaching, should they choose to embark wholeheartedly on an exploration of who they are and what's most meaningful to them.

VALUE, AGENCY & SELF-EFFICACY

In my experience, coaches work too hard to create value. It's not exclusively your role

to do this, but also the roles of the thinkers and the other stakeholders. I do want thinkers to walk away with value from their coaching, but not to the extent that I'll do the thinking for them.

Your responsibility as a coach is to take care of the process so that the thinker can create that value themselves, enabling them to access their inner wisdom, connect their own dots, and find answers that match their personality, context, motivations, beliefs and values.

Therefore, the thinker needs to be ready and willing to take that responsibility for creating value. In other words, they need to be "coaching ready." They need to have some agency and some self-efficacy – although, of course, coaching can also support them to build agency and self-efficacy along the way.

By agency, I mean self-determination – a sense of control over one's choices rather than handing power over to someone else; the willingness to think for oneself, to make decisions and act in accordance with those decisions – intentionality, if you like.

Bandura describes those with agency as "producers of their life circumstances and not just the products of them."¹ And yes, this builds over the course of coaching, but thinkers need some agency to build upon as they come into coaching.

By self-efficacy, I mean one's belief in one's own ability to change and grow. Again, this can be built on over the course of coaching, but it's an important input to the process. I recognize that our educational systems haven't necessarily done the best job of setting up people for a life of agency, so some may need more support and challenge than others to embrace the idea that change comes from within, not from without.

Moving away from the mindset that it's your role to create value and towards a belief that it's the thinker's role might be quite a shift for you. Beliefs drive behaviors, so updating your beliefs precedes taking action that matches those beliefs, in this case around where value is created.

WHO IS THE THINKER?

The thinker is a person who works with a coach. This is what they're there to do – to think for themselves.

The term comes from Nancy Kline's work around the Thinking Environment (2002). It's not a perfect description, because thinking (like cognition – see Amanda Blake's article in volume 21, number 4 of *choice*) is often synonymous with logical rational ideation, and in coaching, we want clients to think via their multiple intelligences.



Training does teach us to see the thinkers with whom we work as ‘creative, resourceful and whole’ (Whitworth et al, 1998). But we don’t always seem to internalize that belief at the start of our coaching journey and we’ll need to continue to come back to the idea in supervision and mentor coaching, to enable us to let go of needing to create value ourselves.

SCREENING FOR COACHING READINESS

Sometimes, you’ll make a mistake and start working with someone even when your intuition was quietly (or loudly) telling you that the thinker might not be ready for coaching: maybe it isn’t the right time, coaching isn’t the best-fit intervention for their needs, or maybe they just plain don’t want it.

Proceeding despite signals that perhaps you shouldn’t, may be driven by financial insecurity: independent coaches need money to live. Whether you’re an internal or external coach, proceeding may be driven

coach training might have taught you, you can’t coach everyone! There are some red flags that your intuition will recognize and your brain needs to pay attention to. And even if you didn’t catch these at the start, you can always re-contract when it becomes obvious that the thinker isn’t playing their part and is overstepping boundaries. Or you can end the contract with grace and compassion.

STAKEHOLDER RESPONSIBILITIES

But what of those other stakeholders I mentioned? What is their role in screening for coaching readiness? And how might we influence them to play their part?

Did your training cover any of the expectations you might have of and agreements you might make with the coaching custodians and sponsors in organizations and coaching platforms? I doubt it. The problem is that if they don’t play their part, the coaching may add less value than everyone might hope for. Hope is not enough in setting coaching up for success

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by a desire to accumulate hours towards a credential so that you can get there sooner.

It may be that you just don’t feel equipped to say no. Or, as a newbie, you may think that if you only tried harder, you could crack this nut. Maybe or maybe not! It depends what you mean by trying harder.

Maybe you’ve never come across this idea of screening or all of its constituent parts. Don’t feel bad about that if your training didn’t cover it. I’ve said previously that most training teaches you to coach, and that in itself is a set of skills that needs constant refining. But the screening piece is just as important, so that you don’t start to doubt your coaching skills when it may actually be the thinker who’s not playing their part.

It’s good to gain experience, but not if it messes with your head and your belief in yourself as a coach. Contrary to what you

– it takes multiple conversations about coaching readiness, from multiple parties.

Coaching is not the panacea for inattentive management practice. For all of our sakes (the organization, the coach, the thinker, the custodian, the line manager), training organizations would do well to spend more time teaching coaches how to ensure that coaching focuses on those who are coaching ready; and perhaps also teaching coaching custodians in organizations and platforms how to set up coaching to build agency. •

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