



PACE OVER PROGRESS? THE SHORTCUTS THAT ARE SLOWLY KILLING COACHING

It takes a village to raise a child. Similarly, it takes multiple stakeholders to cultivate coachability, argue [Clare Norman](#) and [Sam Humphrey](#).

Here, we will focus on you as coach: the mindset and skillset you require to cultivate coaching readiness and coachability, and the influence that you can apply to those other stakeholders, particularly the coaching custodian (the person in an organisation who is responsible for the return on investment and/or expectations of coaching) to achieve a more effective coaching set up.

Sparse, pacy set-up of coaching assignments might be expedient for the coaching custodian and the organisation but diminishes the leverage and lasting value that coaching is designed to unleash – for the thinker, the organisation and the coach.

MINDSET

Coachability is not fixed – we can partner with our clients to develop it over time. Fundamentally, we (believe that everyone who willingly signs up for coaching wants to derive some benefit from it. But here's the thing: they must know what it is they are signing up to so that they can make an informed decision about whether this will realise the benefits they are hoping for.

There is an unrealistic and growing expectation - or worse, an assumption - that coaches ensure the front-end pre-requisites of a successful coaching assignment are covered off at a first meeting. Yet you can and should expect more from the screening process undertaken by coaching custodians who match you with potential thinkers, to establish coaching readiness:

- Is coaching the best fit intervention for this individual's development?
- Is the timing right for the individual and for the organisation?
- How prepared is the individual to make the most of coaching?
- Are they willing to step into the hard work of thinking and making changes?
- Who is the best fit coach for this individual's needs?

Given coaches' desire to increase their hours of coaching (for experience and credentialing purposes) and the fees (as a source of income), we have become too accepting of mediocre or even non-existent coaching readiness checks ahead of chemistry sessions. That means that these initial, usually no-fee meetings try to cover everything including the kitchen sink – in just 45-60 minutes. In our book *Cultivating Coachability*, we argue for change in this regard, and we're leading the charge to influence coaching custodians to do more of the up-front set up so that chemistry sessions can focus on a specific purpose. Our view is that these meetings are best set up to explore compatibility alone; our request though is that whatever the purpose of the meeting, it is made clear to all parties so that the time can be used effectively.

It is often forgotten that the compatibility meeting is a bilateral decision-making meeting – the coach and the thinker both have

choice. Assuming also that the coaching custodian has played their part in pre-screening, the purpose of this meeting/call will focus on the coach and thinker's compatibility to work together, covering areas like conflicts of interest, style, values.

The primary question is: 'Are there any reasons why you and the thinker couldn't work well together?' This is quite a shift from the traditional context for a chemistry meeting where the question is, 'Does the thinker like/get on with this coach more or less than others?' The former question demands you and the thinker to enquire, be curious and engage from the get-go. In contrast, the latter question demands that you please and entertain, to be the most popular.

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Then every interaction, every conversation, every contractual discussion is an opportunity to build the thinker's capacity for coachability.

Your responsibility as coach is to encourage and enhance the thinker's thinking and learning for themselves. Their responsibility is to wring the most value out of the whole coaching experience. That's what coachability is all about.

Accumulating hours of coaching or financial pressures must not override your intuition about coaching readiness and coachability. When you choose to work with people for whom coaching isn't a good fit, or who are not motivated to think for themselves or to change, coaching is unlikely to be successful. If it isn't successful, you may have a tendency to blame yourself, wondering what more you could or should be doing, or what you are doing wrong. This is the rocky road to self-doubt. But an underwhelming coaching result does no-one any favours: it reflects poorly on both the thinker and the coach and may have far-reaching consequences affecting the career aspirations of the thinker and further work for the coach.

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SKILLSET

Imagine that you are tending a seed that is ready to germinate. The soil is nutrient-rich, the conditions are right, but there will still be weather patterns that could be too wet or too dry, stormy, windy. The coach cannot protect or rescue the thinker from this tumultuous environment. But you can believe in their capacity to grow despite, or perhaps because of the setbacks, and follow through with that belief by building their agency, self-awareness and self-efficacy.

Your skill is in:

- Contracting for coachability and holding the thinker to account for this
- Transitioning the two of you into the thinking space and out of it again
- Keeping the thinker connected to who they are and what is important to them in the coaching
- Building intrinsic hope within the thinker, alongside curiosity and a growth mindset
- Challenging the thinker to think about what they need for themselves, given their unique circumstances, to reach their goals
- Drawing out the possible, even if that's modest, when the system is working against the coaching.

You may also need to develop skills in influencing coaching custodians and saying no to work that will break you.

When you think about your own mindsets and skillsets around cultivating coachability, what do you notice?

And how will you influence coaching custodians to believe that working on effective, rigorous set-up trumps expediency when it comes to successful outcomes from coaching?

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Clare Norman is the author of 'Cultivating Coachability' and the founder of Clare Norman Coaching Associates. A Master Certified Coach with the International Coaching Federation, she's also a Master Mentor Coach and Certified Coach Supervisor. With over 25 years focused on maximising effectiveness at individual, team, and organisational levels, Clare helps people express their needs to create a more caring world. Her previous books include 'The Transformational Coach' (2022) and 'Mentor Coaching: A Practical Guide' (2020).

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