

# The International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching

Volume II Issue 2  
December 2009



## Editorial

### Editorial

#### Editor Comments

Welcome to the second issue of 2009, which closely follows our 2009 conference held in Amsterdam and which provided us with numerous opportunities for debates on mentoring and coaching.

This issue offers a special edition article by David Clutterbuck being the result of collaboration between the EMCC and the EFMD and published in a supplement of Global Focus. The article is the result of a survey into how organisations use mentoring and coaching. It reflects the way in which they are used within organisations and the differences and similarities perceived between mentoring and coaching by the participating organisations.

We also continue with our tradition of offering a diverse range of articles to contribute to the evolving debates on mentoring and coaching. The contributions also offer a cluster of articles with a distinct learning theme reflecting the value of mentoring and coaching practices within the educational sector.

The journal has two main sections: **Reviewed Section** and **Professional Section**. The Reviewed Section has three categories:

- A Personal View
- Research Based
- Debate or discussion

And the Professional Section also has three:

- Professional skills
- Cases of practice
- Issue Focus

The Reviewed Section rigorously follows conventions of all academic journals in the form of double blind peer review Harvard style referencing. The Professional Section is subject to rigorous editorial review. Both sections provide good quality writing and interesting comment.

We also welcome book reviews.

#### **Reviewed Section**

The first of our papers in the reviewed section is by [Jennie Jones who presents a case study on research conducted as to how mentoring is used within Higher Education as part of the support offered to newly appointed lecturers](#). The second is a paper by [Professor Bill Critchley which explores relational coaching and why it should take courage](#). The third is by [Ruth Simpson who discusses the benefits to leaders of developing an inner freedom to act](#). The final and fourth paper is by [Jean Hartley and Kate Pinder who offers an interesting insight into the application of a 360° feedback tool supported by coaching for the purpose of developing political leadership of locally elected members](#).



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Continuing the theme of mentoring and coaching within Higher Education, the **first** contribution in this section is by [Rose Schofield who reflects on the relationship between coaching and the development of management and leadership through educational programmes](#). Concluding the theme of mentoring in education the **second** paper is [a personal reflection by Daniel Doherty on his experiences with Master students](#). [James Brook, in the third paper poses a challenge to coaches with the question whether coaches collude with their clients to feed a problem-based mindset, limiting the capacity of the client to grow](#). In the **fourth** paper [Ros McIntyre reflects on the notion of confidentiality encountered within the coaching triangle](#). [Jitske Kramer and Karin Brugman in the fifth paper consider the lessons to be learnt from cultural differences encountered within coaching](#). Finally, the **sixth** paper by [Peter Szabó puts forward thought provoking assumptions of brief coaching](#).

### Book Reviews

This issue offers reviews of two books recently published, the **first** by Helen Whitten, [entitled Cognitive Behavioural Coaching Techniques for Dummies](#) and reviewed by Dr Penny Johnson. The second book by Aryanne Oade is entitled [Starting and running a Coaching Business](#) and is reviewed by Pauline Wonders.

The variety of contributions provide stimulating diversity on both mentoring and coaching and for future issues I encourage our readers to suggest themes which would be of interest to them and building on our understanding of mentoring and coaching.

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## Professional Section

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## This is coaching, not confession

### Why coaches need to get closer to the organisation that hires them

I have a growing feeling of unease about the insistence of many coaches that there is a blanket of total confidentiality that enfolds the coach and the client and that keeps the coaching work protected from the rest of the world. I'm not convinced that every coach is in a position to promise categorically that the content of all coaching sessions will remain confidential. Nor do I believe that total confidentiality is always the best thing for the client. Of course, my beliefs are shaped by the kind of coaching work that I do and the coaching context in which I typically work. To help explain my assertions above, I will start with a brief description of my practice.

I am an executive coach. Almost all my coaching work is prompted by the client and/or the client's employer deciding that the client will be able to do something different or better for the organisation if he/she has the support of a coach. The coaching context for me is therefore the work environment. The coaching objectives are around helping the client to achieve change in a work context. If the coaching work helps the client in the rest of his/her life, that's a bonus, but it is not the prime objective. My coaching focuses on what takes place within the workplace. Most of my coaching clients are senior managers and about half of them work in professional or financial services.

I am not a life coach and so my conclusions about how best to manage confidentiality should not be taken to apply to life coaching.



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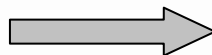
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Given that I am coaching clients principally around their life at work, I consider it essential that the coaching work reflects the needs of the client's employer – the purchaser of the coaching – as well as those of the individual client. For me, there are three parties involved in the coaching contract – the coaching client; the coach; and the organisation that employs the client and pays the coaching bill. I never want to lose sight of the fact that organisations commission coaching because they want to achieve something. This means that I have the needs of two parties to take into account when I am coaching. I will explain why below.

Many years ago I worked for a niche HR consultancy. A big part of our product portfolio was designing and delivering bespoke training workshops in a range of management skills. It was clear to us that, for a training workshop to make any lasting difference it had to fit the organisation's context and objectives. For example, an organisation can run dozens of workshops that train managers how to have great appraisal conversations, but if the organisation treats its appraisal process as a low priority administrative task, those managers are never going to prioritise using the new skills they have learned. Similarly, many of us will have worked with managers who are recognised technical experts and subject specialists. If, however, the organisational context means that these managers are expected to be hands-off strategic leaders, there will probably be a significant mismatch between what the organisation requires and what they actually deliver. At its simplest, the managers' skills need to be aligned with the demands of the role.

We can demonstrate the importance of aligning people with the organisation's context by using just three arrows. The first arrow represents the organisation context – the direction it is going in; its aims; its culture; and what it needs from its people:

Organisation context



For that organisation to be successful, it needs to align the capability of each of its people precisely with the first arrow. The people have to have the skills and abilities to deliver what the organisation needs:

Individual capability



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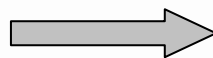
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And, as being capable of delivering what the organisation wants is not the same as actually delivering it, we need a third factor to be perfectly aligned with the first two. People have to *want* to do what the organisation needs them to do, otherwise they will not deliver what is needed and the organisation will not achieve what it wants to achieve:

Individual commitment



Just one misaligned arrow can lead to failure for the organisation and for the individual. What starts as a tiny misalignment can become a significant gap further down the line. For example, an individual who is committed to delivering what the organisation wants will fail unless he/she also has the skills to deliver it. All three arrows must head in the same direction if the individual and the organisation are to succeed and if that individual is going to be able to sustain the performance that will deliver organisational success.

This need to align people with the direction in which the organisation is heading applies as much to coaching as it does to recruitment, selection and training. This means that coaches must keep in mind what the organisation wants the coaching work to achieve at the same time as they work on delivering what the client needs. Coaching clients often do not have a clear idea of what the organisation wants from them, nor do they always perceive the gap between what they are delivering and what the organisation requires. So, for these reasons, it is critical to my kind of coaching to align the client with the organisation by widening the coaching relationship from a duet in which there is no room for anyone but the client and the coach, to a broader harmony where a third voice is heard.

This three-way relationship has implications for what coaches can promise the client in terms of confidentiality. Coaches have to achieve a delicate balancing act between the promise of confidentiality that they give to the client, and the need to give the organisation comfort that the coaching work is focussed on helping the client to become better aligned with the organisation's needs. If this is to be done successfully, it relies on clear and precise contracting around confidentiality between the three parties. The coach has to go beyond an exclusive approach that restricts the coaching relationship to just the coach and the client, and that insists on the need for total confidentiality around this relationship.

Some coaches believe that the coaching relationship confers absolute confidentiality on the coach and the client. I see it a little differently. In my experience, there are three obstacles to the notion of coaching being a two person relationship of total confidentiality:



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- Firstly, I am clear that what is discussed between coach and client in a coaching session will usually remain between coach and client. However, if the organisation gets no feedback from the coaching relationship, it makes it unnecessarily difficult for it to assess whether its investment in coaching is progressing well;
- Secondly, I know from experience of working in regulated environments and of seeing what happens in employment tribunals that there are circumstances – albeit very rare – in which a coach can no longer keep confidential something that he/she hears from the client;
- Thirdly, I believe that holding the bounds of confidentiality too tightly can sometimes do the client a disservice.

I'll look at each of these challenges below.

### "So, is our investment paying off?"

In any relationship between three people, one person usually ends up being the outsider. Inevitably, in the case of the coaching relationship between client, coach and coaching sponsor, it is the sponsor who plays the role of gooseberry. This is perfectly natural. As coaches, we quite rightly spend far more time with our clients than we will ever spend with the coaching sponsor. Also, if we are coaching well, the relationship acquires an importance for the client that it rarely does for a sponsor. Because of this understandable imbalance in the involvement of the three parties, the coach needs to take the initiative and redress the balance just a little, so that the organisation also gets what it needs from the coaching relationship.

The first step to achieving a more balanced, three-way relationship is to identify a coaching sponsor. This is not always as easy as it may sound. In an ideal world, the client's line manager will be the sponsor. Sometimes it's someone from HR or from Talent Management. What matters is that the coach identifies who is representing the organisation in this coaching relationship and what he/she (or they) wants from it. As part of the normal discussions with the sponsor about coaching objectives and the organisational context within which the client works, the coach should clarify up front expectations about how this three-way relationship will work. The coach needs to achieve a shared understanding with the coaching sponsor that:

- What goes on in the coaching conversations will normally stay confidential unless the client expressly releases the coach to share information with someone else
- The coach will share a factual report of progress now and then with the sponsor. This may consist of no more than the number of sessions completed and a high level assessment of the client's commitment to the coaching process. This gives the organisation the comfort that the coaching work that is being paid for is actually being done
- The three parties – client, sponsor and coach – will review progress about half to two thirds of the way through the coaching programme. In an ideal world, that review will be a conversation between client and sponsor, or between client, sponsor and coach. Failing that, the coach will talk to the sponsor without the client being present...but will have agreed beforehand with the client what will be covered in that meeting
- If the sponsor wants to share extra information with the coach as the coaching programme progresses that is fine. However, he/she needs to know in advance that the default position is that the coach will want to share this with the client.



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These ground rules sound simple, but getting them agreed is not always straightforward, and I know that not every coach does it. Even when coaches work hard to get agreement up front as to what will and will not be shared with the coaching sponsor, this confidentiality contract will be tested and challenged at times. There have been times when, despite having done the best I can to spell out how confidentiality and communication can work between me and the organisation, I have been asked to be a party to something that I think will compromise the promise of confidentiality that I have made to the client. There need be nothing sinister about this on the part of the organisation. Requests have been made with the best possible intentions that, had I agreed to them, would have put me in a difficult situation. I have been asked by the HR team:

*"Can you come in and have an off the record conversation about James? We think he's having a bit of a crisis of confidence and we want you to tell us how we can support him before his manager loses patience. We would like to keep this conversation just between us as we think it might unsettle James if he knows we're worried about him."*

This is a really laudable objective on the part of the HR team...but I know I can't possibly have secret meetings with them about my client. All I can do is acknowledge how much I appreciate the fact that the HR team wants to support James and be clear that if I were to come to the meeting I would need to agree it with James first.

When it is time for client and coach to report progress to the sponsor, the best thing the coach can do is to equip the client to lead that review discussion. That way the client knows what is discussed in that review session and can hear from the sponsor directly what progress the client has made and what has still to be done. The ability to handle a review conversation well is a valuable one and will be useful to the client for the rest of his/her career. Moreover, if all three parties are in the review meeting together, there is no space for hidden agendas - the relationship of trust between the client and coach can be maintained.

In short, I expect the organisation to take an interest in whether or not their coaching money is being spent wisely on me. I think I owe it to the paying customer to keep him/her in touch with progress. I think this can be done without compromising the relationship between the coach and the client. It's perfectly possible to do this without in any way breaching confidentiality or damaging the relationship between coach and client. Some coaches already do this beautifully. Some prefer to keep a wall of total confidentiality between them and the sponsor. As a profession, I think it's time that we recognised that our coaching relationship is with the organisation as well as with the client. We need to take the initiative to draw the coaching sponsor in to that three person harmony with us and the client.





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### **“Don’t worry – everything you tell me is confidential”**

Clearly, what the coach agrees with the client about confidentiality will need to marry up with what the coach agrees with the client’s coaching sponsor. It is critical that the client knows right from the outset that what is said within the coaching sessions will *usually* be confidential to the coach and the client. However, I don’t think that coaches can honestly make an absolute 100% promise of confidentiality when they are coaching in an organisational setting. How can a coach manage his/her conflicting loyalties to the organisation and to the client if, for example, the client reveals a fraud or describes behaviour that is going to land the organisation in tribunal? When I’m talking to clients about what confidentiality means for me, I normally say something along these lines:

*“What we discuss in our sessions together will remain confidential....unless you tell me that you are committing fraud or doing something that the regulators won’t like or knowingly putting the organisation at risk of having a tribunal case successfully taken against it. If I hear anything that sounds like that, I’ll tell you. We can then discuss it so you can make sure I have understood correctly what’s actually going on. We can then work out what we do with this information. All I’m saying is that I can not keep confidential something that puts the organisation at risk. I doubt it will happen – it’s only happened to me once so far – but I don’t want to make you a blanket promise of confidentiality in case you then tell me something that I can’t allow to stay confidential between us.”*

I have yet to meet a client that has not been able to understand this conditional description of confidentiality nor have I found that this in any way stops a relationship of trust developing quickly with a client. I would rather deal up front with this slightly uncomfortable issue of there being a limit to my confidentiality undertaking than to run into problems later if a client divulges something appalling and I find I’m caught between my promise of confidentiality to the client and my responsibility to the organisation that hired me.

I want to make it clear that I am not saying here that, if the client were to reveal something that I can not keep confidential, I would automatically report him/her to the relevant person internally. My preference is to discuss it with the client and, where necessary, get him/her to take the necessary action.

### **Too much confidentiality is not in the client’s best interests**

In a previous existence as a Head of Human Resources, I inherited coaches who actively resisted engaging with the organisation in any way either to shape what the focus of the coaching work should be or to share progress. Now, in some circumstances, a coach/client relationship that is completely isolated and confidential can be a perfectly viable coaching model. However, that is not how I like to work and, in my experience, this is not the best way of delivering coaching results that are aligned with the organisation’s needs. As importantly, I strongly believe that the coach who keeps the organisation at a distance is doing his/her client a disservice. There is immense value to the client to be gained from drawing the sponsor more actively into the coaching process. An engaged sponsor is:





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- More alert to what the client is trying to achieve and therefore more likely to notice what he/she is doing
- More able to give good quality feedback at review time partway through the coaching programme
- Invested in the coaching programme and in its future success
- Quicker to find opportunities for the client when he/she needs support to try out a new behaviour or approach
- More likely to keep the client and coach updated when there is a change in the organisational context that might affect the coaching programme.

The coach's job is to leave the client better able to function in this organisational setting when the coach has gone. (I'm leaving to one side here those situations where the best outcome for the client is to move on and leave the organisation altogether.) A key skill in navigating organisational life successfully is the skill of finding and nurturing sponsors. The coach who helps the client to use the coaching programme as a way of getting closer to a sponsor is really serving his/her client well. This means that coach and client need to work out when they will bring the sponsor into the fold with them and when they will work entirely alone. The best response is rarely to keep up that impenetrable wall of confidentiality. What works better is for the client and coach to choose where to place a door in that wall; when to open it; and who to invite in. There will be plenty of rooms that will remain completely closed to visitors, but the client is better off having a welcoming lounge into which he/she can invite the sponsor occasionally, than he/she is keeping the sponsor outside staring at a blank and unbroken wall.

In summary, I think that we need to be a bit less precious about confidentiality and a bit more precise. Coaching in an organisational setting is not confession nor is it therapy. A blanket promise of confidentiality is misleading and leads to suboptimal results. I urge more coaches to draw their client's sponsor closer to the coaching work and to invest time in adapting those confidentiality promises to deliver something that lets the sponsor come in to the warm, whilst keeping plenty of safe and private space in which the client can develop. I know from experience that this is not always easy to do. However, every time I have done it well, it has repaid the client handsomely....and that's what we are all aiming to do.

