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From TRIAGE to
RECOVERY

Coaching through COVID-19

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Coaching through COVID-19

COVID-19 is presenting coaches and their clients with significant challenges. How does coaching offer a solution to the world's 'new normal'? What is the impact of COVID-19 on our clients' ability to perform? How can we help clients recover after a major crisis? How can we coach teams from chaos to health? How can you reinvent your coaching practice? Join us as we explore how coaches can help their clients get ahead of the curve.

Adapting to CRISIS

Expanding our coaching mindset

By Laura Hauser, PhD, MCC, MCEC

The events of 2020 have irreversibly altered the way we live and do business. Whether it's the global COVID-19 pandemic, racial injustice, economic recession, or some combination of all three, life is different. We are different.

The challenges we and our clients face are different.

Our work and lives are constantly disrupted and changing. How do we adapt as coaches? During times of crisis, it is essential for coaches to expand their mindset to help clients do likewise, so they feel capable to navigate these waves of disruption successfully.

This article reflects on the response by coaches and clients during the onset of COVID-19, explores the need for coaches to expand their coaching mindset, and offers questions to consider when partnering with clients to make a positive difference in the world.

REFLECTIONS ON COVID-19 TRIAGE

Earlier this year, many of my clients, students, colleagues and others reached out for support to deal with the sudden impact of being thrust into a virtual work environment due to COVID-19.

Coaches and leaders alike were shell-shocked by the loss of stability, including the scuttled in-person leadership and team development events, meetings and off-sites. Clearly, leaders, teams, and the professionals who support them need coaching now more than ever.

Over the past 30 years I've lived and learned a lot through myriad local and global crises here in the U.S., in South America, the former Soviet Union and more. I've learned there are three critical principles to live by during times of major disruption.



1 Lean In

This is not a time for coaches or others who support leaders and teams in organizations to step aside, especially when the conversation is uncomfortable for our clients such as dealing with personal and societal emotions.

This is particularly true during major disruptions like COVID-19, social justice movements aimed at achieving greater equity and inclusion, climate and environmental change, and more.

2 Reach Out

Leaders and their teams need us. People are yearning for guidance and perspective. At the onset of a crisis, our first responsibility to our clients is to help them triage.

In a recent conversation with Lisa Dean, HR director for Zurn Industries, she said, “When Covid-19 hit, California was the first to go into lockdown; we had to act fast, we had to be agile and think differently.” Her options expanded when she reached out to companies in her industry and geographic area: “We quickly learned from each other, so we could best support our people and our customers.”

3 Share Generously

Collectively, we’ve learned a lot. And we have shared a lot since the onset of COVID-19. Volumes have been written about insights, resources and impacts on work and home life, technology challenges, and the need to address a new set of demands in an agile way.

Case in point: my recent blog in *choice* online was inspired by a technology client who created a strike force team of trusted advisors with international leadership and team coaching expertise. We worked around the clock to create just-in-time resources and guidance for Human Resource Business Partners (HRBPs), Learning & Development Business Partners (LDPBs), coaches and leaders about how to perform triage during a crisis. These just-in-time resources were quickly distributed throughout the organization.

MIND SET

During this era of pandemic, social unrest, and other major crises, coaches and their clients are presented with significant challenges every day.

Traditionally, coaches were trained to view clients as whole and resourceful. This in turn guided coaching behavior, such as helping clients discover answers to their own questions rather than telling them what to do. A good start, but no longer enough.

We need to expand our mindset. *A mindset is a collection of deeply-rooted attitudes and perspectives. Our mindset shapes how we see and live in the world.*

Expanding our mindset is a means to radically grow our capability to coach our clients during crisis. This also requires us to **expand our knowledge, skills, and hearts.**

Expanding our mindset is a means to radically grow our capability to coach clients during crisis. This also requires us to expand our knowledge, skills and hearts. We can do this by remaining aware and open to the influence of context and culture on ourselves and others.

My colleague, Nathalie Salles-Oliver, head of Facebook’s coaching program, wisely shared her paradoxical view, “everything needs to change, and nothing needs to change.” Indeed, the pandemic seemed to change everything in our work and personal lives overnight. Leaders, coaches and employees were forced to be agile and examine age-old assumptions.

Paradoxically, what hasn’t changed are the positive effects of using a coaching mindset to cultivate trust and safety, listen deeply, question assumptions, and evoke and provoke new ways of thinking to facilitate growth and action.

Wally Kuhns, Director, Human Resources at Dexcom, a long-time client and colleague, described the challenge/opportunity in this way: “COVID-19 has been so disruptive to our process it caused us to quickly move 90 percent of our people to working at home. Yet the crisis gave us the opportunity to rethink how to address a huge disruption in a way that could better support our company’s growth curve.”

As coaches, we must expand our mindset to help our clients survive and thrive in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) world.

? **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

- How can you expand your mindset to better coach and influence change during a crisis environment?
- Can you lean into similar conversations with your clients to help them expand their mindset in order to better navigate during a crisis?

KNOWLEDGE SET

Highly effective coaches continuously expand their knowledge set through learning and development activities. They engage in an ongoing, reflective practice to enhance coaching capabilities.

Charles Shaw, global director of diversity and inclusion at Facebook, recommends coaches educate themselves about the emotional, political, social, historical and cultural contexts in which their clients are immersed.

By broadening our perspective, coaches are better positioned to have larger conversations with clients and thereby make a difference in the world, especially during times of crisis.

? **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

- Can you educate yourself to become more aware of the context and culture of your clients?
- How can you do a better job of generously learning and growing together, and sharing knowledge within your coaching community?

SKILL SET

Organizations poised to prosper once the pandemic wanes are those with agile people skills pegged to emotional intelligence, resilience in leadership, and teamwork. According to McKinsey and Co., “to emerge stronger from the COVID-19 crisis, companies should start reskilling their workforce now.” This requires an agile mindset.

Agility is becoming a core 21st-Century competency. A 2020 Wiley Publishing survey of 2,500 professionals found that 95 percent of managers, directors, and executives said that agility – the ability to adapt quickly and easily – is more important to their organization’s success now than it was five years ago.

Just as organizations need new skill sets to help people respond well to disruption, so do coaches.

? **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

- What skills and tools can you add to your toolbox to better coach in highly complex and uncertain environments and influence change?
- How can you measure your own level of agility and develop strategies to increase your agility EQ?

HEART SET

Many coaches have been trained, mentored, and supervised to deeply listen, not only with their head, but also with their heart while maintaining a neutral stance toward their client.

Yet, in her book, *The Future of Coaching*, author Hetty Einzig challenges the tenet of coaching neutrality. Rather than simply following the client’s agenda, there is a movement toward coaches seeing themselves as partners in evoking courageous leadership conversations with clients.

Coaches have a stake in creating a better world. If we remain neutral, we may unintentionally maintain the status quo, stifling our clients’ ability to discover new possibilities and pursue actions to facilitate positive change.

By expanding our heart set, we can assist clients in overcoming uncertainty, volatility and ongoing disruption at an even deeper level.

? **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

- How can you shift from having neutral to courageous conversations?
- Can you be courageous and stand with one another when a disruptive event occurs?

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

New waves of disruption surely lie ahead of us, whether it’s a resurgence of COVID-19, an economic decline, civil unrest, climate change or some other wrenching crisis. What we can count on is:

- Organizations need coaches more than ever.
- Coaches can help their clients grow and develop only as far as the coach has expanded their mindset, skills, knowledge and heart set.
- This is lifetime work and life-changing work.

Expanding your coaching mindset during this time of uncertainty is essential to empower yourself and your clients to successfully navigate these rolling waves of disruption. •

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