

# choice

the magazine of professional coaching

**Breaking  
the Rules!**

Is it time  
for the  
coaching  
paradigm  
to expand?

Shattering  
the Myths

A Roadmap for  
Rule Breaking

Is it Time to  
Change Course?

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# Breaking the Rules!

We all do it. It's that secret conversation where we admit to a colleague that we also give clients advice, regularly teach or train them, or even tell our own stories. How do we manage the balance between standard descriptions of coaching and what our clients are asking us for? How does an understanding of the brain help us expand what we do as coaches? How are we limiting ourselves and not offering everything we have when we refrain from these things? Why are we afraid to challenge the convention that is only 20 years old? Join us as we explore expanding the coaching paradigm.



# All In!

Humanity demands we bring our fullest contribution



By Darelyn “DJ” Mitsch, MCC

**I**n the dance of a corporate coaching conversation, there are always opportunities to mentor, guide, consult, teach, and lead. And that begs a couple of questions:

1. When do we cross the line from coaching into another discipline? (And is there really a line – other than practicing unlicensed therapy?)
2. How do we prepare and certify leaders to really coach and develop people given inherent blocks to certification?

## Question 1

At what point do we cross the line from coaching into another discipline?

I admit it; I have blended several disciplines while coach-

ing. Example: An executive and new mother who returned to work after maternity leave and had several challenges to work through. First, her new baby had the croup. Second, she and her team were working through a company merger that threatened to eliminate positions. In a moment of complete exhaustion and exasperation during a coaching session, she said, “Please stop that Socratic shit and tell me what to do. I need to know what’s possible, or if I can succeed at this job now that I am a mom. Should I just quit? You have kids. How did you do it?” If I had asked her one more question I would have royally pissed her off.

In that “Socrates” moment, I put the coaching hat aside and donned my mentor hat as someone who had similar challenges and experiences to share. While I used coaching skills during the process, I stepped out of the coach role and into the mentor role for much of that session. Sharing my

own story about how I faced similar challenges created possibilities she hadn't considered. Once there was hope, we were back into our groove, though I danced between mentoring and coaching for a few sessions until her foundation was clear and we needed to shift the focus to her team.

Coach training organizations teach new coaches to distinguish, "You know I cannot advise you, my role is to coach you." While that boundary helps us stay consistent across the almost 300 training programs that boast certification through the International Coach Federation (ICF), I don't think that is how those whom we coach hold what we are doing.

Our clients see us fully. They choose to hire us for many reasons including our background, gender, experiences, and energetic fit. And in the same way we get to know them as whole, creative and capable human beings, they want to know that we are more than process automatons.

## Question 2

If \$387 billion is spent annually on leadership development and 80 percent of the world's workers are disengaged and leave jobs they love primarily due to a bad boss, then why are we not focused on conveying advanced coaching skills to leaders? Coaching is a \$2.5 billion industry and we are realizing great impact and outcomes. It's time to grow our share of the larger leadership development pool and teach leaders advanced coaching skills to unleash the highest potential in their companies.

We want leaders to coach. We want coaching to be easily embedded in every leaders skill set. And to do that, we will need to blend coaching into the framework of leadership competency development and strategic pillars of performance for an organization. A lot of the coach training is confusing to leaders who've been taught that performance management is really "coaching," by those who did nothing to update their own skill sets or become certified coaches who could hold the distinctions.

There's a time for each leader to assume different roles, and coaching is still a skill that needs to be developed at the deepest levels. A one- or two-day workshop is an okay start, but if leaders are going to become great with people they need stronger coaching practices.

I am a rule follower. I have helped to create rules for the profession of coaching and I have helped to scale large coaching initiatives in Fortune 100 companies and set up corporate coaching cadres. And there are hurdles and barriers to some of this work that should be revisited.

In order to achieve their ICF certification, leaders cannot coach their team members or direct reports as part of their certification requirements – the hours will not count as coach-

ing hours, even though we review recordings of their coaching sessions and they are coaching peers and colleagues in their cohorts, along with other assignments outside their organizations or teams.

So a busy executive must coach – not mentor, guide, or consult – people other than their direct reports or teams for their 100-500 hours of practice to achieve what others can do more easily. That creates a barrier for entry into coach training organizations considering HR professionals, internal coaching cadres and change agents in those same organizations can coach leaders and their teams for credit hours.

That seems out of alignment with the growth and visibility we need in our profession. We want all leaders to not only use coaching skills, but to become coach leaders.

As part of my orientation to working with leaders, I help develop models and strategies when I wear my consulting hat. These are built on coaching frameworks and have impact. For example, I developed a Coach Competency Progression for internal leadership coaching programs in 1999 as part of a coaching initiative my company, which lifted employee satisfaction for the client company from 1.4 to 4.2 on a 5 point scale in 18 months.

Training 3,800 mid-level leaders in the program elevated the game and changed the culture by transferring core coaching skills within the framework of their appreciative inquiry leadership model which allowed for blending disciplines. Our company developed many tools during that effort, which is another way we become creative partners. We sometimes go to a whiteboard and facilitate the clients' thinking into the creation of a model for them to explore with their stakeholders. Is that straight coaching? No. Is it impactful and desired? Yes! Do they still call us their coach? Yes.

The coach competency guide was one of those creations and emerged before there were 11 Core Competencies and standards for the ICF. We still use this to demonstrate the distinctions for leadership coaches we train.

Tracking competencies on this type of developmental pathway means that coaches who achieve a level of mastery can move beyond the methodology. We are All In, fully present and connected, and can be with others in ways that are truly transformational. We can become thinking partners in a creative process that also taps into our best contributions as well.

## Yes AND

Recent neuroscience research holds that when we advise people or tell them what to do, their brains offload their creative process or executive function to the speaker (coach). Their synapses stop firing in the images we've seen of those conversations.

I trust the research so I understand the importance of tapping into other’s creative process, and I want my own synapses to be ignited when I am in conversations. Yet after coaching thousands of leaders, I am clear that blending some methodologies in the longer view of a coaching contract can be the best service to those who call us coach.

In every profession that emerges, there are scouts, pioneers and settlers. Scouts take the risks to try something and are often the “crazy ones,” to quote Steve Jobs. Pioneers find the gold. Settlers create the rules and bring the profiteers, police, pastors, publics and pundits to create new laws to protect people or systems to sustain the camp.

All of these roles are important in coaching. They are also becoming quite visible as we see a proliferation of new training programs, new certification bodies and professional societies. Where are the scouts, pioneers and settlers emerging in organizations such as the Institute of Coaching, International Association of Coaches, Board Certified Coach, and World-

wide Association of Business Coaches? What are thought leaders in each finding that should be acknowledged and more widely adopted?

More questions to answer, along with my current one: how do we move the leadership certification into a place that is accessible and relevant in every organization as other disciplines and programs? How do we improve the share of mind for coaching?

I believe coaching is foundationally the greatest common language of leadership, love and acceptance on this planet. So as we train others to become masterful in this profession, let us continue to stay curious and nimble in our policies.

The last question I am toying with is how to best advance the professional methodologies – the art and science of coaching – without making coaching something as pedestrian as performance management for leaders? How do we preserve and advance the profession without sucking the life out what it means to be a creative partner and coach? ●

### Pyramid Resource Group’s Coach Competency Progression

Novice	Apprentice	Professional	Master
Coach’s focus is on How I’m doing Gathering information What I “know”	Coach’s focus shifts to Client “I have so much to learn” Finding a mentor	Coach’s focus is on Client development “I know there’s more to learn from clients & others”	Focus is on Client’s movement Access to wisdom “I don’t know how I know”
New identity/role	Mentor/creates identity	Can relate; has own identity	No need for identity
Focuses on solution	Focuses on shifts	Focuses on source	Simply speaks truth
Needs lots of information & assessments	Evaluates assessments and information	Discriminate use of assessments	Hears and assesses what’s most needed
Listens to the story	Hears different stories	Hears equally well what is unspoken and what is said	Hears who the client is being... essence
Low confidence in abilities	Building confidence	Competent & growing confidence	Connected—complete communication
Is prescriptive and reactive	Searches for appropriate responses	Is present and responsive	Gives client access to bigger possibilities
Needs results for the client	Results greater because of lessons from mistakes	Client is responsible for the results	Appreciates and celebrates client’s results
Aware of methodology	Methodology blends with experience	Has ownership of coaching methods	Beyond methodology
Protective	Open	Reflective	Revealing
Information overload	Sorting information	Discerning	No separation—at one
Sells ideas	Seduces	Informs	Attracts
Process thinking	Critical thinking	Mindful of intuition	Intuits
Unconscious incompetence	Conscious incompetence	Conscious competence	Unconscious competence

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