

What is transition coaching? Why would I consider transition coaching? How does transition coaching work? How do I choose a transition coach?

Read this white paper if you want to know more about transition coaching, how it works, its potentials and limitations and if you want to be able to act on the information by the time you are done reading.

Coaching is centered on performance-based psychological principles. Coaching is about evoking solutions and supporting their implementation. Equally important in coaching is **understanding and learning** about a situation, an environment, a setting from different perspectives and weighing alternatives for making sound choices and decisions. **The purpose** of coaching is to allow a coachee to understand their thinking and activate resources to achieving something worthwhile for the coachee.



Transition coaching typically addresses two components¹. The first component is **psychological** in nature and composed of three phases which are firstly, letting go; secondly, an in-between phase (confusing or distressing) and; thirdly, launching into a new situation. The **change component** of transition is situational. Both components are important and vary from person to person and by situation.

Transitions include a variety of situations including: an employee's first international assignment; an expat repatriation, a new position based on a promotion; a position within the context of a merger or acquisition; an employee's role being changed in scope or scale; an employee newly assigned to a task force or key initiative; accelerating a high potential's development, a part of succession development and/or development of the organization's leadership pipeline and a combination of situations.

The role of the transition coach is to provide a supportive, neutral and productive coaching relationship to help and enable the coachee to maximize potential in both a professional and personal capacity while holding the coachee accountable. A transition coach partners with a coachee to focus on excelling in the current career or in seeking a new career choice.

Using a structured approach, a variation of transition coaching² focuses on the **first 100 days of a career transition**. In this setting, the objective is to support the coachee to make smarter and faster decisions to support early successes while enhancing the coachee's support network. The approach creates value sooner and allows the coachee to reach the breakeven point faster. In this approach supporting the coachee during the first 100 days, the coach carefully frames and distinguishes start-up vs. turnaround vs. realignment vs. ensuring success. The approach focuses on 1) mental preparation and promoting the coachee; 2) matching strategy to the coachee's situation; 3) accelerating learning; 4) securing early wins, 5) creating successful coalitions, 6) aligning strategy with culture and team; and 7) maintaining personal balance. This 100-day dynamic transition coaching supports the coachee to understand the corporate context. The coachee and coach work together to avoid overcommitment, confirmation bias, self-serving illusions, optimistic overconfidence. This is valuable in the context of volatility, uncertainty, ambiguity and emotional pressure.

¹ BRIDGES, W. (1991). *Managing transitions: making the most of change*. Reading, Mass, Addison-Wesley.

² Watkins, M. (2003). *The First 90 Days: Critical Strategies for New Leaders at All Levels*. Boston, Mass: Harvard Business School Press.



Cultural coaching can be useful within transition coaching when **norms of behavior and systems of belief and values are diverse**.³ Organizational culture also enters the picture, often without coachees being clear about how it impacts performance. How do variables such as focus and social control impact objectives? How do you effectively influence motivation? Cultural components are often not understood or misunderstood. Coaching is a setting to sort out issues and work out scenarios to a coachee's advantage.

Prior to my certification in intercultural management and organizational culture, despite diverse global experience, I did not understand the importance and impact of geographic culture and organizational culture. Today, with insights, knowledge and training, I am able to support coachees to predict where issues will become contentious and how to manage or avoid possible melt-downs. This area of culture is well researched and scientific evidence and empirical studies abound.^{4 5}

Coaching as a process enables learning and development to occur and thus performance to improve. A coach uses knowledge and understanding of process as well as the variety of styles, skills and techniques that are appropriate to the context in which the coaching takes place. Coaching is different from training. In a best-case scenario, even if a training program has been built by an expert, it will satisfy only general needs. A coach helps coachees learn how to act and behave during specific situations in the workplace. In a coaching process, the key is to let coachees be learners, rather than a coach imposing ways of facing situations. The coaching starting point is positivistic. It is about a person's potential, not just their performance. The foundation to this way of thinking and interacting is trust. With trust, the coach positively influences performance. Coaching is a commonly used **method of employee development** that generates positive business outcomes. A strong coaching culture has been linked to increased business performance and employee engagement.⁶ Coaching is typically used in five areas: 1) improving team functioning; 2) increasing engagement; 3) increasing productivity; 4) improved employee relations; and 5) speeding up leadership development.



For coaching and dialog to be effective, good chemistry between coach and the coachee is needed. The '**chemistry**' conversation is one in which client and coach have a conversation with a view to deciding if they are going to work together. Both parties should feel the relationship can offer the right interpersonal dynamics and 'feel' to create mutual confidence. When **evaluating prospective coaches**, it is useful to look and listen for rapport clues by asking yourself these questions: Does the coach seem empathetic to the

³ Wursten, H., Imfeld, T. Karaffa, M. (2020). Innovation, Agility and Culture. Journal of Intercultural Management and Ethics (*JIME*). Issue No. 3/3 ISSN 2601-5749. Iasi, Romania: CSESM.

⁴ Hofstede, G., & Hofstede, G. J. (2005). Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind. New York: McGraw-Hill.

⁵ LEWIS, R. D. (1996). When cultures collide: managing successfully across cultures. London, N. Brealey Pub.

⁶ Human Capital Institute, in partnership with International Coach Federation. (2016). Building a coaching culture with managers and leaders. Retrieved from http://www.hci.org/files/field_content_file/2016%20ICF.pdf

issues I need to address or the goals I am seeking to achieve?; Does the coach ask about my issues and goals?; Do I feel comfortable discussing my problems or concerns?; Do I get the feeling that the coach is listening and hearing (understanding) me?; Do I feel confident this coach can help me develop in the areas that need to be addressed?; Do I share similar values with the prospective coach?; Does the coach ask pertinent questions such as: What would you like to improve?; Are you open to trying new things?; Can you articulate your strengths and weaknesses? Based on these first impressions, following your instinct is a good rule of thumb. If it does not feel like the “right fit,” continue your search.

To **find your coach**, getting referrals from persons you trust is a good starting point. Other resources include professional organizations, chambers of commerce, employee associations, HR departments, universities and the Internet. Check the coach’s website and review how they present themselves on platforms like Linked-in. With this information, you’ll be able to create a short list of a handful of top candidates. Your next step is to reach out to coaches and schedule a conversation.

There are some limitations and pitfalls related to coaching. Some coachees have less aptitude and interest in self-awareness and personal responsibility, an important pre-condition for successful and effective coaching. Some coaches are not aware of diverse aspects of culture in the workplace which invariably impacts the coachee when the setting is a business organization.

After reading this white paper, you have possibly learned more about transition coaching. If so, that can be satisfying for the both of us. It’s actually a bit like the coaching process. Together we confront the reality of the coachee, deconstruct it, reconstruct it and actively work to make a situation and circumstances more advantageous for the coachee. Coaching is empowering and supports change. The first step to start the process is yours.

About the author and coach

My career and personal development have been influenced by transitions and cross-cultural experiences. From working at Switzerland’s prime global financial institution to leading international sales at a Swiss market maker in visual communication creating 8-figure revenues with fortune 500 companies, transitions have been shaping me. After working as an employee, I created my own company in 2012. As an entrepreneur, I work with clients (companies and self-paying individuals) going through change and transition. I stay agile as a coach, consultant, facilitator and trainer. I’ve earned certifications in coaching, intercultural management, trust and D&I. My M.A. is from FIU in Miami. Growing up in Metro New York and living and working in Switzerland and Germany, I am an open-minded American-European professional with a passion for enabling and supporting my clients. With my German wife and tri-national, neuro-diverse grade-school son, we call southern Germany home.



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