



The science, design and validation behind Coach

Assessment tools often end with the provision of a feedback report to the recipient. These reports summarize the major themes to emerge from the feedback and provide the data in a way that is easy to understand. The premise is that the feedback report lays out a path leaders can take to improve, and the unstated assumption is that leaders will use this information to develop themselves.

This assumption is problematic because it is demonstrably wrong. Multiple experiments in social psychology demonstrate that education alone is insufficient to drive behavior change, even when the need for change is indisputably clear.

This explains why live coaching in the aftermath of upward reviews or 360 assessments is so prudent. Live coaching is very effective, significantly increasing the value of the feedback generated by that assessment. Yet, there is a downside. Live coaching is time-consuming and expensive, and consequently is usually made available to only a small percentage of senior leaders. This leaves the overwhelming majority to develop on their own, despite the scientific understanding that such an endeavor is highly unlikely to produce demonstrable change.

Thanks to its automated delivery of coaching through email, the personalized content of Coach is designed for all leaders – not only those at the very top. However, merely sending content about best practices via email is also unlikely to produce meaningful change. This is why Coach is designed to integrate the principles of behavioral economics, adult learning theory, and the psychology of coaching.

If human beings were perfectly rational, then all leaders would be motivated to change based on the aggregated feedback they receive from their teams and colleagues. All that would be required is an understanding of what and how to make those changes.

In reality, human beings are not perfectly rational. However, irrationality does not equal unpredictability. This is the basis for the emerging field of behavioral economics, which studies human tendencies, biases and irrational choices in the hopes of creating insights into how to motivate and develop people for the better.

For example, consider the construct of loss aversion. It has been scientifically established that human beings are twice as motivated to avoid losses as to secure gains – even when the value of such loss/gain is the same. Therefore, driving the intrinsic motivation of leaders to improve is more effective when framed in terms of future promotions they stand to lose, rather than as future promotions they stand to gain.

Because live coaching is so time consuming and expensive, the vast majority of leaders are left to drive their own development, despite the scientific evidence that such an endeavor is highly unlikely to work.

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Understanding how to leverage these human quirks of behavior means being able to construct guidance that is most likely to be effective. Another example is Adult Learning Theory, which shows that learning in adults is strongly supported by factors like a clear understanding of why and how the learning is important for their future.

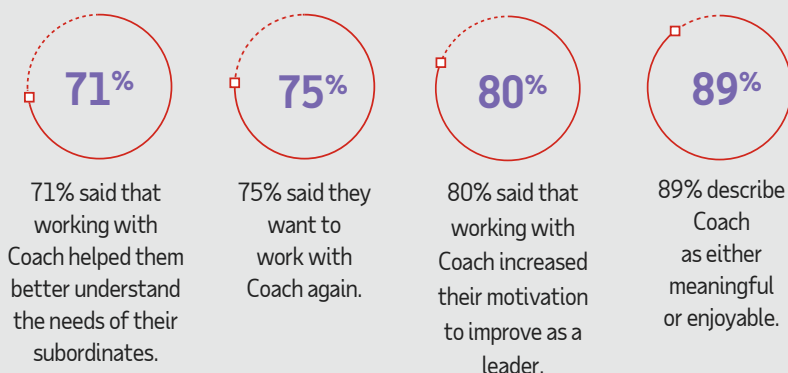
The coaching curriculum is designed to a) utilize techniques that leverage human tendencies, such as anticipating heuristics (mental shortcuts), priming, framing, need for consistency and many others, b) to satisfy the criteria of Adult Learning Theory, with an emphasis on past experiences, self-pacing, rapid application and intrinsic motivation, and c) to employ the basic psychology of coaching, including buy-in, trust, encouragement and repetition.

The most obvious evidence of this design emerges from the fact that suggested techniques and behaviors to improve are not even mentioned until the second half of the curriculum. The first half is instead devoted to framing the importance of development in the particular area and priming the recipient's intrinsic motivation to improve.

Reaction to ADP Coach

ADP deploys Coach across the entire worldwide organization


6,000
Managers



Six months later, leaders saw a

10%* ↑

improvement on the items which they received coaching.

*No score changes on un-coached items.

Beginning in February 2016, ADP has been running Compass and Coach.

A link to unsubscribe to future coaching emails was included in every email. Less than 0.5% unsubscribed.

In surveys and interviews following the end of the curriculum, more than 71% said that working with Coach helped them better understand the needs of their subordinates.

More than 75% said they want to work with Coach again. Almost 80% said that working with Coach increased their motivation to improve as a leader, and 89% describe Coach as either meaningful or enjoyable.

In subsequent administrations (approximately every six months), leaders saw a 10% improvement on the items for which they received coaching, while the scores for the un-coached items remained unchanged. This provides the ultimate validation that Coach is solely responsible for the 10% increase in scores.

Understanding how to leverage the human quirks of behavior means being able to construct guidance that is most likely to be effective, both in driving the intrinsic motivation to improve and in supporting measurable behavioral change.

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1. <https://elearningindustry.com/the-adult-learning-theory-andragogy-1-of-malcolm-knowles>

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