

What is self-coaching, how can individuals and organisations benefit and how can coaches develop clients' capacity to coach themselves?

Rachel Ellison investigates

TALK TO THE EGO



“I’ve become a more flexible, challenging leader,” states one executive after coaching. Another notes: “My company now has a leader who contributes across the business; before I didn’t have the confidence.”

What these executives have in common is that they both self-coached. From greater passion and commitment, to innovative thinking and multiple perspective taking, the impact of self-coaching can be felt both professionally and personally: inside teams, inside the corporate system and in some cases, inside the home: “I’m a more authentic father... these days I really listen to what my children say,” reports another global executive.

So what is self-coaching and how is it important to leaders and their

organisations? And what can coaches do to elicit self-coaching in their clients?

My work-based research project for my master’s in professional executive coaching seemed an ideal opportunity to find out.

As part of the research with i-coach academy and Middlesex University, I carried out semi-structured interviews with former clients of different ages, stages and sectors and from diverse professional, personal and ethnic backgrounds. I first asked them how they would define self-coaching.

Here are some of their answers:

- It’s talking to your ego. It’s thinking about how you are thinking and feeling in order to provide self-guidance on a work issue.
- It’s the difference between chance and active behaviour.
- It’s like having a mini-you on my shoulder thinking what would my coach ask me?

My own definition encompasses a conscious conversation with oneself that elicits new understanding, behaviour or solutions around a

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Learning points

Questions that help clients coach themselves:

- That's a great question, why don't you have a go at answering it yourself? (This was clients' favourite).
- If I weren't here what question would you ask yourself?
- What's your internal dialogue on this?
- What question might I ask you at this point?
- What question are you hoping I won't ask you?
- How do you think that would land for him/her/the other people?
- What reflections have you had since our last session?

individual includes greater self-confidence, passion and motivation. One leader said he now thinks of five solutions to a challenge at work. He then picks the best one. Before, he went with the first thing he thought of. So, deeper, broader, more creative thinking.

● **Teams** Leaders said they felt more trusted and respected by their direct reports. As a result of leaders self-coaching, team members were prioritising better, delivering with passion and feeling empowered and appreciated by their boss.

● **Organisations** Participants believed organisations with leaders who self-coach benefit from more self-responsible leaders who question performance.

● **Home** When these leaders head home, the coaching conversation comes with them: "I'm more honest with myself now. And that's brought more harmony to my relationship with my wife."

Future research could better this result by checking for congruence in leaders' reported improvements in self-awareness, behaviour and outcomes, with how they are experienced by work colleagues, partners, even their children.

As I conducted my research during the global economic crisis, I was curious to see what happens to self-coaching at times of extreme tension. One leader told me: "You can't afford not to self-coach right

now... As accepted wisdoms are being thrown out, leaders must come up with new thinking."

For some clients, the economic crisis has tested their capacity to self-coach: "It's politically too dangerous to share my thinking... so I self-coached and then became so fearful of making the wrong decision, I couldn't commit to action at all."

My final research question focused on what coaches can do to elicit self-coaching in their clients (see *Learning points*).

Other factors that influenced the client's capacity to self-coach included great listening, quality presence and questions that helped clients go deeper emotionally on issues. Trust in the coach as a person and a coach was also mentioned.

Conclusions

My research suggests that self-coaching can bring meaningful, positive outcomes for clients, their teams, organisation and family.

As a result, organisations might test coaches for the "capacity to develop self-coaching in others", as part of their coach selection criteria. Coach trainers and supervisors could raise the bar and do the same. i-coach academy, for example, already includes this as one of its assessment criteria on the PGC and master's programmes.

My hope is that through demonstrating the multiple impacts of self-coaching, the coaching industry can further prove its added value to leaders and those investing in their growth. ■

challenge at work. The conversation could happen inside or outside a coaching session or work.

Deep impact

So what impact did self-coaching have on the study group as leaders? My hypothesis was that the impact might be felt on different levels, ie, personally and across the business. And that helping clients develop their capacity to self-coach had the potential to deliver a greater return on investment – deeper, more sustained and self-sustaining learning – for buyers of coaching.

This is what I found: self-coaching has an impact – invariably, and not always positively – on leaders as individuals, on their teams, their organisations and even at home:

● **Individuals** The impact for the

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