

Adapting While Doing: Leadership Coaching within the Voluntary Sector Context

developed by Anne Wright, Certified Integral Coach and Non-Profit Consultant

613-226-2232

annewright@sympatico.ca

The Ever-Changing Challenges Faced by Voluntary Sector Leaders

It is not "business as usual" in the Voluntary Sector any more. Leading a sound and thriving organization that responds to community needs is still essential, and it is no longer enough. Now, executive directors are expected to stimulate wider community change. A large proportion of today's voluntary sector leaders' time is devoted to larger issues such as community safety, harm reduction, prevention of early school leaving, youth suicide, homelessness. A leader's field of action and alliances does not stop at the walls of their agency, but extends even beyond their sector and to other parts of the country.

While there are a number of core competencies that are foundational to leading a sound organization, there are many skills that can only be learned "on the fly" in response to changing conditions ---- skills like: negotiating with and creating enrollment within large bureaucracies like school boards, various levels of government; maintaining relationship while working positively with conflict; skillfully dealing with differences in culture such that these differences contribute to strength.

The Voluntary Sector Initiative, a national effort sponsored by the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector, identified a range of competencies that today's executive director needs. Table One summarizes these competencies (see appendix).

How Coaching Contributes to the Development of Leadership Competencies

Coaching is one of the most efficient and effective ways of cementing development of new competencies. It is being widely used within private and public sectors across North America and Europe to support "just in time" accelerated learning that moves into reliable action. For new leaders, coaching is used as a powerful accompaniment to leadership skills development workshops that help develop understanding and begin to build skills. Coaching helps what is learned in the classroom take root in real life. For busy seasoned leaders who are moving into greater challenges, or facing conditions in which they are feeling a need to rapidly adapt, coaching can bring renewal and it can widen and extend their range of strengths to bring impactful results.

The kinds of topics that voluntary sector leaders are bringing to coaching include, for example:

- how to stay fully in the game and stay balanced in my life
- how to enroll allies more powerfully

- how to influence others when I'm not in charge
- how to build a stronger team
- how to shift from coordinator to leader of an agency
- how to advocate effectively for change
- how to work with performance issues.

The Nuts and Bolts of Coaching

360 Feedback

Coaching is sometimes combined with 360 Feedback process in the public and private sectors. In a 360 Feedback process, a coach individually interviews 6 - 10 people who currently or have worked with the client in the past to discover their leadership strengths and challenges as seen from those around them. Typically the interviews include peers, direct reports, and superiors. The results of the review are then fed back to the client. This information can give data that can be used to ground a leadership development plan. It can also help people see into blind spots that they currently have - - sometimes we are as blind to our strengths as to our challenges.

One on One Coaching

Coaching is designed to support a leader to address their most important current challenge. An individualized coaching program is designed to enable the leader to become more aware of their current approach to the challenge, to see new possibilities and then to build sustainable new competencies and capabilities to achieve the outcomes they want.

Coaching leaves a client with

- stronger insights, skills and actions that align with those insights and skills
- a capacity to self-reflect which enables them to self-correct and adjust after the coaching relationship has come to an end.

Coaching starts with a conversation for the client and coach to check fit and level of comfort. Then, an intake session (1 - 1.5 hours) follows in which the client and coach clarify the topic the client wants to focus on and the coach learns more about how the client approaches the topic.

The coach then completes an assessment that takes into account a range of aspects of a client's world, both inside and outside, that can include: mind, body, heart, interpersonal dynamics, and structures, resources and tools. The coach then designs an individualized program for the client with goals and competency objectives and a range of capabilities to be developed. The program includes recommendations for the number of sessions required.

A typical program requires 6 months of coaching with sessions lasting about an hour every two weeks. The program will begin with exercises for the client to undertake to begin to enter into their topic in a new way. These exercises require an investment of 15 - 30 minutes or so per day. They often entail the client moving into action in ways that are somewhat awkward or unfamiliar to them, in order to strengthen areas that will help them in relating to their topic differently. It is the combination of practices and reflection and then grounding insight with the coach that leads to sometimes startling rates of change.

ACE-It Peer Coaching

ACE-It¹ peer coaching groups are groups of 5 - 8 colleagues who meet on a regular basis (every 3 - 6 weeks) with a coach. Peer coaching helps build a learning stance and strengthens participants' capacity to ask powerful questions, explore and tap their own knowing. It also widens access to resources, information and approaches to challenging situations. After six sessions with a coach, peer coaching groups are ready to self-facilitate and continue to meet on their own.

Some participants choose to combine peer coaching and individualized coaching with up-front individualized assessments and between-group individual phone sessions. This extends the learning and enables the development of wider competencies while also building strong ongoing peer support.

Action Learning

Another way of learning while in the midst of doing is Action Learning, which combines individual coaching, and group and team coaching and development with a particular project or task that a team is tackling. This has been used successfully as a way to develop new leaders within organizations. The process is designed specifically for your team. Individual coaching occurs concurrently. The coach "envelops" group working sessions with team development exercises and practices, and helps a group learn from their experiences of doing. Debriefing, reflection and individual and group practices are used to generate reflection, insight and adapt and widen approaches. A group needs to be prepared to invest not only time on task, but also time to individual and group development. This can be a very intense and exciting way to learn. Results include: achievement of stronger task results, development of each team member, development of greater capacity within the team to generate effective results in future, development of stronger culture of learning and development within the team.

References

Association of Canadian Community Colleges and the Coalition of National Voluntary Sector Organizations, *National Learning Initiative: A National Skills and Learning Framework for the Voluntary Sector* (2002)

Boshyk, Yury (2002) *Action learning worldwide: Experiences of leadership and organizational development*, New York: Palgrave-Macmillan

Dotlich, David L. and James L. Noel (1998) *Action Learning: How the World's Top Companies are Re-Creating their Leaders and Themselves*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass

Torbert, Bill and Associates (2004) *Action Inquiry: The Secret of Timely and Transforming Leadership*, USA: Berrett-Kohler

¹ ACE It (Analysis, Creativity, Exploration) is a process developed by the Ginger Group for an individual to present their particular challenging situation from their work and to tap a group's wisdom.

Leader Competencies Profile

www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/hr/pdf/nli_brochure.pdf

<p>A. Aspiration and Alignment</p> <p>The competencies in this core area relate to improving life in the community and the world. They enable leaders to achieve the noblest aspirations of the sector – peace, freedom, human rights, opportunity, safety, justice, and removal of poverty and discrimination – while sustaining its leadership in community-based, inclusive and visionary work. Leaders with these competencies excel at building support for a vision in a world of multiple needs. These competencies include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. taking effective and innovative action in the interest of society and working toward policies that positively impact the public 2. developing and winning widespread commitment to the organization's vision 3. providing leadership in dealing with ethical issues 4. dealing effectively with issues larger than the organization itself 5. working well with external partners 6. nurturing a work and organizational environment where learning, in its diverse forms, is ongoing and constant 	<p>B. Strategies & Resource Management</p> <p>The competencies in this core area relate to maximizing day-to-day operations through sound and ethical management practices. Leaders ensure that management practices are responsibly carried out in the best interest of the organization, enabling it to operate efficiently. These competencies include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. maximizing the use of various fund raising approaches and public relations/marketing programs 2. ensuring wise use of funds and resources 3. creating an organizational environment where individuals use creativity and innovation to carry out their responsibilities and respond to challenges 4. effectively using the tools of information technology and research 5. providing leadership in developing plans and evaluating the effectiveness of programs, ensuring widespread involvement from the organization and beyond
<p>C. Relationships</p> <p>The competencies in this category allow leaders to work effectively with people at many different levels to achieve a common vision. They enable the leaders to develop and maintain effective relationships with people inside and outside the organization. They build and effectively use a network of relationships, which fosters collaboration, a climate of trust and resolve. These competencies include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. developing effective interpersonal relationships 2. maximizing the potential of all human resources (staff, volunteers, board members) 3. nurturing an environment where teamwork thrives 4. demonstrating wisdom and care in relationships with a keen awareness of political implications 5. representing the organization effectively as a public persona 6. building and maintaining effective links between individuals, the organization, and the community 7. optimizing the use of communication technologies 8. Optimize the use of all communication technologies 9. building a stronger organization and community by engaging diverse talents, cultures and assets 10. Developing creative approaches to local issues while maintaining a global perspectives 	<p>D. Complexity</p> <p>The competencies in this core area relate to leading voluntary organizations in a complex, interdependent world where change is constant. A leaders with these competencies demonstrates flexibility and adaptability in the face of contradiction and difficulty. He or she easily adapts to change. The focus of the leader is on discerning the patterns of relationships, how they are sustained, how they self-organize and how outcomes emerge in a context that is frequently unpredictable, not merely unknown but unknowable. These competencies include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. responding and being accountable to multiple individuals, organizations and partners 2. understanding the increasing interdependence of organizations and individuals in the community, national and world 3. assessing how economic and political systems relate to the organization and its mission 4. translating theories and knowledge into effective action that helps lead the organization 5. nurturing a healthy organizational and work environment where innovation, creativity and adaptability are valued 6. demonstrating ability to cooperate and compete, according to what is appropriate