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## Executive Book Summaries®

# The Coaching Connection

## A Manager's Guide to Developing Individual Potential in the Context of the Organization

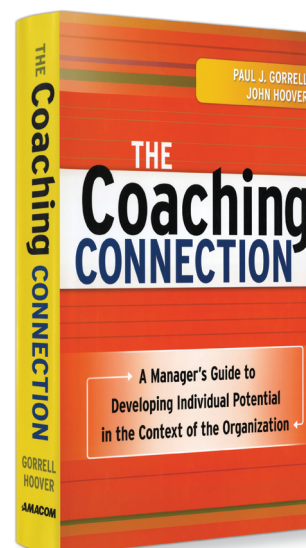
### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

*The Coaching Connection* presents a useful framework for coordinating a coaching culture throughout your organization, whether you're a coach-at-large, a mentor, an onboarding specialist, a career coach, a manager in an advisory/guidance role or an individual being coached. You will become expert in Contextual Coaching, a methodology that can help align what individuals do best with what organizations need most, ensuring a win-win for all involved.

If you are new to coaching, this book outlines the beginning of an exciting journey. If you're an experienced coach, you are about to learn and apply a new systemic model that aligns the growth and development needs of the individual with those of the organization. As the authors say, "Coaching is never only about the organization, nor is it about individuals in isolation. It is about all of it, all of the time."

### IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The single key success factor underlying most positive outcomes in coaching.
- How to align coaching design and execution with organizational strategy.
- A winning formula to address the three critical ways individuals enhance — or inhibit — alignment.
- Methods for dealing with the difficult coaching client.
- How to apply a 360-degree assessment that covers the 10 most essential skill sets of well-balanced, effective leaders.



by Paul J. Gorrell  
and John Hoover

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# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE COACHING CONNECTION

by Paul J. Gorrell and John Hoover

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*The Coaching Connection* by Paul J. Gorrell and John Hoover. Copyright © 2009 by Partners in Human Resources Intl., LLC. Summarized by permission of the publisher, AMACOM, a division of American Management Association, Int'l. 266 pages, \$29.95, ISBN 978-0-8144-1414-9. To purchase this book, go to [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) or [www.bn.com](http://www.bn.com).

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## The Tale of Two Clients, or The Coaching Conundrum

Executive coaching has often in the past been used to remediate damaging behaviors demonstrated by those with enough institutional authority to do significant damage to people and to the organization that employs them.

Anything, such as coaching, that helps managers and executives make good decisions is worth the investment, whether that means turning around a manager's or executive's thinking or involving them in more productive habits, skills and activities.

*The Coaching Connection* is, in part, about connecting the dots between the need for highly skilled, knowledgeable and wise coaches and the exponentially increased benefits of pre-emptive managerial and executive skill and competency building, as opposed to reactive, after-the-fact interventions.

### The Conundrum

Who, then, is the coaching client? Is it the individual or small team receiving the coaching or the organization that is paying for it?

Our final answer: The individual *and* the organization that employs the individual are *co-clients*. We are talking about the growth and development of individuals specifically in how they do their jobs and interact professionally with others now and in the future, both of which are inexorably linked to the well-being of the organization that employs them.

Conundrum solved. The tale of two clients unfolds. The highest value a coach or manager who coaches can bring to the individual or to a small team is to find the place

where the best interests of both converge. Ultimately, if the coaching is successful, the individual's and the organization's interests become one — or as blended as humanly possible. A well-coached employee who has experienced such convergence will be able to articulate how his or her function adds value to the organization.

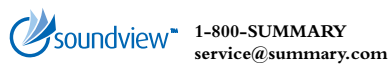
The Contextual Coaching process provides leadership development to everyone who shows potential. All growth and development of your coaching clients take place within the context of the organization. As the coaching progresses, the identity, agenda and priorities of your clients begin to merge with those of the organization, resulting in more continuity and consistent alignment between the organization's needs, the client's needs and ultimately your clients' performance.

### The Benefits of Using the Contextual Coaching Model

The 10 components of the Contextual Coaching model shouldn't be thought of as the 10 Commandments of Coaching. They represent architectural knowledge for a well-balanced organizational leader. However, you should be knowledgeable about all 10 if you want to serve the organization well and help it become an employer of choice filled with well-balanced employees of choice. ●

## A Coaching Culture

Besides generally educating and raising awareness, there are three primary categories within which people contribute to or detract from the success of the organization — three ways they enhance or inhibit the



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alignment between what individuals do best and what their organizations need most: habits, skills and activities.

**Habits.** As coaches, we help our clients discover where, when and how their habits enhance their careers or how they might adopt new ones in order to overcome old behaviors that impede their growth and development.

**Skills.** You can help your coaching clients make better choices in developing and applying their skills/natural talents.

**Activities.** Activities are totally deliberate, chosen because of their functional purpose and strategic benefits.

Change starts with “C,” and so does coaching. There is virtually nothing you will do as a coach that is not about creating or sustaining positive change in your organization. There is nothing individuals do in the coaching process that is not about changing habits, skills and/or activities.

The 10 Contextual Coaching categories, representing competencies in well-balanced leadership, are paired into five dyads as follows:

**Strategy and Structure.** How the organization’s strategy creates an impact on leaders and how they manage relationships across different levels of authority within the structure.

**Culture and Communication.** How cultural markers of the organization create challenges and opportunities and how communication style affects success.

**Talent Systems and Talent Solutions.** The use of processes related to the acquisition, management and succession of talent and the learning and development opportunities created by the organization.

**Development and Dynamics.** Specific areas of individual development for the coaching process and the impact of any change in behavior on the dynamics of the leaders’ team.

**Career and Competence.** The career plan of the leader and the gaps the leader has vis-à-vis the organizational definitions of leadership.

Whether it comes fast or slow, if your clients’ new habits, skills and activities are demonstrably improved, everybody wins. Creating a coaching culture in your organization might mean pushing back the boundaries of everything you have ever thought about coaching and venturing into a space where it is never about either only the organization or about only individuals in isolation. ●

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## The Basics of Contextual Coaching

The idea of working with a client may seem threatening at first. If you are an experienced coach or manager

who coaches, you know the feeling. You also know that your clients just as often feel threatened. Two key points to remember and share with your clients: 1. Executive coaching represents a major investment in your clients. 2. Truly effective coaching must be conducted within the context of your organization.

Confidentiality is the cornerstone of any effective coaching in engagement. Your clients must be assured that what is discussed between the two of you stays between the two of you unless your client decides to share information with others and/or expressly grants you permission to discuss selected information.

### Steps in the Contextual Coaching Process

A well-managed Contextual Coaching process will accelerate the development of your clients’ leadership potential and provide a connection between what your clients do best and what the organization needs most. The program comprises five key stages, each with a specific focus.

**1. Engagement Launch.** This introductory phase begins with a dialogue involving you as the coach, your client’s human resource partner and/or the client’s direct supervisor regarding a general set of objectives for the engagement. Once selected as the coach, in the initial coaching meeting between you and your new client, discuss the coaching process, identifying initial goal(s), make plans for the assessment process and begin to build rapport and trust. In the ensuing sessions, you and your client will focus on initiating the assessment process, often including 360-degree feedback and/or personality assessments.

**2. Assessment and Exploration.** Assessment tools fall into two broad categories: (1) those that guide your clients toward self-knowledge through directed self-insight and (2) those that provide your clients with the objective observations of others (360-degree assessments). These assessments are incorporated into the coaching process early on so that the engagement can be used to address issues that the assessments identify.

**3. Strategy and Goal Setting.** Your clients will be challenged to grow in personal performance as well as leadership capability through a personalized experiential learning process in the Coaching Action Plan.

The plan is further broken down into specific actions and incremental accomplishments that will make the

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individual's progress seem realistic and doable and ensure that your clients are developing in areas that they value.

## 4. Ongoing Development and Reinforcement.

This stage involves several steps:

- Tracking of behavioral changes.
- Ongoing development and reinforcement.
- Modification of goals and strategies to adapt to changing conditions.
- Filing of a midterm report on your client's progress.

**5. Engagement Conclusion.** Here you identify strategies for your client to use in the post-coaching process and roundtable discussions with your clients, HR partners and your client's manager. ●

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## Area of Behavioral Focus: Strategy

Coaching your clients around theoretical strategic planning and execution will produce limited results, benefiting neither the individual nor the organization. The best opportunity and incentive for your clients' growth and development related to strategic thinking, planning and execution takes place in real time and, of course, within the context of the organization.

There are specific behaviors that are part of the Contextual Coaching 360-degree assessment that measures your clients' proficiency in using strategy as a tool:

- Successfully managing resistance to new ideas
- Formulating a strategy related to business goals
- Applying organizational strategy and managing strategic planning within an area of responsibility

One of the main ways to connect Strategy to the Coaching Process is to raise your clients' collective consciousness about how strategy is the fascia tissue that connects their career ambitions to the ongoing well-being of the organization.

### 360-Degree Feedback Questions for Strategy

Sitting and talking through questions and noting the answers (verbal and nonverbal) of your clients and their feedback providers is a terrific way to assess the state of your clients' relationship and mastery of the 10 Contextual Coaching components.

Here are questions specific to strategy that you should ask your clients:

- How would you describe your management of strategic responsibilities?
- Can you provide some examples to illustrate this description?
- Who looks to you for strategic guidance and information related to the company's strategy?

Use the 360-degree feedback data as a global positioning satellite to plot where your clients are now, where you want them to go and any detours that might be encountered along the way. Comparing what you have at present and what you want in the future will provide you with some gaps to be filled. ●

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## Area of Behavioral Focus: Structure

Structure is the way an organization sets up its employees, property and other resources to manage process, determine lines of authority, identify workflow within and between departments and create a management architecture that maximizes opportunity while minimizing risk.

### The Coaching Connection Among Organizations, Individuals and Structures

Structure is an element of the Contextual Coaching model because organizational alignment is an essential element of the company.

In the Contextual Coaching model, structure and strategy are partnered to remind ourselves that organizational structure is not in place for its own sake. The goal of any organization is to think critically about strategy and to determine how the people in the company can best meet the company's goals and objectives. This includes the way people are organized and assigned tasks.

As a coach, your exposing your client to a broad view of organizational structure can provide a roadmap to new levels of success.

### 360-Degree Feedback Questions for Structure

As a means of further assessment, here are questions specific to structure to ask your coaching clients:

Please provide examples of when you worked with people from multiple departments to solve a problem, and describe your role in the process.

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The earlier anyone in the organization starts talking structure, the better. Knowing who is tuned into organizational structure and who is not will ensure that your client's coaching engagement is aligned with your position in the organization's structure. ●

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## Area of Behavioral Focus: Culture

Culture is reflected in the predominant behaviors, beliefs and values characteristic of a particular organization. Not only do humans create culture whenever they organize, but also those cultures can change shape and intensity as individuals at various levels of an organization influence them.

### Why Culture Is Important to the Individual and Organization

Your coaching clients will benefit when you consider how different aspects of the organizational culture will bring success to your clients or present them with obstacles. You can help clients remain adaptable in the face of shifts in culture and also become "culture carriers" who communicate the culture to others through their words and deeds. If an organization wants to maximize the skills, competencies and capacity of its population, there must be a deliberate, methodical effort to synchronize all that the organization members have to offer.

### 360-Degree Feedback Questions for Culture

If your coaching client has direct reports, you want to know how your client's management style supports the strategic imperatives of the organization.

Here are questions specific to culture that you can ask your coaching clients:

- Can you describe any aspects of the culture that challenge your integrity?
- Can you provide examples of change processes in which you have participated?
- When the organization is facing change, what role do you take?
- How do you reflect the cultural values of your organization in your day-to-day work?

You will be able to tell from your clients' answers if they have habits that resonate with the kind of culture your organization is seeking to build. If not, then you play a

vital role in helping them shed counterproductive tasks and replace them with productive habits and new skills. ●

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## Area of Behavioral Focus: Communication

Communication is serious business when it comes to individual and organizational success. Perhaps more than anything else, an organization expresses its culture by the way it communicates.

As a coach, when dealing in the context of culture, you and your client will consider how communication is managed within the organization. Do your clients share information openly or on a "need to know" basis with others above, below and/or beside them on the organization chart? Understanding how an organization communicates internally and externally will help your clients create communication plans for customers at critical times within the execution of coaching strategies.

### Why Communication Is Important to the Individual

As a coach you need to help your clients understand that their career moves, both up and down the ladder, are determined during conversations between people who have the institutional authority to alter careers.

The ability to communicate effectively with direct reports, peers, superiors and customers of all kinds is pivotal to developing the legacy your clients need to succeed.

### 360-Degree Feedback Questions for Communication

- What are some examples of your communication style when essential information is necessary for completing work?
- How do you acquire a sense of where others stand on important matters?

By defining good communication habits like active listening, clear and concise writing, and expressing oneself succinctly, you identify a platform for your clients to build on. If you begin with a conversation about the Contextual Coaching model and show how effective it is in dealing with all 10 components, your clients will surely agree that effective communication is one of the most important.

Your clients can work toward an enhanced skill level that

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will make them more effective in their current jobs and prepare them for expanded responsibilities in the future. ●

### Area of Behavioral Focus: Talent Systems

A talent system is any structured process that helps organizations manage their people; it forms a bridge between the individual and the organization. Through talent systems, employers of choice manage employees of choice across an organization to meet specific goals like talent acquisition, retention, career management and succession.

Talent systems are sometimes known as performance-management systems. These are some examples of generalized talent systems processes: talent acquisition, career management, performance management, potential management, succession planning, rewards and recognition, compensation, and health and well-being.

As a coach or a manager who coaches, you need to help your clients continuously seek optimal balance in their emerging leadership styles and delivery. Mastering talent systems is part of their complete balance as leaders and effective team members.

#### 360-Degree Feedback Questions for Talent Systems

As a means of further assessment, here are questions specific to talent systems to ask your clients:

- Can you give examples of how the management of talent is a major investment of time, energy and focus for you?
- How do you acquire a sense of where others stand on important matters?
- How do you give people the feedback on their performance that will help them do a better job?

The very act of exploring these topics with your clients and gathering data about them will heighten your clients' awareness of the many hats a manager must wear. If your client is on track to become a manager, this is a good opportunity for your client to learn about talent systems in the context of the organization. ●

### Area of Behavioral Focus: Talent Solutions

Talent systems define, measure and monitor the raw and experienced talent that talent solutions develop and optimize. More and better talent solutions based on ever-evolving definitions of needs, new measurements and feedback provided by talent systems can keep individual and organizational learning alive and growing. Solving a talent challenge can be seen in three prongs of the talent solutions fork: new knowledge, restorative knowledge and enhancing knowledge (making something better).

#### Talent Solutions in Perspective

Talent solutions can be put into the context of sales and customer service. The term “solution selling” involves convincing customers that it is in their best interest to buy into a solution that offers a people-based advantage. In a solutions world, investment in product development should be matched with a corresponding investment in staff development, of which your coaching activities are a part.

#### 360-Degree Feedback Questions for Talent Solutions

As a means of further assessment, here are questions specific to talent solutions to ask your coaching clients:

- Can you give examples of times when you have provided learning opportunities for members of your team?
- How have you assigned job responsibilities that might have caused difficulties or dissensions within your team?

You will use your clients' answers to see how well their understanding and perspectives on talent solutions align with yours. Then you will use the answers your clients' feedback providers provide to see how the three perspectives align and where the gaps exist. ●

### Area of Behavioral Focus: Development

For our Contextual Coaching purposes, “development” encompasses three main activities: training, education and development. Development is a holistic approach to improve and enhance everything professional about your

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clients for current and future benefit of your clients and the organization.

## Developmental Change is Simple – Not Easy

There are two things required before people will change and develop: People will participate in change, support change and even champion change if they think they (1) will be happier with the new outcome than they are with the present situation and (2) believe the change is possible. Participants can discuss their challenges, receive assessment that provides self-insight, build an action plan for change and reflect on behaviors and relationships that impede success. Coaching is the most successful individual-development activity.

## 360-Degree Feedback Questions for Development and How to Use the Responses

Here are questions specific to development to ask your coaching clients:

- What areas of individual development are most important for you in this process?
- How open are you to feedback from others in the organization when individuals communicate concerns, feedback and/or advice?

You will explore where your clients struggle when trying to execute the activities associated with growth, if their development plans resonate with the objectives of the organization, and how they can shift focus from the tactical tasks of the moment to what will be needed in the future.

You need to state that planning and executing their own development plan is a large part of what they're getting paid for. A strong, well-developed leadership team is essential for the organization's future. ●

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## Area of Behavioral Focus: Team Dynamics

Team dynamics is the study of how teams influence the environment in which they exist and how teams are influenced by their environments. A team can be united by a common cause, a goal or an objective, which may be short term or long term, official or unofficial, naturally forming or synthetic. As a coach you can discuss these elements of team dynamics with your clients:

**Working Style.** You can calculate the composite personality of the team by considering the individual personalities through a personality assessment.

**Interrelationships of team members.** These include histories of work experiences and the ways in which team members form alliances.

**Group Knowledge and Experience.** The way a team uses its competencies and balances the power dynamics can determine the team's level of success. As a contextual coach, you need to observe your clients leading teams.

**Level of Clarity in Roles and Responsibilities.** You must conduct critical conversations with your clients about how important it is that a team make fullest use of the skills individuals bring to the process and that a team create an equitable balance in the work expected of individual members.

## 360-Degree Feedback Questions for Team Dynamics and How to Use the Responses

- Can you provide examples of how you engage the team that reports to you?
- Can you describe the best and worst team meeting that you have attended in the past year?

Do not get caught in your clients' defensiveness. Not all of your clients will defend themselves unreasonably against critical feedback. However, some will. Be prepared. It is perfectly natural for human beings to be, at the very least, nervous about receiving feedback. Never take the position that, since everybody seems to think your clients have problems, they are a problem. Gaps can be corrected with perception-altering behaviors. ●

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## Area of Behavioral Focus: Career

Your clients' careers and professional futures are the culmination of the balanced abilities you help them acquire through the Contextual Coaching model. Career development is a strategic practice to fortify the enterprise while at the same time providing practical career development to your clients. Companies have merged career planning with talent management and employee development as a retention strategy. Companies are also providing processes for internal mobility through which individuals can identify open roles inside the company and create career plans that follow organizational templates. As with talent solutions,

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you as the coach need to help map out your clients' career-development opportunities. You might focus on how to build a deeper network of relationships or on how to close experience gaps in your clients' resumes.

## Why Career Is Important to the Individual and to the Organization

If employees experience opportunities for growth and career planning, they feel more in control of their future. As well, career expertise provides employee engagement and greater loyalty, which translates into effective performance. A key benefit from career development is the employment brand, a magnet that attracts new talent because the organization is known in the marketplace as a great place to work. In short, when people are the most important resource within an organization, developing them for future roles is a wise investment.

## 360-Degree Feedback Questions for Career and How to Use Those Responses

Here are questions specific to career to ask your coaching clients:

- What are your ultimate career goals?
- What is your plan to attain those goals?
- What is your commitment to the career aspirations of others?

The internationally acclaimed professional photographer Dewitt Jones said that we must all place ourselves in the “place of greatest opportunity” if we are to reap the rewards that opportunity offers. That is his message to your clients: Prepare constantly so that you will be recognizably ready when the opportunity to move up presents itself. Your clients need your help to navigate the uncharted waters of career mobility and to negotiate their way toward maximum career success for themselves and for the organization. ●

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## Area of Behavioral Focus: Competence

Competence is at the very core of your clients' abilities to add value to the organizational equation. Beyond the organization at large, competence relates to the ways in which our field, marketplace and competitors identify

standards for career potential. As a coach you can help your people understand competence on the company level, and you can measure progress against goals, hire the right folks and promote people with potential.

## 360-Degree Feedback Questions for Competence

- What is the most constructive feedback you have received regarding competence?
- What gaps do you believe exist between how you view your competence and how the organization views leadership competence?
- What are some examples of how you plan to close these gaps?

Coaching using the Contextual Coaching process is the only way to achieve total and unquestionable success for the individual and the organization. ●

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## Epilogue

As you coach, you are riding the cutting edge in individual and organization development because the most remarkable and sustainable organizational improvements take place one person at a time.

Never forget that you are “never not communicating.” Make sure everything about how you do your work and everything you preach to others reflects the impact that coaching has made in your job and your career.

The power of the Coaching Connection begins with you and resides at that critical juncture where you embrace what is best for you and what is best for the organization in the same moment and in the same context. Although you might eventually retire from it, the work of a contextual coach is never done. ●

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### RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The Coaching Connection*, you'll also like:

1. ***The Fearless Front Line*** by Ray Attiyah. Learn to use the Run-Improve-Grow model to stimulate a culture of growth and continuous improvement.
2. ***Follow This Path*** by Curt Coffman and Gabriel Gonzalez-Molina. Backed by Gallup research, Coffman and Gonzalez-Molina describe how organizations should value and develop relationships with their employees and customers.
3. ***The Learned Disciplines of Management*** by Jim Burkett. Burkett presents a framework of individual disciplines that form a self-reinforcing management system for making the right things happen.