

My First Year as a Coach: Reflections from the Front Lines During a Historic Crisis

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Nothing like a good pandemic to push me over the edge. I'd been wanting to make the leap from fulltime C-Suite executive to leadership coach for several years. I put my dream of my career encore into the universe. My personal network was supportive – not quite sure what I was thinking, but happy to root me on, nonetheless. My professional network, my employer, was 100 percent supportive working with me to find the time for the grueling 6-month training program and agreeing to contract with me for coaching clients post completion of the program. July 17, 2020, I made the leap. Here's what I learned about myself and what I learned from my clients. If you're a new coach, here's some lessons to short circuit that learning curve.

Lesson #1: There is a Very Generous Community of Coaches – Lean on Them

I graduated from one of the top leadership training programs in the country, but I actually never left. I am surrounded by my classmates and hundreds of alumni who stay closely connected. The resource rich environment is truly never ending and has been the reason I am able to continue my work. I get ideas, I get answers, I get solutions, I get and get and get – from this community. Stay connected. It's a lifeline.

Lesson #2: Be a Mentor to Others

Because no opportunity has ever come my way without someone opening a door for me, I am religious about doing the same for others. Besides helping anyone who reaches out to me, I make it my practice to find people who might need help. For example, I signed up to be an ambassador for my training program. Secret: I learned more from those who "wanted to pick my brain" than they learned from me. More on that later. My former boss always advocated: Role Models and Mentors: Find one and be one.

Lesson #3: Find Your Rhythm

What works for me, may not work for you. Find your rhythm – the cadence of sessions, the number of clients, the amount you'll charge, your niche. When you're in the groove, you'll know it because it'll be like an old pair of shoes: comfortable and time to look for a new pair to stay current.

Lesson #4: Change Up Your Game

Staying current means re-evaluating – taking it to the next level. Take the time to take stock of what worked well and what could be improved. Be honest in your assessment of your own performance and ask your clients for feedback. Don't be shy about sharing with your clients that you're going to do things differently because of what feedback they gave you. Fill them in

on the fact that you're upping your game and trying to get better yourself. Thank them for teaching you.

Lesson #5: Your Clients Will Teach You More than You Can ever Teach Them

My clients take me to school every day. I've learned about diversity, equity, and inclusion from every client I've coached. Recognizing leadership gaps and their causes has been something my clients and their sponsors teach me regularly. I become proficient at recognizing cultural deficits. How? By listening. When you're listening, you're learning.

Lesson #6: Create Daily, Weekly Habits aka Read, Read, Read and then Read Some More

I don't have a lot of habits, but reading is one of them. I read voraciously. I have FOMO when it comes to newsletters, new leadership books, articles, webinars, and conferences. I challenge you to share an HBR article with me that I haven't already read, catalogued in my library, and shared with clients. It's served me well and I can honestly say I have never regretted the time I spent reading.

Lesson #7: Get Comfortable with Being A Businessperson

If you don't like negotiating rates, contracts, putting together proposals – get over it. Tap into those networks and communities of coaches. Ask around what others are charging and then practice on your current clients. I've never quoted a rate that wasn't accepted...at least eventually. I may not always get my asking price, but when it comes time for a renewal, if I've earned my way to a second contract, the rates follow.

Lesson #8: Know Why You Are Here

In the end, we all need meaning and purpose to live fulfilling and joyful lives. I may not have made the leap into becoming a leadership coach had it not been for the historic crisis of the pandemic in 2020. Once I jumped, I was only able to stay afloat because I knew my purpose: to take my 40+ years of experience, lessons learned, skills honed, hills climbed and put them to good use. For me that meant being a valuable partner to my clients in their journey to becoming effective leaders.