

# The Maturation of a Coach



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## ***Introduction***

In our work at Hudson, we've spent three decades providing a year-long learning experience designed to equip leaders and other professionals to engage in developmental coaching. Over these three decades, we've had an opportunity to observe and learn about the essential elements that facilitate an emerging maturation process of a coach. Maturation is a journey requiring far longer than a year-long learning experience; in fact, it is an ever-evolving process for any coach committed to doing their best work. Unlike many fields, the nature of coaching is highly relational and requires much more than a set of tools, some great inquiries, and assessments, to facilitate development and meaningful change for the coachee.

The relational nature of the coaching work necessitates a coach's ability to use oneself as an instrument in the work and it's impossible for a coach to do this well without knowing oneself. Each of us is a product of our culture, racial identity, family systems, and social contexts. These complex forces are the basis upon which we unwittingly construct our individual narratives as we grow up. *Our narratives become the basis for how we make sense of our world and, inevitably, our narratives limit how we show up in the world and interpret what happens in the world of work, relationships, conflicts, and the nuances of life.*

An important part of a coach's maturation lies in exploring one's narrative, appreciating the origins, and pushing the old boundaries and well-worn habits of it to expand one's capacities and continually broaden one's perspectives and meaning making.

Coach supervision provides a valuable medium for a coach's evolving maturation because the emphasis in coach supervision is on the coach's development, the coach's awareness, their capacity to continually broaden their perspective, and their use of self. Hawkins and Smith (2006) describe three main functions of coach supervision as developmental, resourcing, and qualitative. The developmental function occurs by reflecting on the supervisees' work with their clients. Hawkins and Shohet (2012) suggest four ways the coach is likely to develop: "to understand the client better; to become more aware of their own reactions and responses to the client; to understand the dynamics of the interactions between themselves and their clients; and to look at how they intervened and the consequences of their interventions" (p.64).

## ***The Coach's Journey***

The recognized path in becoming a leadership coach begins by accruing years inside organizations at several levels of leadership, followed by a rigorous and accredited coach training program that ultimately leads to various levels of credentialing through well-regarded organizations like ICF and EMCC.

Upon completion of an accredited program, a coach is equipped with key skills and competencies, a coaching methodology, theories, concepts relative to the work of coaching, sufficient mentor-observed coaching, and coaching practice to provide the new coach with a clear sense of their own continued development.

Rather than an ending, this completion marks the beginning of the maturational journey of a coach. The journey has both a sequential and interactive nature that allows a coach to deepen their capacity to become aware of and able to manage one's internal landscape, broaden one's use of self, deepen one's awareness of what the client brings to the interaction, simultaneously see multiple layers of interaction, deliberately practice the conscious use of self on behalf of each particular client's needs, and expand one's view of the entire system at play.

## ***The Progressive Nature of Maturation***

This progressive nature in our maturation as human beings has been studied in other fields well before coaching emerged; and theories and studies of the past provide a helpful backdrop for understanding what is uniquely developmental about the maturation of a coach.

Torbert and Kegan represent two well-known theorists in the field of adult development who base their work on a constructive development theory tracking the progression of one's meaning making and complexity management capacities ranging from early-stage maturation of a self-focus to an increasing capacity to comprehend and make meaning through a broadening lens. Both theorists offer a view of adult development that holds the possibility of continual growth in one's ability to make meaning and consider perspectives with increasing complexity and a deepened sense of one's agency.

Torbert conceives of three categories of progressive development equipping a leader to react with increasing complexity when their power or safety is challenged. The first stage is pre-conventional, representing a dependent frame of mind, followed by a conventional mind, able to think and make meaning with a greater sense of independence, and finally, an interdependent frame of mind, capable of operating within higher levels of complexities.

Kegan's work examines the successive layers of social maturity in adults, allowing one to develop from a simple understanding of the social world to an increasingly complex frame of mind. He focuses on the adult's orientation to authority and perspective-taking across the 'adult forms of mind' and examines four sequential layers of development. These four layers range from the sovereign form where authority lies outside self and a concreteness of thought exists, to the socialized form where other perspectives can be considered, to the self-authoring form where an ability to hold other's perspectives allows for ease in managing conflicting points of view, to the rarest form, the self-transforming wherein the capacity to see multiple perspectives simultaneously and with considerable ease exists. Each successive layer allows a leader to manage more complexity in interactions and in conceptual thinking.

Torbert and Kegan apply their work in the field of leadership, studying both the limitations and the growing capacities of leaders to manage complexities in their relationships, their strategic thinking and their consideration of ambiguous possibilities depending upon their level of development. They offer case studies that underline the challenges a leader faces when their own development is stuck in the early stages of more simplistic forms of thought.

## ***The Relevance of Constructive Development Theory for Coach Development***

The research and conceptual frameworks in the field of constructive development bares relevance to our understanding of the layers of development in play for a leadership coach. First, Kegan and Torbert's work confirms the potential for the progressive nature of development across the adult years. Second, their work suggests a sequential nature to development, even while the layers are overlapping, and circumstances might cause one to revert to an earlier layer of development. Third, both provide frameworks that demonstrate the relationship between progressive development and increased capacities as leaders in our complex work.

While both Kegan and Torbert were focused on understanding the impact levels of development had on the individual's ability to lead effectively, the question of how one's development impacts the work of a coach began to emerge. Otto Laske applies Kegan's work to the field of coaching examining the dynamics at play when a coach operates at a lower level of development than their client. He made a case that a coach cannot successfully coach an individual who is at a higher level of development than their own, stressing that our way of "making meaning" within each stage is so ingrained that it's impossible to consider that there might be a different, higher state view. His early research examining the impact of a coach's development marked the beginning of more research and frameworks to help us understand what is required in a coach's development to be effective in their work.

## ***Maturation Models Specific to Coach Development***

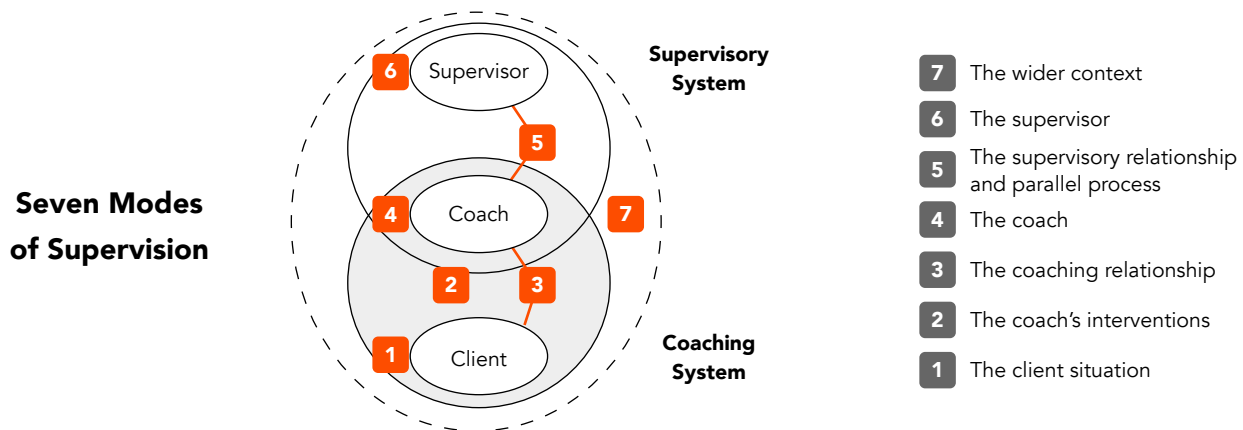
Megginson and Clutterbuck (2009, 2016) developed a model specifically focused on coach maturity and articulated four mindsets which the supervisor can identify through the observation of the sorts of questions the coach asks about their work. Their model tracks a sequential developmental progression leading to maturity.

| Coaching Approach | Style      | Critical Questions  |
|-------------------|------------|---|
| Models-based      | Control    | How do I take them where I think they need to go? How do I adapt my technique or model to this circumstance?  |
| Process-based     | Constrain  | How do I give enough control to the client and still retain a purposeful conversation? What is the best way to apply my process to this instance?   |
| Philosophy-based  | Facilitate | What can I do to help the client do this for themselves? How do I contextualize the client's issue within the perspective of my philosophy or discipline?   |
| Systems eclectic  | Enable     | Are we both relaxed enough to allow the issue and the solution to emerge in whatever way they will? Do I need to apply any processes at all? If I do, what does the client context tell me about how to select from the wide choices available to me? |

Megginson and Clutterbuck (2009) Four Stages of Coach Maturity

Bachkirova's (2011) work in developmental coaching places an emphasis on use of self as instrument, stressing the importance of the practitioner's development and writes *"It is the coach as a person, rather than the application of particular techniques or methods, that makes a difference in coaching practice."* Bachkirova underscores that with each new layer of development, the coach expands her ability to see and understand more aspects of themselves and their clients.

Hawkins and Shohet (2012) pull the developmental progression thread through Hawkins' well-known Seven-Eyed coach supervision model, noting that early in the supervisee's development the focus is on Mode 1, the client, wherein the supervisor is helping the supervisee "to attend to what is, rather than to premature theorizing and over-concern with their performance." Once this terrain has been thoroughly developed, it is possible to move to Mode 2, where the focus is on examining the coach's interventions. They further note "as the supervisees become more sophisticated, then Modes 3 through 7 become more central to the supervision." Hawkins and Shohet (2012) create a coach's developmental model by examining four major stages of supervisee development. Their model progresses from self-centered to client-centered; laying the groundwork for the integrative stages of process- or relationship-centered and context-centered.



## ***The Use of Self as Instrument***

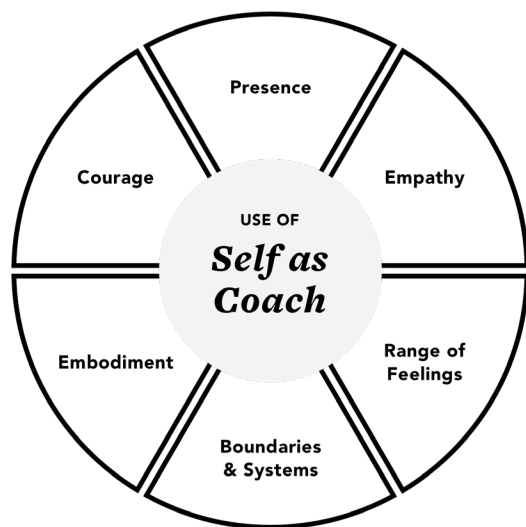
Use of self refers to a wide range of capacities such as presence, empathy, boundary management, systems thinking, the domain of feelings, and the capacity to be courageous. Use of self also implies an awareness and management of one's shadows. If one is drawn to coaching out of a wish to be needed, a desire to solve others' problems, a particular enjoyment of rescuing another, or a sense of superiority, these shadows will impact the coaching work and without conscious attention, make it difficult to effectively use oneself as a coach.

A common topic in coaching that perfectly embodies use of self is the question of when to share with one's coaching client and what to share. Early in a coach's work, it is common to share common experiences without noticing or considering the impact this might have on the coaching work. Sometimes a novice coach believes it puts the client at ease; some early coaches simply get drawn into the client's story and want to share what they have done or learned in this regard. Yet, once a coach begins to develop a conscious use of self, they will

find themselves able to pause, step back and ask themselves questions that will alter how they might unconsciously proceed. Self-inquiries might include asking oneself questions like: *How would my sharing alter the course of our work or our exploration?* or *Can I recognize my motivation to share?* Use of self requires heightened awareness, regular reflection, an understanding of one's own shadows, and a commitment to one's own growth as a coach.

## ***Hudson Research on Coach Maturation***

In 2018 our Hudson Supervision Center conducted research on the coach supervisee's developmental journey using the conceptual framework of our 'use of self' model.



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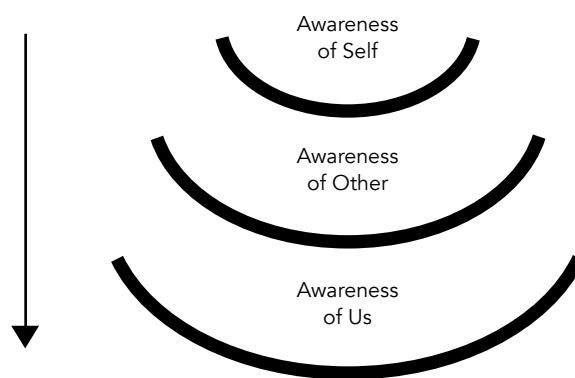
## ***Sixty Coach Supervisee Respondents, Three Levels of Experience***

Sixty coach supervisees participated in the study and were grouped (by years in group supervision) into three clusters including: early-stage supervisees (1-2 years of group supervision); mid-stage supervisees (3-4 years of group supervision); and later stage supervisees (5+ years of group supervision). All participants were asked a series of questions (combination of open-ended, multiple choice and yes-no) about how the group supervision experience had strengthened their capacities as a coach. They were asked to reflect upon the 'use of self' model and reflect on which of the six areas they had experienced the most growth. They were asked to give specific examples of how this growth was experienced by them in their coaching engagements.



## ***The Developmental Progression of Presence***

The area of growth cited most frequently by all participants in the study was that of Presence. Upon close examination of thematic patterns, what emerged was a maturational progression in the capacity to be present when examined in the early, middle, and later stage supervisee groups. This progression was separated into three levels that represented a developmental progression that was both of an interactive and nested nature. The levels included:



### **Level One: Self Awareness**

Characterized by a presence focused on oneself, including: *What's happening in me? How am I doing? Am I adding enough value for my client? My critic is getting in the way. I notice my expectations around progress get in my way of being present. I keep using my own life experiences as the frame of reference. I notice how much I want to help my client feel better. I'm noticing how my natural 'upbeat' outlook gets in the way of meeting the client where they are.*

This level is represented by the coach's reference to self in their development and includes anxiety about how the work is going, how they are doing in the work, and concerns about adding value. This level also finds the coach listening to the client's situation through the coach's own narratives, biases, judgements, and experiences.

### **Level Two: Client Awareness**

Characterized by an ability to manage self-awareness and become attuned to the client nuances. *What's happening with my client? What is she experiencing and needing?*

This level is represented by the coach's reference to the client and a growing attention to the other and all that can be observed. At this level the coach appears more equipped to notice and

manage biases and judgements of her own that might interfere with understanding her client's experience.

### **Level Three: Relationship Awareness**

Characterized by increasingly interactive levels of awareness that allow the coach to notice the nuances of: *how coach and client are working together in dialogue and in exploration.*

This level is represented by a synthesis of self-awareness and client awareness, allowing the coach to begin to explore the nuances of the interaction together. Increased attention is placed on 'the dance' more than the 'dancers.' At this level, the coach can explore and consciously use dynamics that arise in the dance between supervisor and supervisee.

## ***Time, Attention, and Supervision Deepening Levels of Presence and Use of Self Agility***

In this study with 60 participants, the coach's development in this study spans several years before supervisees reach a layered awareness at all three levels. It is also notable that the first level, awareness of self, comprises much of the developmental work identified by those in the early-stage supervisee group. The progression to awareness of the client followed by the integrative awareness of the interaction is only evidenced in this study after 2-4 years of supervision. This finding may suggest coach supervision that allows a supervisee to travel the developmental journey from novice to maturity takes several years to achieve. The early self-referential focus appears to be a predictable early stage that is present for at least two years as the dominant area of development and only as that begins to recede does the coach move to a growing awareness of other, and finally, the relationship.

| <b>Early Stage Supervisees</b><br>(1 - 2 years in coach supervision)  | <b>Mid Stage Supervisees</b><br>(3 - 4 years in coach supervision)   | <b>Late Stage Supervisees</b><br>(5+ years in coach supervision)   |
|---|--|--|
| <p><b>Awareness of Self</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ <i>How am I doing?</i></li> <li>+ <i>Am I adding value?</i></li> <li>+ <i>Am I asking the right questions?</i></li> <li>+ <i>Does my client like me?</i></li> <li>+ <i>I have judgements about my client</i></li> <li>+ <i>I have judgements about myself</i></li> </ul> | <p><b>Awareness of Self</b></p> <p><b>Awareness of Other</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ <i>I've grown focused on my client's story</i></li> <li>+ <i>I recognize what is mine and what is my clients'</i></li> <li>+ <i>I am able to notice subtle somatic shifts in my clients</i></li> </ul> | <p><b>Awareness of Self</b></p> <p><b>Awareness of Other</b></p> <p><b>Awareness of Synergy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ <i>I sense more fluidity in my coaching</i></li> <li>+ <i>I see myself as the instrument, not the solution</i></li> <li>+ <i>I am aware of what is unique about our 'dance' as a coach and client and we can learn from that</i></li> </ul> |

## ***Reflective Inquiry Tools to Support Coach Maturation***

Whether in coach supervision or inside one's own reflective practices, what we know about change and development is that it is impossible to change something we can't observe in ourselves. The reflective inquiries below provide prompts to observe more with the hope that in doing so we set the stage to encourage the maturation process.

### **Awareness of Self: Inquiries for the Early-Stage Coach**

The reflective practices before and following each coaching session are where a coach can accelerate awareness and support growth. This territory is gold, so resist any urge to skip over it and instead, use it well.

#### **Pre-session Reflections:**

- + *Name Your Worries:* Name your worries before stepping into a coaching session because naming them diffuses some of the power in the worries and often allows you to consciously put the worries 'on the shelf' for a bit.
- + *Shift Your Internal Reward System:* remind yourself (and post this note in a prominent place!) your job is not to solve problems; your value is increasing the client's awareness so they can make meaningful changes

#### **Post-session Reflections:**

- + How did I shift my internal reward system? Did it help to remind myself that my work is not solving problems for my client?
- + What inner chatter was I most aware of during the coaching session?
- + Was I able to quiet some of the inner chatter? How?
- + Was I able to observe how my inner chatter interfered in any ways with the focus of the coaching?

### **Awareness of Self, Awareness of Other: Inquiries for the Mid-Stage Coach**

#### **Pre-Session Reflections:**

- + *How Can I Notice the Nuances:* How can I strengthen my awareness of the client – their somatic nuances, words, phrases, emotions – in this session?
- + *Commit to Staying a Little Longer:* How can I draw attention to these awarenesses and observations, inviting exploration with the client?
  - *I notice how often you use the words 'it's just who I am' (or whatever you are noticing!) and I wonder what those words mean for you? I wonder how that phrase impacts you? I wonder where that comes from?*

- *I wonder if I could interrupt for a second and share what I'm noticing?*
- + **Continue to Give Voice to My Worries:** Name my worries before stepping into a coaching session. You are likely noticing your ability to manage inner chatter is growing, but it will inevitably continue to show up, you'll just get stronger at self-managing.

**Post-Session Reflections:**

- + Where was I able to share any observations? What was the impact?
- + Were there times I was able to stay a little long when I shared an observation?

**Awareness of Self, Awareness of Synergy: Inquiries for the Later-Stage Coach**

**Pre-Session Reflections:**

- + What is the dance that occurs with this particular client?
- + What happens in our interaction that is unique and worthy of highlighting? (i.e., client comes seeking my advice and my temptation is to offer it; client vents at length and I simply stay put and listen; client seems a little helpless and I'm drawn into rescuing, etc.)
- + How might I make better use of our dance in this upcoming coaching session?

**Post-Session Reflections:**

- + Was I able to observe our dance and bring it into the coaching so we could learn from it? An example of 'bringing it into the session:'
  - *I notice we have a repeating dynamic that might be useful to explore a bit – up for it? Often in our sessions you ask me for my advice or 'what would you do?' and I find myself wanting to help by offering my advice even though I know it won't be what serves you best. Do you notice this pattern?*
  - *I wonder if the drive to ask for advice is unique to our relationship or something you are aware of elsewhere?*
  - *I wonder if we could experiment with changing up the dance a bit.*

A coach's views and interventions are limited or enhanced by their ability to observe at these three levels – self, other, and synergy. A coach's capacity to enable a client in gaining a broader view of themselves, opening the door to unlocking meaningful changes, is strengthened through this evolving maturational journey. How does a coach cultivate this ability to observe at several levels? Is a reflective practice sufficient? Is this an ethical commitment a coach ought to make to be equipped to do their best work?

Our growing understanding that a coach's maturation requires time, practice, commitment, and reflection surely makes a case for the power of regular coach supervision as an essential, and, potentially ethical practice that ensures one's continual development and enhances one's current capacities.

