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Dear Reader,

What does it take to be a good coach? Amazon's virtual bookshelves are filled with books on coaching. Actually today it displayed 17,099 results! Reading makes for good education, practice helps in the training, and wisdom received from those who are more experienced is priceless.

This month one of LIM's founding partners, Tony Pearson from New York, shares extracts from an article of his personal reflections on what he has learned as a coach. Click [My Journey As A Coach](#) to read the full article.

Enjoy the reading,

Isabel Rimanoczy
Editor

Quote of the Month

*"The only things worth learning are the things you learn
after you know it all."*

Harry S. Truman
(1884-1972, U.S. President)



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My Journey As A Coach

By Tony Pearson

My development as a coach continues, and it is a journey that still excites, challenges and nourishes. Here are learnings that are important to me.

1. Globalization and the international consultant

The 'I' in LIM stands for 'International', which means that much of the work we do is outside North America which, for me, makes it most exciting.

a) *Nothing is as thrilling to me as cross-cultural work with global teams.*

It galvanizes and challenges me to coach teams consisting of several different nationalities. It requires sensitivity, awareness and skills gained through years of experience, reading and insights. Here are some key things I have learned in my 27 years of international consulting and coaching.

o *Find a 'guide' when working with people of different nationalities*

I make it a point to talk to other coaches from the countries involved to get hints on how best to work with their countrymen, because there are nuances in national characters that are not obvious to outsiders. What are their likes? Dislikes? 'Hot buttons'? How do they prefer to learn?

o *Non-American audiences are often willing to give us credibility*

The US business model has global recognition, and US-based consultants benefit from this. Now, this attitude is something to be aware of, because it means that overseas clients are often disposed to let us do something that is unfamiliar to them, and allows us to get teams to try new behaviors and new ways of thinking.

b) *"I speak English" has several meanings.*

The global business language, at least for the moment, is English. It is essential that English-speaking coaches remain aware that every person has a different level of competence in English. It might be their second, or even third, language; and that it is important to stay away from slang and humor until you know the audience better.

Observation. Some people, especially from Asian countries, will not ask you to slow down or speak more clearly because they fear the request might cause you to lose face. You have to find out a way to get that feedback from them.

c) *We have an obligation to prepare to work in other countries.*

Global consultants must show respect for the citizens of the country they are working in. Before I go to work in another country, or with a team that has members from other countries, I always do basic research on those nations. It is simply respectful to know the name of the President and/or Prime minister of the country; the languages they speak; the name of the currency and exchange rate; what sport they follow; the names of leading sports people.

d) *When working internationally you are always a guest.*

It is critical to observe local traditions — particularly when disagreeing with them! When I work in Spain, I have to take care not to speak my mind about bull fighting which I hate. One member of a team I coached, had a father who was one of the most famous photographers of bullfights in the country. I had to keep quiet.

e) *Be aware of the part that religion plays in another country.*

When I work in Muslim countries, it is important to ask the audience when they have to have breaks during the day for prayers. It is easy to arrange the schedule around those prayer times. Always ask when visiting other countries.

f) *National culture can be an extraordinarily powerful dividing force.*

Differences in national culture can lead to potential problems. I have worked in countries where the team members say, "We are all Europeans (or Asians, or Latinos) so we don't need to have any cross-cultural exercises!" The interesting thing is that presidents of client companies ask us to include exercises that surface national differences. One can never know too much about neighboring countries.

g) *Working in another language is difficult and exhausting. Remember that.*

Coaches whose first language is English can forget it is tiring for participants to work for a whole day in another language. While I knew this intellectually, it wasn't until I had to do with a West African Francophone team it that I felt it viscerally.

2. Handling resistance: a key coach skill

To resist change is very human, and we as coaches meet it daily as we work to help others to think differently, to change their behaviors, and to try new ways of working and being together. Resistance is a large part of any coach's challenge, and I have found that it can come from all areas — from client program leaders, from the client teams, and even from LIM team members.

o *Client program leaders*

Ironically, the HR Director in charge of the program can present a challenge to the consultants, and might require special attention to overcome his/her doubts. The director knows that, eventually, the CEO is counting on him to bring a successful program into the organization, and that the director is expected to get a good return on the company's financial investment in the program. It is really helpful to include the HR people at every phase of the work so that they increase their comfort level.

o *Client teams*

The fears that lead to resistance of managers include:

- Fear that they cannot handle their daily work as well as the "added tasks of the training". This statement actually provides a fine opportunity for the coach to make a strong point. I always stress that what they are doing IS their daily work; it is not added work. They are being developed as future leaders of the organization, and they are expected to take what they learn in the workshop back to their workplace
- Fear that they will 'fail' to gain the skills expected of them by senior management
- Fear that the coaches are there to judge them and that we will speak to their bosses about their performance. This is the easiest one to address. I tell them that I will NEVER discuss the performance with any individual team member with any member of his organization, only how the team is working

o *LIM team members*

Even though we share a set of values, a methodology, and a philosophy, we are each

individuals and we respond in different ways to common challenges. Resistance to other points of view occurs among our teams as well.

3. Clients provide helpful learning experiences

Every program raises issues to challenge the coaches; that is what makes it exciting. Some challenges that helped me to learn.

a) Don't compromise ARL principles – even for a CEO

In one Leadership program the president of the company presented a very real and complex organizational project to be addressed and he told us that he wanted a team to include two special senior participants to work on this issue. We agreed; and we were wrong to do so, for three reasons.

- The composition of the team affected the professional growth of all the team members, since the other four team members, were intimidated by the fact that the president had selected the seniors.
- It robbed these four members of the chance to learn and practice new leadership skills, because the two senior members shared the role of leader.
- The team's focus was almost all on the task and not the process — because the CEO has stressed its importance. It was a powerful lesson for us.

b) Not all leaders support the learning process

In one organization, a new member of the Executive Team, who had just joined the organization, wanted to participate in the program. He said he was able to forget his rank and position in the company; and be 'just another team member'. He couldn't forget that he was on the Executive Team. He refused to keep to the Norms that the team had agreed to; he often worked on his computer during the team's work. When challenged, he just said he was working on "important Executive team issues". The other team members were unable to learn, and in my mind he was responsible for wasting a huge amount of the company's financial investment in developing its future leaders.

4. Miscellaneous learnings from along my journey

- Coaches need team building as well. One powerful way for a coach to develop leadership in others is to model the behaviors that s/he is trying to instill in the participants. As coaches planning to work together for the first time, we spend time building our own team of coaches and gaining alignment between us. It becomes very apparent to the audience that we function as a team; we show respect to one another; we speak to each other openly in front of the participants to demonstrate our transparent way of working.
- I have found that it is really helpful to have women in all programs if possible. Even one woman in a group of 20 people changes the dynamic, and for the better. The men simply behave differently in the presence of women.

- Remain flexible at all times. Sometimes you have to throw away the design that you have spent days working on!
- Always use a blend of teaching methods. It took me some time before I understood that some learners are visual, some love reading theory, some learn by hearing, some by discussing, some by experimenting etc. Keep this in mind so that you cover all learning styles when you present.
- "Self as instrument". Always be mindful of the power of your own intuition. There is a school of thought called "Self as instrument" which posits that we should use our own feelings of fear, anger, frustration, joy etc. when we act as coaches. Coaching is not always a logical process, and feeling and intuition are valuable guides.
- Sometimes teams believe that we set traps for them so that they will fail, and then we will step in, be heroes and 'save' them. They say, "You know what is going to happen because you make it happen." I take great pains to deny that we are this powerful. I reply that while there are clearly some phases of team development that teams will go through (for instance Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing) every team's journey is different. I also make two important points. First, I tell them that it is essential that the coaches be authentic in their behaviors, and that I will never manipulate them into making a mistake. That is against the principles of ARL. Second, I let them know that coaches have no interest at all in 'saving' them from mistakes; indeed, I show them how I have deliberately let them continue on a certain path which I was fairly certain was the wrong one. I did this because I did NOT want to save them because if I do, then I am, in fact, robbing them of their own learning. It is much more powerful if they themselves realize their mistake and then draw great learning from that – which would not have happened if I had 'saved' them.

4. **Know thyself**

a) Unless I know myself I cannot expect to be effective with others.

I believe that everyone who serves as a coach must be aware of his/her preferences, 'hot buttons', dislikes, values, and blind spots. The coaching programs that currently proliferate the OD field pay attention to self-understanding. My thought is that coaches could perhaps go further and experience some form of consciousness-raising intervention – psychotherapy, Eastern philosophic insights, animistic interpretation etc. – because coaches are exposed to delicate personal issues which we are not trained to manage. If I am not aware why another person's behaviors trigger a reaction – positive or negative – in me, then I am unlikely to be an effective and insightful coach. An example.

We all know that in the Reflection and Dialogue sessions, we are not supposed to respond directly to another person's comments. We know too, that it is not the occasion to argue with another person's opinions. We especially know that it is wrong to criticize someone for his comments in an R&D.

I was given a powerful learning when one senior client said in an R&D session that he was not finding the leadership program helpful in developing his leadership skills, nor the skills of anyone else. As the team leader, I realized that I had two choices. One was,

in the true spirit of R&D, to simply accept his statement. Another was to criticize his comments, which was totally against the spirit of R&D. I regret to say that I took the second option. Realizing immediately what I had done, I apologized to him and the group. Interestingly, several people came up to me afterwards, acknowledged that it was courageous to apologize, and thanked me. We always must be aware that we are role models.

b) Unless I continuously pay attention to my needs, wishes, and 'hot buttons', they can harm my effectiveness.

Over the years I have realized that I must monitor two things in particular:

- *A strong need for inclusion.* Being part of a team or group is enormously important to me, but I have to remind myself that it is not realistic to be a part of every activity. It helps to tell people I work with that I have this need for inclusion, and I ask them to remember it if possible. I also have to be realistic about my need to be included.
- *A wish for approval from women.* At one time, I consulted on gender issues in organizations, and believe it helped in developing my sensitivity towards the role and effectiveness of women in the workplace. When coaching teams that include women, I have noticed how their sensibilities can lead to different, and sometimes deeper, insights than those of all-male teams. There is, of course, a danger of a 'halo effect' and it is essential for me to be aware of the danger of generalizing female attributes as team members, and that this can skew my judgment unless I pay strict attention to it.

c) Unless I request feedback and act on it, I will not improve.

Most of us prefer positive feedback, and I am no different. To be honest there are still times that I am apprehensive in asking for feedback if I fear it might be negative. But I know that both positive and constructive feedback have helped me in the past, so I make it a point to ask for it. How else can one improve?

d) I am at my most effective — and my most joyous — when I behave with complete authenticity in an intervention.

Unless I am true to myself, then I will be less effective with my client. Unless I practice my espoused values, and am consistent in how I apply my art and my craft, then I am not being authentic, and I am unlikely to be effective as a developer of human potential in the people I coach. I know how powerful I can be if I behave genuinely, because I hear it in the responses I get. I know, too, I am not effective when I try to force my behavior or attempt to be political.

The excitement of continuous learning is so intense, and you can never know enough about coaching. That's what makes it such a rewarding profession.





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