



Message from the President

Dear Fellow Coaches,

This issue of the Newsletter features an article on coaching supervision which brings up the topic of professional certification. In my discussions with colleagues we all come to the conclusion that although coaching certification may not be the most important factor in the current selection of coaches by corporate clients in Asia Pacific but having a certification certainly increases credibility. The other point is that the coaching industry is mostly self-regulated and although there exist some national guidelines for codes of conduct and coaching standards in some countries but the industry has yet to be subject to government regulations and supervision.

Encouraging coaches to obtain their credentials and to abide by ethical standards is a first step toward maintaining the reputation of the industry. APAC has a code of ethics that all members are encouraged to abide to as well as a process to be followed in case charges of ethical misconduct are filed against any member. Furthermore APAC will certainly be studying ways to encourage and assist its coach members obtain their certifications. The views of the membership will also be sought on this matter in the months to come.

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Coaching in Hong Kong – any different?

by Charlie Lang

Hong Kong is known for its fast pace, long working hours, multicultural workforce and liberal economy. Being one of the first twenty or so professional coaches in Hong Kong back in 2002, I wondered how this dynamic market would accept coaching as a new way to support and develop people.

Fast forward to 2011, a bit less than a decade later, there are an approximate 200-250 professional coaches practicing in Hong Kong and the number keeps growing rapidly as half a dozen coaching schools train new professional coaches every year.

The more than tenfold growth of the number of coaches seems dramatic and I'm often asked if there are now already too many coaches on the Hong Kong market? I then draw comparisons with more developed coaching markets such as the US, UK, Australia, Germany, etc. and point out that there is still a 5-10 fold upward potential before Hong Kong reaches a similar coach density as these more developed coaching markets. And these markets are also still growing...



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So for now, there is no need to worry about a saturation of coaches in Hong Kong, but the question is, are the people in Hong Kong, especially the locals, really ready and willing to be coached? Do we need to consider any differences when coaching Hong Kong people compared to coaching people in other locations? How important are language and cross-cultural concerns when coaching Hong Kongers?

Since my company's and my practice is exclusively focused on the executive / corporate coaching market, I'm not in a position to share any experience related to life or personal coaching. The following statements are exclusively related to executive or corporate coaching and may not similarly apply to life coaching.

Language

While it tends to be easier for anyone to be coached in their mother tongue, I found rarely any issues when coaching local Hong Kong managers in English instead of Cantonese. That's probably because most senior managers or executives in Hong Kong speak excellent English and therefore usually don't face any language barrier when being coached in English.

Cross-Cultural Considerations

While I found that on staff level, employees might be more resistant to being coached by their superiors – mostly due to trust issues and fear of being accountable – I never faced any major roadblocks for local executives to be coached by me as a European. In most cases, indeed I found the local Hong Kong coachees to be very open to the idea of being coached, especially once they understood what coaching really meant. Does it take a Chinese to coach a Chinese? This question is often asked and the answers vary from

“definitely” to “not at all”. My answer is usually ‘it depends’: In my opinion, the background of the coachee, the coachee’s work environment and the coaching purpose should be considered before answering this question.

For example, if the coachee is a local executive who wants to develop his EQ, then the cultural background of the coach seems secondary as long as the coach has sufficient understanding of the specifics of interacting with local employees. If the coachee, however, wants to become more engaging with a purely local workforce, a local Chinese coach might be more suitable.

Coaching or Mentoring?

It is often said that due to the Confucian heritage, most Chinese would prefer mentoring over coaching, i.e. that they expect advice or at least significant sharing. Also, that the coach should be more senior than the coachee which is typically a characteristic of mentoring.

My experience is that after explaining the coachees and other stakeholders the principle of ownership and the rationale why coaches abstain from giving advice and share only to ‘add on’ after exhausting the coachee’s own resourcefulness, local Chinese coachees tend to be equally appreciative of the coaching approach like Westerners.

The future of coaching in Hong Kong and Greater China

The level of awareness of what coaching really is and how to make best use of it is continuously maturing among corporate decision makers, not least because an increasing number of them have undergone significant coach training or even international coach certification themselves. For professional coaches that means that they, too,

need to step up their professional qualifications and become more skillful and professional to stay at the forefront of this emerging market.

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