

The Art of Leadership Coaching: A Guide to Getting Started



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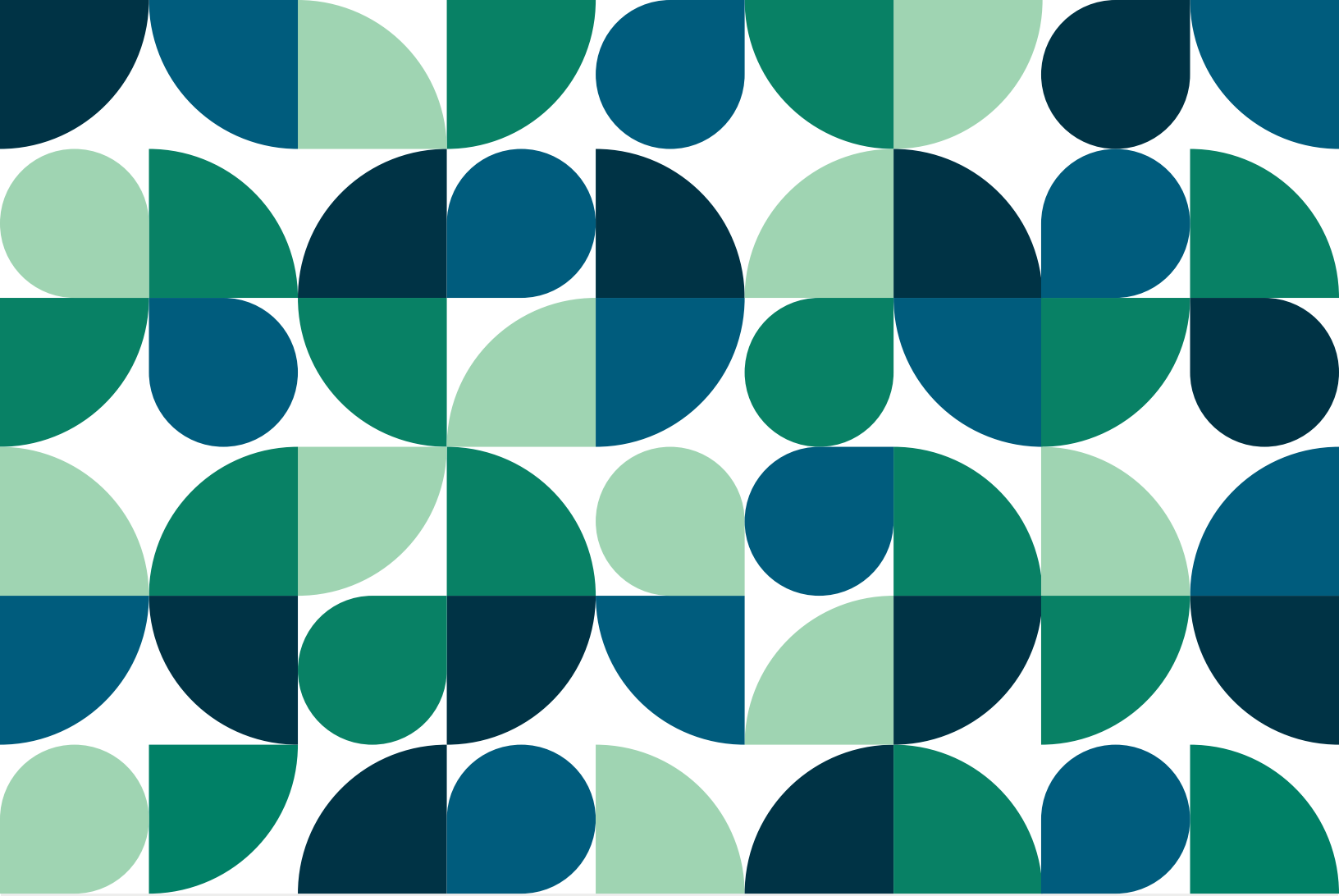
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Meet Your Guide, Madeleine Homan Blanchard, MCC



Madeleine began coaching in 1989 and became an unwitting pioneer, among a handful of others, in the quest to make coaching a tangible and respected profession. When she and Scott Blanchard started the first company devoted to scaling and democratizing coaching in 2000, she became a student of Ken Blanchard and the original Blanchard founders and began weaving their leadership wisdom into her coaching.

The combination of excellent coaching and practical leadership expertise has grown Blanchard Coaching into a standout in a now crowded field. Acquiring a master of science degree in neuroleadership and a certification in spiritual intelligence has enabled Madeleine to weave yet more insights into the collective brainpower of Blanchard Coaching.



Exploring Leadership Coaching

Coaching leaders is exhilarating. The challenges are interesting, multi-layered, and complex. A coach can have an exponential impact that affects an entire system. Even the smallest changes a leader makes can result in a positive ripple effect.

But an executive leadership coach must have both the expertise and an exceptional skill set to meet the expectations of these special clients. Most leaders seek coaches who have strong leadership experience themselves, or, at a minimum, the competence, education, and confidence to guide them effectively.

In this eBook, I will share essential elements the Blanchard Coaching team and I have developed to help coaches just like you deepen their knowledge and enhance their skills. These are the same concepts I've used in my own practice and shared with hundreds of coaches worldwide.

The Blanchard Leadership Coach approach has resulted in the development of highly successful executive coaches now working in the space and thousands of hours of successful coaching. If being a top leadership coach is your goal, this eBook is for you.



An Overview of What We'll Cover

Many things can get in the way of a coach's efforts to [develop](#) executive coaching skills.

It is common for coaches to believe that if they have a good coaching technique, they will be able to coach anyone. But these days, *good* is not good enough. An executive leadership coach needs to be ready—not to teach the client per se, but to have the common ground and related business acumen to:

- Ask a question that provokes a mind-bending shift in perspective
- Share a model to structure a life-changing breakthrough
- Offer the one tiny-but-powerful idea that will spark transformation

This requires executive coaches to:

- Be hyper self-aware and confident that they have what it takes
- Have an outstanding ability to self-regulate
- Be remarkably mentally agile
- Have a massive library of best leadership practices at their disposal

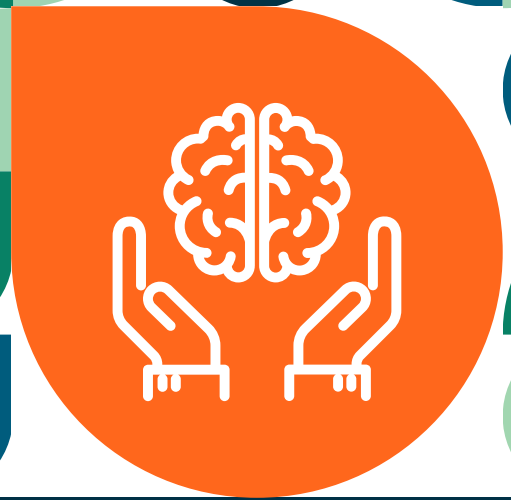
When executive leaders agree to work with a coach, they expect that coach to know things they don't know—or, perhaps, once knew but have forgotten.

My goal here is to demystify the process. I will show you how to build the confidence and competence you need to successfully work with today's executives.

- **Taking It to the Next Level**
- **Reviewing Some Basics**
- **Advanced Tools for Exploring Yourself as a Coach: The Coach as Role Model for Integrity and Personal Effectiveness**
- **Using Leadership Models to Guide Coaching Conversations**
- **Getting Started on Your Journey**

I've also sprinkled along the sidebar some interesting research from the world of neuroscience that I hope you will find interesting and useful in your practice.

Ready to get started?



What We Are Learning from Neuroscience

Fact #1: The battle between our rational selves and our instinctive selves is real.

The study of the brain exploded with the advent of the fMRI machine. The last two decades have produced massive amounts of research about what happens in the brain under certain conditions. The interpretation of what brain activity and neurochemical reactions might mean sheds light on why people behave the way they do under certain conditions.

Scientific Fact: The pre-frontal cortex (the rational self), which is in charge of self-regulation, executive function, strategic thinking, and creative problem solving, gets worn out very quickly and battles for control with the limbic system (the instinctive self). The limbic system cannot distinguish between the past and present, will interpret almost everything as a threat, and, when under stress, will take over every time. If leaders want people to be their best selves, they must ensure they get enough rest and take time to eat right and exercise.

One recent study shows how daylong cognitive work leads to glutamate accumulation in the lateral prefrontal cortex, which reduces control over decisions and thereby favors effortless behaviors with immediate gratifications.

What this means in English is that after about six hours of heavy-duty thinking, gunk builds up in the prefrontal cortex and reduces its ability to do all the other stuff we need that part of our brain for. The research also shows physical exercise diffuses the gunk that keeps our brain from working well. Self-care is seen as a nice to have, but, in today's workplace that demands intense cognitive thinking and creativity, it is more vital than ever.

Implications: Leaders must take proper care of themselves. They should schedule difficult tasks or emotionally draining conversations at the beginning of their day and take time to eat lunch. Leaders also must make sure employees have enough time to take care of themselves. They must encourage their people to take their time off and have enough people on staff so that PTO absences are covered.

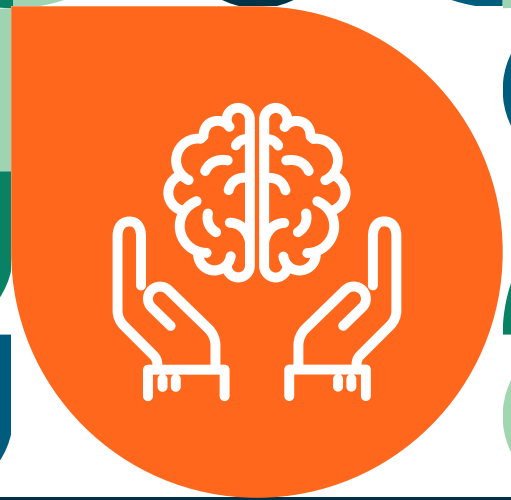


Taking It to the Next Level

If we can agree you've got the coaching basics covered, here are some key areas that will help you take your skills to the next level.

For our Blanchard Leadership Coach Certification course, we've identified several essential learning modules to help coaches build the competencies they need to effectively work with senior business leaders. They should be a part of any leadership coaching curriculum.

- Advanced tools to explore oneself as both a coach and a role model for integrity and personal effectiveness. These serve to vastly augment the executive presence and credibility of the coach.
- The language of leadership mindsets with a grounding in leadership theory, in practical, usable language.



Using Self-Determination Theory to Take Responsibility for One's Own Destiny (a.k.a. Shifting a Victim Mindset)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a comprehensive framework for studying human motivation and personality that focuses on the degree to which human behaviors are self-motivated and self-determined. Developed by psychologists Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, SDT identifies that people are most motivated and perform their best when their actions are intrinsically motivated rather than extrinsically controlled.

Although SDT is the philosophical base on which coaching is built, many coaches are not aware of it. It encapsulates the scholarship and fundamental tenets that help individuals fully accept they are the captain of their own ship by:

- Identifying the ways a client is trapped in their own beliefs and assumptions about themselves
- Helping a client uncover heretofore unacknowledged strengths and gifts
- Providing new ways for a client to use language to make requests for what they need

SDT identifies three fundamental psychological needs that are essential for optimal functioning and well-being:

- *Autonomy*: The need to feel in control of one's own behaviors and goals. Autonomy involves having a sense of volition and self-endorsed actions.
- *Competence*: The need to feel effective in one's activities and to achieve mastery. This involves a sense of accomplishment and proficiency.
- *Relatedness*: The need to feel connected to others, to belong, and to experience caring relationships. This involves a sense of being understood and valued by others.



Reviewing Some Basics

All professional coaches are expected to have certain skills. Before we discuss the special requirements of leadership coaching, let's review what might be considered coaching fundamentals.

- **Creating Clear Agreements for the Coaching Relationship**
- **Setting Good Goals for the Coaching**
- **Keeping the Client On Track**
- **Challenging the Client when Appropriate**

As we work through the advanced content I share, I will assume you have this foundation in place. Identify and address any areas you do not consider strengths.

Creating Clear Agreements around the Coaching

- Clearly define the services provided by the coach, the length of the coaching engagement, the process for renewal or termination, and the frequency and duration of sessions.
- Outline the specific goals and objectives of the coaching relationship.
- Detail the confidentiality terms to protect the privacy of the client's information.
- Define the responsibilities of both coach and client to ensure mutual accountability.

Setting Good Goals for the Coaching

- Articulate the long-term vision the client has for themselves, so that it can inform short-term goals.
- Make certain the goals are clear and compelling; a bit of a stretch, but not impossible.
- Ensure the goals resonate with the client's core values.
- Involve the client's boss, if appropriate, to make sure most of the goals are aligned with the expectations of the organization.
- Establish criteria for measuring progress and success.
- Set deadlines for action steps to create a sense of urgency and focus.
- Analyze the outcome of all actions to integrate learning and potentially tweak the goal.
- Use goals, milestones, and actions as a way to measure the success of the coaching engagement.

See the article: [Myths and Truths About Goal Setting](#)

Keeping the Client On Track

- Create detailed action plans that outline steps the client will take to achieve their goals, with specific tasks for each step.
- Find a way to track progress that works for the client.
- Establish accountability mechanisms such as regular reporting, peer support groups, or accountability partners.
- Encourage the client to seek feedback from relevant parties.
- Foster self-reflection to help the client learn from their experiences and refine their approach.
- Help the client identify potential obstacles and develop strategies to overcome them; encourage a problem-solving mindset.
- Be flexible and willing to adjust goals and strategies as circumstances change; ensure the client understands setbacks are part of the process; and provide support to navigate them.
- Consistently follow up on action items from previous sessions to reinforce accountability and ensure continued progress.
- Periodically review the overall coaching journey: assess the effectiveness of the strategies employed and make necessary adjustments.

Challenging the Client when Appropriate

- Ask powerful questions that encourage the client to explore their beliefs, assumptions, thoughts and feelings more deeply.
- Craft challenging questions designed to disrupt the client's usual thinking patterns.
- Help the client reframe a perspective.
- Reflect back what is said in a different way so that the client can see themselves more clearly and be more aware of their state of mind.
- Challenge limiting beliefs by suggesting there may be another way to look at things.

For some insights on *bad questions*, check out my recent blog post [5 Questions Professional Coaches Should Never \(Ever!\) Ask](#).



Advanced Tools for Exploring Yourself as a Coach: The Coach as Role Model for Integrity and Personal Effectiveness

These ideas are drawn from the work of Thomas Leonard in his book *The Portable Coach*. Some are also covered in CoachU's Coach Certification Program in a class called Personal Foundation.

All coaches need to be impeccable, but it is even more important for those who coach executives. This means cultivating integrity. Integrity might be defined as:

- Coherence: the inside matches the outside
- Courage to tell your truth
- Respect for universal laws

Addressing inside/outside coherence requires building our awareness of needs, values, boundaries, standards, and tolerations.

Needs:

A core psychological need is a human need that must be met in order for a person to operate at 100 percent of full capacity. These needs are non-negotiable and will drive our behavior whether we like it or not. The only way to prevent this is to become aware of our needs and find approaches to get them met in ways that won't derail our lives.

Most people, including coaches, are oblivious to how their needs drive their behavior. A need to achieve can be handy until it presents its dark side. A need to be right can, again, drive us to do proper due diligence, but may be deadly for a coach. A coach who is not aware of their needs can easily succumb to getting them met inappropriately in their coaching practice. And a leader who is unaware of their needs can find themselves behaving in ways that ultimately will keep them from achieving their goals.

Most cultures do not encourage people to acknowledge their own needs, let alone learn how to get them met. Those who have a handle on their needs will be much more successful at the discipline of self-regulation required to be an excellent coach and a trusted leader.

Values:

Needs drive us; we drive our values. Values are chosen and they change as life circumstances change. Unlike needs, values are flexible; but the more we can align with them in our work, the more work will feel like play. Values are a nice to have, not a have to have.

Boundaries:

These are the ground rules we set for ourselves and others that stem from what we want and expect from the people in our life, and what we will and will not accept from them. Boundaries are often connected to core needs and are deeply personal. For any number of reasons, it is extremely challenging for many people, including coaches, to name, claim, and defend their boundaries. It takes awareness, courage, and a lot of practice.

Standards:

These are behaviors and practices to which we hold ourselves accountable. Standards can be useful to help us get our needs met, but they are more deeply connected to values. Like values, standards change as life circumstances change. Sometimes they need to be lowered; for example, when an individual contributor moves to a management role they may have to learn to live without checking off everything on their to-do list every day. Sometimes they need to be raised; for example, when an individual who enjoys gossiping about others is promoted to a leadership role. People who don't regularly examine and shift their standards may find their effectiveness and quality of life affected.

Tolerations:

These are the little irritations in life we put up with. Having a few of them is okay, but if we allow them to proliferate, it can lead to our feeling depleted or even burned out. Tolerations are annoyances that are part of everyday life. For example, the door to your office won't stay closed and people keep sticking their heads in to say "hello" when you are in meetings that can't be interrupted. Or your good microphone has stopped working for no apparent reason, but you only think of it when you are about to record something important. Think of one toleration as a small pebble: having one or two of them in your pocket isn't going to make much of a difference, but having twenty or more is really going to be a drag.

Understanding Ourselves Is Both Important and Urgent

Building awareness of all these dimensions and creating strategies to deal with them can seem like something that is important but not urgent, so it can easily fall by the wayside when things get busy. But of course, it is when things get busy that the lack of urgency to get needs met, align with values, practice setting appropriate boundaries, reshuffle standards, and eliminate tolerations can get in the way of our being at our best—especially when we are dealing with unexpected stress.

The Language of Leadership Mindsets

Working with executive business leaders requires a shared understanding of leadership theory, concepts, and applications. While there are many ways to approach leadership, the approaches I see as useful are based on the fundamental assumption that leadership is something we do *with* people, not *to* people.

In this section I will share a series of models I use with clients to address different dimensions of leadership—trust, inclusion, performance management, motivation, etc. These models lend themselves wonderfully to a coaching mindset.

The overarching umbrella leadership theories that support this mindset are *Transformational Leadership Theory*, *Servant Leadership Theory*, *Contingency Theory*, and *Self-Determination Theory*. What do you know about these approaches to leading others? Here's a quick review.

- **Transformational Leadership Theory**

Emphasizes inspiring and motivating followers to achieve their full potential and exceed their own expectations. Leaders focus on creating a vision, fostering an environment of intellectual stimulation, providing individualized consideration, and modeling positive behaviors. This approach aims to transform both leaders and followers, promoting significant organizational change.

- **Servant Leadership Theory**

Focuses on prioritizing the needs of others and empowering and uplifting followers. Leaders serve by listening, showing empathy, fostering growth, and building community. This approach emphasizes ethical behavior, humility, and a commitment to the well-being and development of individuals, ultimately leading to greater organizational effectiveness and harmony.

- **Contingency Theory**

Posits that effective leadership depends on the alignment between the leader's style and specific situational factors. Different situations require different leadership approaches. Key factors include the leader-member relationship, task structure, and positional power. Success is determined by how well a leader's style matches the demands of the context.

- **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**

Suggests individuals have three innate psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—that drive motivation and personal growth. When these needs are fulfilled, people experience enhanced well-being, motivation, and performance. SDT emphasizes the importance of supportive environments in fostering intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being.



What We Are Learning from Neuroscience

Fact #2: Creating a psychologically safe environment is not a *nice to have*.

Scientific Fact: In organizations that depend on employees' brains to creatively solve problems, innovate, and embrace conflicting viewpoints to build a thoughtful strategy, people need to be seen and heard—and they need to feel safe to be themselves. When people are afraid, they do not get smarter and more creative. The brain is a prediction machine designed to keep us alive, not to induce us to take needless risks.

Implications: Creating a positive work environment in which people get timely and useful feedback, are encouraged to experiment, and are not punished if things take more time or aren't quite right at first, is not about being kind or nice. In today's workplace that demands intense, cognitive thinking and creativity, it is more vital than ever.



Using Leadership Models to Guide Coaching Conversations

Great leadership models are like maps: Why would anyone embark on a journey without one? And the more maps we have, the more likely we are to have the exact one for wherever we might find ourselves.

Language, distinctions, and definitions help coaches support their clients to navigate complexity and rise to challenges they may have never faced before. The same is true for helping clients recognize patterns using proven structures for thinking through and solving problems. The more tools the coach brings to the table and the more quickly they can cut to the chase, the more work they can get done in the time they have with their clients.

A Case in Point: An Example of How a Research-Based Trust Model Can Elevate Coaching Success in a Business Setting

Let's say a client comes to a coaching session and says, "I have a feeling about one of my people. I just don't think I can trust her." How might a coach begin to have a conversation about trust?

Ask ten people to define trust and they will provide ten different answers. Having a model allows a coach to efficiently sort through a multi-layered, seemingly subjective concept and distill it down to concrete, usable language that will help a client who has a trust issue identify exactly what is going on so that they can take action.

I like this ABCD model that breaks down trust into four components: *Able*, *Believable*, *Connected*, and *Dependable*.

In this case, the coach can share this model and ask, "Of all these things that tend to impact trust, what behaviors can you pick out here?" Once the client has clearly identified the behaviors that are prompting the feeling, then coach and client can plan out what the client is going to say, what requests the client may make, and potentially what consequences may be imposed should trust be broken again.

A problem that could easily have taken an entire hour is handled with plenty of time left to address other critical issues. The bonus is the leader now using this model to look at themselves in the mirror as well, which may surface some of their own behaviors to tweak with their coach. Everybody wins.

The Elements of Trust

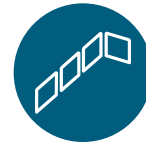


Other Areas Where Leadership Models Make All the Difference

Trust isn't the only place where an established model increases a coach's effectiveness. Having an elegant and simple mental model for the following leadership challenges will help a coach with a variety of client challenges. Consider how an increased ability to help a client in each of these areas would positively impact your practice.



Emotional Intelligence



Leading Change



**Performance Management
and Achieving Results**



Diversity and Inclusion



**Developing People
for Engagement and Retention**



Leading Teams



**Managing Conflict
for Optimal Results**

Emotional Intelligence

A deeper self-understanding can help executive leaders improve personal effectiveness.

Leaders tend to reach the limits of their own effectiveness due to early habits they developed to become successful. The more useful a habit has been in the past, the more deeply ingrained it can be. Leaders, especially those who have recently been promoted, need help with reinventing their approach to:

- Prioritizing tasks, setting goals, and managing time effectively
- Adapting to new situations, changes in work processes, or new technologies
- Understanding one's needs, strengths, weaknesses, motivations, and emotions
- Bouncing back from setbacks, learning from mistakes, and maintaining a positive attitude
- Continuously learning and improving one's skills, knowledge, and competencies

Even with the proliferation and use of assessments, many leaders still have only a surface understanding of their own core needs and values. And they often have even less insight into the needs and values of others.

These leaders need help with:

- Deepening their awareness of what drives them, what matters most to them, and how they come across to others
- What drives others, what matters most to others, and why people behave the way they do
- Why the differences matter
- What to do about it

My preferred model in this space is based on the work of Linda Berens. It's a framework that quickly identifies deep core motivations and talents. Originally articulated as *temperament* by David Keirsey in the 1980s, it has been enriched by Berens to provide a way of understanding ourselves and others that helps build self-esteem and positive regard. To learn more, here's a link to a podcast with Linda Berens: [Understanding Essential Motivators with Linda Berens](#).

Performance Management and Achieving Results

The number one job of a manager or team leader is to ensure their people produce the results the organization expects and depends on. Most managers don't get any training on how to do this well until they have been in the job for more than ten years—if ever.

These leaders need help with:

- Collaborative goal setting
- Helping direct reports navigate discomfort when taking on new things
- Building skills for highly productive one-on-ones with direct reports
- Overcoming fear of (and other obstacles to) giving timely critical feedback
- Providing appropriately nuanced supervision for employees at all levels

In this area, I like two models.

The first model, from [Blanchard Management Essentials](#), focuses on four core conversations all leaders must become proficient at to manage people and performance.

- **The Goal-Setting Conversation**—introduce the goal, get feedback to refine the goal, and identify steps to make progress on the goal.
- **The Praising Conversation**—communicate positive feedback in a way that is specific and timely, encourage the person to reflect on the accomplishment, express confidence in the person, and encourage continued good work.
- **The Redirecting Conversation**—when it is necessary to reclarify the goal, ask for the person's perspective or confirmation and encourage reflection on impact and solutions.
- **The Wrapping Up Conversation**—discuss the results and impact collaboratively and ask about key learnings or areas for improvement.

The second model takes a deeper dive into contingency leadership theory using Blanchard's SLII® approach. This is where leaders learn how to set goals collaboratively, diagnose the needs and development level of the people they work with, and then provide a matching leadership style.

- **Goal Setting**—collaboratively align on what needs to be done, by when.
- **Diagnosing**—collaboratively assess an individual's competence and commitment on a specific goal.
- **Matching**—use a variety of leadership styles, comfortably, to provide individuals with what they need.

This model has been taught and used by millions of leaders over the past 50 years, and I have returned to it time and again in my work with clients. Use this link to learn more about the [Four Core Conversations model](#). Use this link to learn more about [conducting performance management conversations using SLII®](#).

Developing People for Engagement and Retention (a.k.a. Leader/Manager as Coach)

Many organizations ask their leaders to be coaches, but offer no training to help them do that. Often leaders are assessed on competencies such as *Develops Others* but given precious little direction on what that means.

Here is a link to [research that shows the impact that developing a solid “coach approach” can have on a leader’s effectiveness.](#)

Leaders who want to be able to coach their people need help with:

- Shifting into a coaching mindset
- Distinguishing between management activities and coaching activities
- Knowing who to coach, when (and when not) to do it, and how to do it
- Inspiring direct reports to reach their full potential
- Providing employees with opportunities for career growth and development
- Fostering a positive work environment by ensuring people feel seen, heard, and valued
- Recognizing all employees for their contributions

It can be challenging for even a very experienced coach to help a leader adopt a coaching mindset using the process and skills they use. Just because a coach knows how to do it doesn’t mean they have a well thought out, accessible model to share.

I suggest these models from Blanchard’s Coaching Essentials:

Mindset: The shift from a manager mindset (managing performance and results) to a coach mindset (conversations about personal development, hopes, and dreams) can be tricky. The bottom line is that the coach mindset requires the leader to keep at the forefront the best interests of the person being coached.

Process: A coaching conversation consists of four steps: *Connect, Focus, Activate, and Review*. It is important to keep in mind that the process is not necessarily linear and can require the coach and the leader to frequently reconnect or refocus.

- *Connect* requires the coach to be fully present in the here and now, truly paying attention to the person being coached.
- *Focus* means clarifying and putting in order the topics to be discussed.
- *Activate* means identifying action steps: what could be done, what will be done next. This stage often uncovers multiple focus areas and requires refocusing to maintain clarity.
- *Review*—a step often skipped—ensures crystal clear agreement on what was decided, what actions will be taken, and in what time frame.

Skill Set: The fundamental skills a leader needs to provide coaching for their people are: *Listen to Learn*, *Inquire for Insight*, *Tell Your Truth*, and *Express Confidence*.

- *Listen to Learn* is a refined way of listening that is subtle but powerful. It teaches coaches to listen for the heart of the matter—something that is easy to miss. We remind coaches they can't listen if they are talking, and we give them a memorable acronym: *W.A.I.T.—Why Am I Talking?* It's about quieting one's mind to truly understand what the other person is sharing.
- *Inquire for Insight* challenges coaches to ask better questions. There is a big distinction between asking decent questions and asking the best question. For example, instead of asking "Why did you do it that way?" or "Tell me what you were thinking," which deal with the past and challenge the person to defend their actions, a coach will learn to ask "How could you have done it differently?" or "How might you approach it differently in the future?" This looks ahead at new possibilities and responses.
- *Tell Your Truth* is all about having the courage to say what needs to be said, which often means giving feedback. Coaches must examine their motives and intentions for things they say. Is this something the person needs to hear, or something the coach just feels the need to say? This skill teaches coaches how to make better decisions about what and what not to share. Intentions are often murky. Coaches should ask themselves "Am I sharing an observation I think will be helpful? Am I making a request for a behavior change that needs to happen? Or is this a hard-core demand?"
- *Express Confidence* is about maintaining the distinction between people and their performance. For example, "As a person, you are innately brilliant and valuable. Your recent behavior, on the other hand ..." It's all about creating a strong, trusting relationship.

Managing Conflict for Optimal Results

Many leaders either avoid conflict or approach it with a drive to win at all costs. Neither tactic is useful. Embracing conflict is critical for increasing the quality of thought and creative problem solving. These leaders need a way to demonstrate how to engage in open, balanced, and non-defensive dialogue about difficult subjects.

These leaders need help with:

- Staying cool in challenging circumstances
- Managing one's own fight-or-flight response and helping others to do the same
- Identifying one's own natural tendencies and learning to regulate them
- Learning how to argue one's own point of view while encouraging others to the same
- Leveraging conflict and harnessing opposing viewpoints to increase innovation for competitive advantage

The structure I like here is one put forth by author Craig Weber in his book *Conversational Capacity*. *Conversational Capacity*® provides a model for engaging in constructive, learning-focused dialogue when challenging topics or conflicts arise so that leaders can make informed decisions and find the best solutions, even under high pressure.

Conversational Capacity teaches leaders:

- **Awareness**—how to recognize when fight-or-flight reactions prevent real listening and create discomfort in others. This awareness allows for a more intentional response to challenging conversations.
- **Mindset**—how to explore diverse perspectives by listening to contrasting views for insights and growth.
- **Skill Set**—how to evaluate four behaviors—two that build genuine candor and two that build curiosity—to create a conversational sweet spot.

Here are two follow-up resources:

- The first is an [eBook with an overview of the Conversational Capacity model](#).
- The second is a [podcast recording with Craig Weber](#) where he shares more about this model in greater detail.

Leading Change

Even if leaders have heard they must involve everyone affected by change efforts, that doesn't mean they know how to do it. Most leaders have put so much thought into plans for change that, by the time the change is rolled out, they are impatient with and dismissive of challenges their people may face.

These leaders need help with:

- Framing the need for change in ways others can hear it
- Co-creating solutions to unanticipated challenges
- Managing the predictable stages of concern
- Leaning on advocates to strengthen change efforts and reduce drag
- Refining and completing change efforts

There are many different change models, but none quite as effective in my experience as the Leading People Through Change model developed by Judd Hoekstra and Dr. Patricia Zigarmi. This model identifies the predictable, sequential reactions people have when asked to change, and the steps leaders can take to address each concern successfully.

These concerns are:

- **Information Concerns**—People want to know what the change is, why it is important, and what success looks like.
- **Personal Concerns**—People want to know how the change initiative will benefit them or what they may lose. This is the stage leaders often ignore.
- **Implementation Concerns**—People want to know that challenges, obstacles, and barriers will be surfaced and addressed, and that they will have the time, support, and resources they need to successfully implement the change.
- **Impact Concerns**—After the change goes live, people want to know if the change is working for them, their team, the organization, and its customers. Is it worth the effort?
- **Refinement Concerns**—People want to know that a tipping point has been reached and that most people are on board and succeeding with the change.

This model has provided help when my clients have brought up issues concerning change—not only initiatives they are leading but also change they are experiencing themselves. In both cases, the model provides a great structure for change conversations.

[Learn more about this change model.](#)

Diversity and Inclusion

Equity, inclusion, belonging, and fairness are foundational components of a company's culture. The organizations that are able to attract and retain the best people have a reputation for paying attention and making tangible efforts to establish a working environment where all feel welcome. Again, leaders are often expected to lead this charge with precious little training or support.

These leaders need help with:

- Expanding their awareness of their own conscious and unconscious biases
- Being role models for inclusiveness
- Crafting an environment where every individual feels they belong and are valued, respected, and supported
- Building a workplace culture where people from all backgrounds can bring their whole selves to work

To provide structure around diversity and inclusion topics, I turn to the work of Jennifer Brown. Jennifer is a respected expert in this space and author of the book *Courageous Inclusion*. She shares a model that includes a developmental journey continuum where leaders can plot their progress from Unaware to Aware, to Active, to Advocate.

Here is how she defines each stage in an article for *Fast Company*:

- **Unaware**—the leader is still learning about the experiences and challenges people with other identities face.
- **Aware**—the leader learns more about the concept of identity. They examine how their own identities shape their lens of the world and influence their values and beliefs, including the judgments they form about other people.
- **Active**—the leader recognizes that interrupting the status quo to make change happen is important work and their involvement is needed.
- **Advocate**—the leader leans into a new type of leadership. They make room at the table for different insights and perspectives.

[Read the entire Fast Company article here.](#)

Leading Teams

Although more than 50 percent of the work in organizations is completed through teams, only about 27 percent of people consider their team to be consistently high performing. The truth is, a staggering number of leaders with little or no leadership training find themselves charged with leading teams.

These leaders need help with:

- Defining the difference between a work group and a team
- Developing the mindset that will support building a high performing team
- Understanding the predictable stages new teams go through on the way to high performance and how to lead at those moments
- Building team cohesion
- Planning, managing accountability, and enhancing communication
- Maintaining alignment

I like to use a Blanchard model that outlines four focus areas as building blocks to high performance:

- *Align for Results*—Do team members understand what they are doing and why? Do they know how they will accomplish goals? Do they agree on how they will work together?
- *Communicate during Conflict*—Do team members feel comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions? Can they do so without fear?
- *Build Team Cohesion*—Has the team begun to work better together? Have people learned to work through challenges, but are still a bit tentative?
- *Sustain High Performance*—Have team members demonstrated they know how to work together as one? Are they productive and ready to take on more?

Successful team leaders provide appropriate leadership behaviors to help their team members focus on what is important as they move from getting started to high performance. [Learn more here.](#)



What We Are Learning from Neuroscience

Fact #3: Expectations have more power than anyone realizes.

When we expect something good—a treat, a raise, a promotion, a day off, or perhaps a cool new assignment—dopamine is released in anticipation of the good thing. When it turns out that what was expected was incorrect, or suddenly changed to something either less good or downright bad, the brain literally stops producing dopamine. It feels like a crash in the brain—people lose access to their pre-frontal cortex and their limbic system takes over. This is when people are likely to behave like five-year-olds.

Implications: Careful communication while managing people's expectations is a key leadership responsibility that many leaders overlook because they don't realize how important it is. Leaders need to provide enough information so people don't make things up or misinterpret what they hear in a way that will result in dashed prospects.



Getting Started on Your Journey

Training to become an executive coach involves a mix of formal basic coach education, practical experience, and ongoing learning. Extensive experience working in organizations is helpful, as is experience in leading others.

Developing the competence and confidence to work with executive clients requires access to appropriate resources, a way to practice new skills, and a way to measure progress. In the Blanchard Leadership Coach Certification course, we use a learning journey design that is spaced, layered, and social. Let's do a quick review of this approach.

Spaced Learning

[More than 200 research studies](#) have examined the benefits of *spaced learning* (breaking learning experiences into smaller pieces and delivering them over time) versus *massed learning* (all at once/event-driven).

Spaced learning experiences give individuals opportunities to practice what they have learned and to scaffold higher level skills onto ones they've previously developed. This helps [build skills](#).

Spaced learning also gives people the chance to “think without thinking” about a new idea. This means spending time in the *default mode network*—a combination of brain systems that are activated when we are not focused on a task. Colloquially put, it's the ability to noodle or marinate on a concept. This fosters the creation of insights and makes it more likely that learners will form new habits and turn the learning into workplace behaviors.

Layering of Content

Layering of content allows participants to make connections across time, which fosters sense-making. For example, if participants are learning about building trust, a learning journey could also cover relevant topics like communication skills. This builds a holistic skill set that is valuable in a myriad of situations.

During the best learning journeys, topics or modules are presented as different layers under the overarching framework. As participants progress through a learning journey, they can learn, for example, how trust is a prerequisite for honest conversations, which are a requirement for leading situationally, and so on. Each layer is like a thread in a tapestry.

This approach has numerous benefits including improved comprehension, better retention, increased application, a more positive attitude toward the content, and increased awareness of how to use the content in different settings.

Social Component

Building social dimensions (which can range from breakout activities to long-term cohort relationships) into learning experiences activates powerful motivational and cognitive mechanisms in learners. Plus, learners tend to enjoy social learning activities and can benefit from the support and accountability they often generate.

A good learning design will include access to self-sustaining learning communities that give people an opportunity to contextualize what they are learning and apply it to their skill set. Well designed communities are lively digital or in-person forums where people can learn together, collaborate, and grow. Dedicated places for sharing best practices and swapping tips are safe spaces where people can confide their challenges to their colleagues and get help. This empowers learners to form their own opinions about the content.



What We Are Learning from Neuroscience

Fact #4: Our brains are wired to connect.

When people feel excluded, the limbic system interprets this as certain death. Adrenaline and cortisol are released, which sparks a fight-or-flight response—and pretty much no one is going to be doing any high-level thinking.

Implications: Anything leaders can do to include people, promote inclusive language, share information with everyone who needs to hear it, and help people work against their own implicit cognitive biases is going to help the entire group think better together. Coaches can make the case with their clients that inclusiveness isn't about being a better person, it's about increased productivity.

To learn more read: [Our brains are wired to connect.](#)



Excelling at Executive Coaching

Becoming a highly sought after executive coach doesn't happen by accident. It is the result of learning, looking carefully in the mirror, spending the time to dig deep into preexisting skills, and then combining those skills with new, scaffolded knowledge. This results in unique insights and actionable behaviors. Successful learning also involves finding a community of like-minded learners who will challenge and support you along the way.

My goal with this eBook has been to provide you with a plan to begin exploring how to develop the skills you need to become a successful executive coach.

We have reviewed the basics of coaching and looked at some of the new areas needed to develop the skills required to coach in the leadership environment. We've explored how the use of leadership models can help develop the competence and confidence needed to get started.

Finally, we've looked at how spaced learning, layering of content, and adding a social component helps to deepen understanding and practice what is learned. This opens the door to long-term retention by applying the new information in our lives. People help us make a commitment to apply what we've learned and get immediate feedback on our skills.

I hope this eBook inspires you to take the next steps along your journey. We need good leaders now more than ever. When you become a highly skilled leadership coach, you gain the ability to transform lives. I wish you well on your journey.

Blanchard® Leadership Coach Certification Program

15-week virtual instructor-led course

Challenge yourself and expand your knowledge base to provide excellent results for your clients

The **Blanchard Leadership Coach Certification** program, developed by coaching pioneer Madeleine Homan Blanchard, teaches time-tested Blanchard frameworks and models and how to use them to increase your coaching effectiveness.



I can confidently say that every minute spent in this coaching program was incredibly valuable. I am glad that I waited to get a leadership coach certification until now, when Blanchard Leadership Coach Certification was launched. I highly value the quality and usefulness of Blanchard's models and concepts.

—Antonio Estrada
MBA in Finance, Engineer, PCC

Who is this program for?

This program is for advanced practitioners who seek to challenge themselves and expand their knowledge base. Participants should be certified ACC, PCC, MCC, EMCC. Exceptions will be made on a case-by-case basis.

You'll Gain

- Critical insights that have proven invaluable to successful coaches
- A peer network of professional coaches to share with and learn from
- 40 ICF continuing education credits
- Our Coach's Tool Kit (valued at \$800)
- Access to weekly learning labs led by a Master Certified Coach

About Blanchard

Blanchard® is a global leader in leadership development, consulting, and coaching. For more than 40 years, Blanchard has partnered with organizations to maximize individual achievement and organizational performance – bringing measurable progress and true transformation. Blanchard's SLII® is the global leadership model of choice, powering inspired leaders for more than 10,000 organizations worldwide. Blanchard also offers a suite of award-winning solutions through flexible delivery modalities to meet the specific needs of clients and learners.



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