

# A View Inside Coaching Organizations

Jeannine Sandstrom, Linda Miller and Bob Johnson

*This article is based on a recorded conversation occurring between these three senior executive coaches in Phoenix, Arizona on August 27, 2004. All three participated on a panel of senior executive coaching professionals convened at the 2003 Annual Meeting of the International Coach Federation (ICF) in Denver, Colorado. The success of the 2003 Panel was followed by a second presentation at the 2004 ICF Conference in Quebec City.*

*Maintaining their commitment to the profession, the panelists decided to conduct a series of interviews, in pairs or trios, which enabled them to extend the dialogue they enjoyed over the two years of panel presentations. Each interview was recorded and transcripts prepared. This is the third in the series to be published in the IJCO. Look for the remaining interviews to be published in the next issue.*

Welcome to a conversation with three world-class executive coaches who are discussing how to identify Senior Executive Coaches and how to utilize coaching teams. This dialogue reflects questions often asked by executives with whom they, or their organizations, work.

Coaches in this conversation are Jeannine Sandstrom who is CEO of Coachworks International, Linda Miller who serves as Corporate Alliance Executive with the Ken Blanchard Companies, and Bob Johnson who is the founder of Leadersearch.

Even though coaching has been around for several decades, the rise of its visibility has caused some confusion in the marketplace, particularly how to locate and utilize Senior Executive Coaches. Three questions most-often asked about Executive Coaching are:

- What distinguishes Senior Executive Coaches?
- How and why do they work together in organizations?
- What are the outcomes of Executive Coaching?

## What Distinguishes Senior Executive Coaches?

*Linda:* Whenever we talk about the distinctions of Senior Executive Coaches, credibility and presence immediately come to mind. Presence is critical when working with executives. Executive Coaches have just a few seconds with which to connect and communicate their credibility when they come in contact with executives. Do you find that as well?

*Jeannine:* I do. It's that immediate connectivity. It is as if we are looking at each other with the unspoken question of, "Do we fit? Am I going to be comfortable having you in the boardroom or on the golf course with other Senior Executives?" Without that comfort zone, it's difficult to get into really serious dialogue.

*Bob:* It always seems to be one of the key separators. I wonder how often the Executive looks at us, as we come in the room and asks, “Has this person walked in my shoes before?”

*Jeannine:* I’ve often been asked that, Bob. “What is your history? What have you done? Have you run a business? Do you have an idea what it’s like to be scrutinized by a board of directors?”

*Bob:* Have you found when that happens that we handle the situation in terms of presence, rather than consulting? That we are coaches that can be with them, but not necessarily be telling them or advising?

*Jeannine:* I find myself sharing my experiences of running a consultancy that had a new holding company. We’ll get into the dynamics of those roles. Sometimes I’m even sharing how I got myself in some real binds with the corporation. It goes from sharing experiences into a conversation on how this relates to the executive’s world.

*Linda:* I had a situation a couple of years ago when a man came to Seattle to interview me. One of the first questions he asked was “What makes you credible?” I threw back my head and laughed, because that is the question that I dread. After I stopped laughing, I said to him, “I’m not sure there’s anything I can say that’s going to make me credible, so at the end of this conversation I will trust that you will be able to tell me if I’m credible!” A funny thing happened the next day. He called me and said that my response was perfect, and I was hired. As coaches we don’t want to try and convince people of anything! That’s not what our coaching model is. Our model is partnering from the very start.

*Bob:* I like the word you said: partnering. Presence is really about the way that we walk into the room as partners in this whole process.

*Jeannine:* As executive coaches, we need to feel comfortable with the same problem issues as executives would have in their company. I also find that along with business acumen comes a whole series of cultural pieces when working with international organizations. For example, have I worked internationally; do I understand different business approaches between Asian organizations and American, etc.

*Bob:* So would we say that effective Senior Executive Coaches need to have come from a background that allows them to come into a room with a presence that communicates partnering right away?

*Jeannine:* Yes, and I think it also speaks to credibility. We need to know ourselves well. We have to be truthful with what we’re capable of doing and our true experience and abilities.

*Linda:* Absolutely, and we’re modeling in every interaction. I want to go back to presence. There are a couple of components that need to be addressed. One is congruence. Executive coaches must be totally congruent, inside and outside, so that even at the first meeting, the congruence is evident. They must be able to share themselves and stay focused on whatever it is that the executive is discussing.

*Jeannine:* So executive coaches need to be vulnerable and to communicate that when we're together, the executive is going to see the real me, because that's what their internal people want to see of them.

*Linda:* I want for us to have the kind of working relationship that they can transfer to others in their organizations. This becomes part of their presence, and builds credibility.

*Bob:* Part of what I heard in that is honesty and matching. You will walk into a situation, and if there isn't congruence, then you may say this isn't the right match for us. Jeannine, you have a great story about that. It was a situation where somebody tried to get you in as the coach. What happened with that?

*Jeannine:* Yes, it was an uncomfortable situation, but I knew I had to definitely follow my hunch. I discovered right away that the executive had a particular way of doing business that didn't fit my core belief system. But I had a colleague that I felt would be able to work effectively with him. I told the executive that I couldn't do the work but that I knew someone who would be a great match with him.

*Bob:* You've made such a great distinction about the kind of executive coaches that organizations want to work with. They want Senior Executive Coaches who will take a look and assess if it's the right opportunity, and if it is a good match. If not, senior executive coaches will be honest about it and refer to somebody else who might be a better match. The junior, or developing coach, will usually take any work they can get.

*Jeannine:* That speaks to one of our other conversations, Bob, about scarcity.

*Bob:* Yes, there is a real scarcity, or what I call a hoarding mentality, in the profession, unfortunately. Senior executive coaches will give business away and refer business when it's best for the client, for the individual, or the organization they're being invited into.

*Jeannine:* And Linda you had a second point about presence that you mentioned earlier. The first was dis-congruence. What was the second point you wanted to bring up?

*Linda:* It has to do with alignment. If we as senior executive coaches say that we're going to be vulnerable or transparent, then we need to demonstrate it as soon as possible. If we say we're going to be very direct and speak up when we sense something needs to be said, then we need to do that as soon as possible. I hear from developing coaches that there's an assumption that they have to wait until there's a relationship established in order to be direct with a Senior Executive. I say just the opposite. If you get in somebody's face, it actually makes the relationship. It creates the relationship and solidifies it, as long as there's presence, credibility and alignment.

*Jeannine:* Sometimes, I'm not really sure how much of the complete truth is being given to me, so speaking up when something seems off is what I want to demonstrate. If I don't speak up, shame on me, I'm not doing my job, and I shouldn't be the one engaged to work with the executive.

*Bob:* There's a fine edge. If we aren't on the edge of being fired, we probably aren't doing our job as a good Executive Coach.

*Linda:* In order to be working in the best interests of the client and the organization, especially on the top level, we need to be on that edge. Not afraid of being fired.

*Jeannine:* Both of those, being on the edge and presence, speaks to confidence. There's a distinction I have seen in many senior executive coaches between confidence and ego. This can be a great conversation with the executive.

*Bob:* Yes. It's the fine line; it's not all about me, as the coach. But I do have to show confidence and competence.

*Jeannine:* And self-awareness and self-knowledge of where my boundaries and capabilities are. I can't come in to coach around a certain issue or a systems challenge if I don't have the confidence, the competence and experience to do that. And yet I have been with some colleagues who are so fabulous in their presentations and their marketing that I can hear them saying, "I can do anything," when it's not really the truth

*Linda:* You know you mentioned something about self-knowledge. That is so critical. Not only to know what our own competencies are, but also to know what are our biases and assumptions. What if there's a bias against C-level leaders or against middle managers. That bias is going to come through in the coaching. So, part of self-knowledge is understanding where I have biases or am making assumptions.

*Bob:* Jeannine, I know there are other hot buttons you had in relation to business acumen. Can we go there?

*Jeannine:* Yes, there are two areas in business acumen that I screen for when I have other Senior Executive Coaches working with me. I educate executives to look for the same thing. One is the measure of industry-knowledge that is needed to work with that executive. To work with some clients, the coach needs to know a portion of their world, their industry, or the particular challenges that they may have. Other times the coach doesn't need to know it. Executive coaches need to have related industry knowledge and experience with similar sized organizations.

This ties directly to confidentiality. There are two tiers of confidentiality. One is about the actual business of the client company with whom they're working. This can be either a verbal or written confidentiality agreement. This protects everyone, especially when we know we're working in competitive environments and have data about a specific organization.

Most of the time when coaches are talking about confidentiality, they are talking about the other tier, the one-on-one conversations with individual clients. Really knowing and understanding the two levels of confidentiality is a part of successful senior executive coaching. So those are the two hot spots: the industry knowledge and the distinct levels of confidentiality.

*Bob:* The level that I would call the entry level around confidentiality is the one-on-one relationship of coach to client. And we could probably have extensive conversations in relation to that, but could we just talk about that for a couple minutes. Let's share our views in relation to the one-on-one confidentiality agreements.

*Jeannine:* We make it clear that the one-on-one is confidential. We're going to get into this a little bit as we talk about the teams, but we always have somebody that's managing the relationships as well. When we have multiple coaches with multiple individuals or teams, their confidentiality has to be clearly established. Sometimes, something from a coaching session needs to be addressed. When that happens, we make sure that there's no specific information that's shared.

*Bob:* In our system we call those organizational themes. There may be a theme that might rise to the surface when you have a team of coaches working in the same organization. We will not break the confidence of a private conversation that takes place one-on-one, but as those themes come to the surface we think that's a value add that the organization should have.

*Linda:* Agree. We actually say that if we don't hear the theme from at least a third of the people that are being coached, we won't report it back. It's not a theme, and that could break confidentiality, so we're very careful of that.

*Jeannine:* If I'm working with an executive and there's something that really needs to be known, part of our methodology is telling the executive that we can't move forward until he identifies who needs to know the information. Sometimes, we bring in the person that actually needs to know, and share the information. I'm thinking about a specific case with a CEO who was having some competitive challenges. The Board needed to know, but he hadn't shared it with the Board. This lack of communication was impacting planning and decision making for the next year. I called a time out, and said that I couldn't work further with him until the Board had been brought up to speed on the situation. We spent our next two or three coaching sessions figuring out how he was going to talk with the Board, while taking into consideration the politics of the Board. It became a theme that the Board needed to know, but it wasn't up to me to bring it up. In fact I couldn't. My client needed to do that, and he did.

*Bob:* Interesting. So, this is another area that's a fine balance, how we hold in confidence the one-on-one relationship, while we provide a service to the organization.

*Linda:* I want to add something to that if I can. We are very careful about not creating triangles. If we're brought on to work with a team, somebody wants to know what's happening. And if we're doing individual work and teamwork, we have to carefully consider what we share back and forth. We try to be clear and to qualify what information is shared and what information is not. All involved parties are told that so that they know. Periodically, somebody will approach us asking what is going on within the coaching. At that moment, we have to make sure that the confidentiality is acknowledged. We don't share that information but rather direct them back into the organization. We believe at Blanchard that one of our goals in an organization is to increase internal communication. We don't want to be carrying information back and forth. Instead, we direct inquiries back into the organization to the appropriate people.

*Bob:* This is another great distinguisher of Senior Executive Coaches: the ability to influence internal communication, vs. becoming an intermediary. We've talked a lot about the distinctions. I'm sure we also want to talk about how organizations find senior executive coaches.

*Linda:* That's a really important aspect to discuss, because there are so many coaches out there. Even if we give referrals to the ICF, sometimes it's hard to know who are the Senior Executive Coaches. One of the things that we talk about with this is networking.

*Jeannine:* It's really pretty classic networking, same as if I'm looking for a doctor, a different accountant or another professional.

*Bob:* So, networking is what we would consider the primary connector, and beyond that is a second step of looking at the International Coach Federation's referral site ([www.coachfederation.org](http://www.coachfederation.org)). It's important to see if they're affiliated with the ICF, because we feel like the ICF has the highest standard of ethics. So we recommend coaches who are referred and who are ICF-affiliated.

*Jeannine:* And the International Coach Federation is also the oldest of these organizations now worldwide. Given the industry is young, and that the ethics, the credentialing, and the training has had fewer than 10 years of formatting, there's a lot of folks that have been in the world of coaching previous to that. When clients ask me about this, I say that my first preference for senior executive coaches are those who have been through a coach-training school, can differentiate what they've done in their previous successful lives from coaching, and are affiliated with the ICF.

*Linda:* We take a little bit of a different perspective. We want ICF-certified coaches. We've run into some companies that have hired "coaches," people who are consultants and who call themselves coaches, even though they still consult. When these organizations want coaching, we've had to educate them on what coaching is before we start the coaching. We've seen the damage, and I think that's why we've taken a fairly strong stand on having people, especially Senior-level Executive Coaches, be certified through the ICF. Bob, what about you?

*Bob:* Interesting conversation. At Leadersearch, we have a dozen coaches who are doing ongoing work individually and as teams in organizations. All twelve coaches are trained and ICF-credentialed coaches. Those are requirements to be an associate coach with Leadersearch. The hypocritical side of that is that I'm not. And I guess that's an upside of starting the business yourself. You can set the rules, but it is truly hypocritical. I've been coaching for twenty-one years, and that's before the ICF existed, and it's before coach-training schools existed. But if we truly believe that the coaches in our system need to be credentialed, then I need to be too. So after twenty-one years, I am now in the middle of coach training.

*Linda:* Congratulations! At this point, I'd like to suggest we do a bit of a wrap-up. Let's go over some of the competencies we've discussed around Senior Executive Coaches that have

distinguished them from other coaches. One of them has to do with credibility and presence. Another has to do with business acumen. Another has to do with self-knowledge.

*Jeannine:* I had added the point of industry-knowledge. Whether in a particular engagement or client system, you really need to know and understand the concepts of the business in that particular engagement.

*Bob:* Lastly, we need to remember credentialing.

*Jeannine:* Let's take a break now, and then we'll come back to discuss how independent coaches work together on client projects.

## ***How and why do Executive Coaches work together in organizations?***

*Bob:* The second question we are going to address today is How and Why do coaches work together in organizations? One of the trends that we've been seeing is that independent coaches and coaching organizations are aligning together a lot more today.

*Jeannine:* They really are. Sometimes we ask our coaches why they're working for us, and they all say the same thing. They want to be part of something bigger. They want to be working with other really sharp coaches so that they can hone their skills, as well as work together in larger organizations and make a bigger impact.

*Bob:* What I've seen is that with independent coaches, there's a bit of a scarcity, or a hoarding mentality that comes from developing coaches. What we've seen at Leadersearch is that when coaches have had success as independent practitioners, they start looking for something more. What they find is collegiality. A drawing card. Collegiality brings them together. For many of us in the early days as senior executive coaches, we became mentors to junior or developing coaches vs. collegial learners. And now collegial coaches are saying "I've been successful, but what I'm looking for is the opportunity to learn with others." That creates the opportunity to actually work together on larger-scale projects.

*Jeannine:* And even though we might have been in some of the same training programs years ago, each one of us has developed slightly differently. I'm always curious to say, "How have you taken this path and what have you done differently with it than I have?" It becomes a challenge and a learning opportunity to share my experiences and how I fine tuned a particular approach. And, I want to know what you've done differently. I would agree that we're looking for the camaraderie. In addition, the co-creation or collaboration of three minds is better than one. I also think that companies are really beginning to benefit from this now.

*Linda:* They get to see multiple perspectives. They get to see multiple experiences in organizations when they have a variety of coaches with whom they're working, especially senior-level coaches. This models for them what we want them to do within their own teams, which is to hear a variety of perspectives and approaches, and to increase collaboration. When we go in with a number of high-level executive coaches, we're modeling what we want to happen inside organizations.

*Bob:* I really like your term, the modeling of what we do, because it is a new concept, I think, for many cultures in organizations.

*Linda:* Five years ago many of the calls we received were requests to work with one or two individuals inside of an organization. Now the calls are to work with teams or work groups. Without collaboration between coaching colleagues, it becomes difficult to staff a complex engagement effectively. As the visibility of coaching and its benefits have emerged, we're being asked for more coaches and broader engagements. The model that Blanchard is using is to partner and align with others who have been successful as independent coaches. How do you bring teams together at Leadersearch, Bob?

*Bob:* When coaches start to look for an opportunity to work together, they want to find other executive coaches who have the same level of experience and the desire to team together. We bring teams of experienced coaches on-site to do the work together rather than the more traditional model of an experienced coach who finds and manages more junior developing coaches. And the client gets the benefit of our collegiality, and our desire to work together. We also are offering what we were talking about earlier -- collaboration and cooperation of coaches.

*Jeannine:* We're modeling what we're asking teams inside organizations to do.

*Linda:* We talked about a word yesterday when we were preparing for this, and that word was co-opitition, a combination of collaboration and cooperation amongst colleagues who could be competitors. It is a powerful concept to bring inside organizations.

*Bob:* I have a colleague in an organization who says that coaches are fiercely independent, and they're like herding cats. Understanding and modeling co-opitition is starting to serve organizations.

*Jeannine:* As organizations are asking more of us as coaches, we need the diversity of the skill sets, the culture, the ethnicity of many coaches. We need a much broader base of skill sets to take into the more complete organizational engagements as well.

*Linda:* This goes back to what we were talking about earlier as one of our competencies -- knowing when we have what is needed and when we don't, and being able to pull in the right coaches, even if they're not within our systems originally. This is teaming with others who can do the work that will benefit the organization.

*Bob:* One of the things that we haven't talked about yet is the matching process. That's an ingredient common in all of this. When we know that one size does not fit all, and when we have the resources in our system, and in our industry to pull in the right folks for the organization, we know that we're doing the best job of serving the client.

*Linda:* The question you have asked is "How do you match?" How do we know who that right coach is? We all are great at doing this, so let's share how we do it!

*Bob:* For us it goes back to the networking discussion. First, we have to have the right coaches in our network. We have to maintain relationships with the coaches and get to know them just like we maintain relationships with our clients. Then, we can do an effective job of matching. Our belief is that one of the things that distinguishes good quality senior executive coaches is that they've got the ability and the presence to assess a client situation and do an effective job of matching. In many cases, people believe that an effective match is finding somebody that's similar to the client.

*Linda:* And in many cases that's not so.

*Bob:* Exactly. Some clients want that similarity, because it's easy.

*Linda:* But not necessarily. We had a situation recently that Jeannine was involved with a client who wanted an executive coach in Dallas. Even though we have 70 coaches in our Blanchard network, we did not have anybody in Dallas. Because of networking with Jeannine and our experience together, I knew that Jeannine was absolutely the right person for this individual. So, we did exactly what we're talking about. I called Jeannine and asked if she would be willing to work under the banner of Blanchard, which would mean working outside of her own organization. We made some agreements, and everybody was thrilled.

*Jeannine:* It's been a real win. The client was very satisfied and pleased that Blanchard was willing to go outside of the current core of coaches. And Linda, you went further than that. You had provided them three or four additional names for an expansion. This worked so well that they came back to you and asked for more coaches throughout the state of Texas that may be working with some of their senior people. We've done a similar model at Coach Works. Especially when we know a client is on the East or West Coast, and we know that travel expenses are going to be a key factor in the contracting, then we will look for other senior executive coaches who are in the needed region. We bring those in to be interviewed in the same methodology that you and I worked together. We do our best; with our knowledge of the coach and the client system, and even the individual they're going to be working with, to make the best connection. Even so, it doesn't always work out. The truth of it is that both the coach and the client have the responsibility to speak up if this is not a right fit. By having a team and an alliance in that organization, we've then got the capability of changing coaches, and finding one that fits that executive better.

*Bob:* That's another great example of what I would call a shared-abundance model, vs. the scarcity model that has been traditional.

*Linda:* The matching process is very intuitive. You've got to know the coaches and the clients. At Blanchard, we came up with a very similar process, because we knew that if we were going to do a matching process, we had to be prepared if it didn't work. We do the best we can at matching, and we encourage clients and coaches to talk with each other if either isn't sure it's a good fit. We want them to try to sort it out first with each other. If they can't, we automatically switch coaches. I think this fits into organizations. Leaders and executives need to really know their people, and what works for them. So we're modeling about knowing the people, probably not overtly, but on a subtle level.

*Jeannine:* And when you're one that's been assigned to a person in an organization, it can get very interesting. Coach Works was partnering with an internal OD Executive and making coaching assignments. I was given my assignment of one of the presidents of a division. When I walked in and sat down to work with him, he looked at me and said "Why were you assigned to me?" I said, "Let's keep talking; I bet we're going to find out!" Within an hour of us interviewing each other, both of us were laughing! Our bullheadedness matched each other! We came out acknowledging that the internal OD exec knew both of us well and knew that we would not let each other get away with anything. It turned out to be a very effective relationship, and I think I learned the most!

*Bob:* I agree that matching is an intuitive process. At times, a different coach is needed, too. There have been situations in the past where one of my coaches will come back and say that it's time for a change of coaches and that a different coach would be a better match in this situation. Sometimes, circumstances have shifted, and even the things they may be working on in their coaching relationship may have shifted. I look to our coaches, again in that shared abundance vs. scarcity mentality, to let us know when another teammate is a better match.

*Linda:* We had an interesting situation where we had to let a coach go in the middle of an engagement, and it was very challenging on a lot of levels because this particular coach was an excellent coach who was working with five clients within one organization. We had to go back to the organization and say that she wouldn't be coaching any longer with us. Several of the clients were not happy about it. However, to your point, Bob, once they saw that they got to experience a different style of coaching, they saw a huge benefit for changing in the middle. I wouldn't want to do it that way again, but we definitely had a huge learning on all levels. We all learned that it's good to make changes in the middle because then you get to experience different styles, different perspectives, and different ways of thinking.

*Jeannine:* You mentioned that changing coaches in the middle can be a challenge, Linda. What are other challenges that you see with bringing together independent specialists and helping them to work as a team?

*Bob:* The first one that always seems to come up is confidentiality. It's easy to maintain confidentiality in the one-on-one coaching relationship. But today we're talking about working with teams. There's always a debate about who is truly your client. Is it the coachee, that you're working with one-on-one, or is it the client organization.

*Linda:* Or, is it the team?

*Bob:* That may be different from the client organization. So maintaining client confidentiality is one of the largest challenges. As soon as a client hears that we're not only teaming up a number of independent coaches, but we actually are teaming up coaches who might belong to other coaching organizations, confidentiality does come back to the surface.

*Jeannine:* I would add confidentiality among the coaches, because each one of us has developed our own methodologies and processes. Am I willing to totally share that with you, Bob, if I think

the client system really could benefit from this particular approach? I'm saying 'Here, use my experience', and I trust that it's going to be used appropriately.

*Bob:* Absolutely.

*Jeannine:* So that comes back to being willing to share experiences, knowing that we're going to be able to win collectively and benefit the client. But it does require thinking about the trust and trustworthiness of the team members on the coaching team.

*Linda:* We think about this in terms of having clear agreements. Clear agreements inside the coaching organization about what information is shared, how it's shared, and how information is handled. Clear agreements with the individual clients, and the client organization, to make sure that everybody is on the same page. I agree with you, Bob, that confidentiality is number one.

*Bob:* Linda, you talked about confidentiality being key, and we're all, in agreement with that. But I'm sure one of the things that comes up quite often now with clients would be "Wait a minute. You're not only bringing in a multitude of coaches from your system, but you're actually bringing in coaches from other systems to work together?" We need to make sure there is a consistent methodology in the processes delivered. Because, Jeannine, your system would be different than mine would be at Leadersearch, or what Linda might be doing.

*Jeannine:* We have two ways that we handle that. If our engagement is actually to use our lead product or process, Legacy Leadership, then those coaches, regardless of what company structure, will have had to have come through our certification. It's our methodology they're certified in and that's what we expect them to use. That's one model. Another model is when we're actually asked to source senior executive coaches who are generalists. These are coaches who are not following a particular leadership methodology. In fact the organization may ask us to work with their leadership model and methodology. In that case, we'll contract with coaches who are the best fit for the organization. So it becomes a two-way street, contracting with the organization, and then subcontracting sometimes five, ten, fifteen individual coaches or coaching organizations.

*Bob:* And there's again a paradox in relation to the consistency. What we want is a consistent relationship with the client, and we want good quality senior executive coaches that have a methodology and who bring their own style.

*Linda:* Absolutely, they have to bring their own style, and they need to be free to do that style, as well as understand the leadership models that are in use. The coaching team needs to know what's going on in the organization. They're attuned to what's going on, what the initiatives are, what the focus of the work is, and are free to use their own styles.

*Jeannine:* It requires us, again, to walk our own talk, like we're coaching the companies. We bring in independent senior executive coaches. We spend one, two, three days making sure that our methodologies are agreed upon. We discuss how we're going to use the core methodologies and tools. Then it comes back to the individual styles and how they're used. That's the diversity

you bring, the value. But the actual core methodology would be agreed-upon as to how we're going to work together.

*Bob:* This is one of the things that organizations have been asking us for several years now. I would call it a one-stop shopping opportunity. What has happened in the past is when organizations have looked for coaching, Human Resources has traditionally had to be the one to source out these independent coaches. HR has had to find them, select them, and manage them. And they're not the experts when it comes to identifying the most effective senior executive coaches. Now the organization can say "We're looking for one place that we can go to that will be a full service to us for our coaching needs."

*Linda:* We've been hearing quite a bit is that there are a lot of coaches working within one organization, but nobody knows who they are or who they're working with. In this case, they're all independent coaches who aren't being managed. So the organization isn't getting the trends or the themes back into the organization, which is something that we also offer. Many organizations are coming back to us and are saying, "Help us, because we need coaching in a variety of different levels, starting at the top, and we also need someone to manage it. We don't know what's happening in our own organization right now." Therefore we take on an oversight or a management role.

*Bob:* In this part of the conversation, we've covered a fair bit in relation to why and how senior executive coaches are now working together. Let's try to do a little bit of a debrief. We've talked about how one size does not fit all. We've discussed how using a team of coaches gives an organization the opportunity for what we would call one-stop shopping. That locality is and has always been a challenge with independent coaches, and with this kind of a system we can have coaches that would be on the ground, on or near client locations. We talked about maintaining client confidentiality and the criticalness of doing that. Handling mismatches also came up. And we talked about the requirement for managing the relationship with the client, and finally, our new word, co-optition. Anything else that you two can remember that we talked about, that we need to make sure we cover in the debrief?

*Jeannine:* For me the bottom line for the client is that they get more options, and collectively we have higher quality of work.

*Linda:* And I would agree, it's the higher quality of work and the better value to the clients.

## ***What are the outcomes of Executive Coaching?***

*Jeannine:* The third question we are going to address in this conversation is what are the outcomes for organizations utilizing senior executive coaches. We are seeing the bar continue to rise with the visibility and the higher use of senior executive coaches. Along with that comes higher expectations of deliverables.

*Bob:* It's not like it used to be. In the old days we had to tell people what coaching was. Organizations are more sophisticated today, and they understand, at least conceptually, what

coaching is all about and the value that it brings to organizations. So it does raise the bar right from the start.

*Linda:* And they are always asking about outcomes. “What am I going to get out of this investment?” I’ll take a stab at the first one, which I think is really critical. One of the first outcomes we see is increased effectiveness of communication. This includes quality of communication and quantity when needed, which it usually is.

*Jeannine:* So you’re looking at efficiencies of communications: the candor, the straight talk, the getting things on top of the table.

*Linda:* Sharing things that maybe haven’t been shared before. Saying things that weren’t said before.

*Jeannine:* Having meeting decisions actually stick, and not be renegotiated outside the meetings. A lot of this simply eats up time and efficiency and performance.

*Bob:* Which brings about in many cases, a cultural shift or a transformation for the organization.

*Jeannine:* It does, Bob.

*Bob:* It may not be the reason they ask coaches to come into the organization, but they will start to see a shift.

*Linda:* And that shift actually starts when the executive and his team operates differently, followed by the changes in how each member of the team operates with their team. So that shift starts the best way possible - from the top, spreading out throughout the organization.

*Jeannine:* They’re having to model those changes. They’re being coached, and the expectations and legacy of that work just keeps growing.

*Bob:* And that includes the idea that mistakes are a valuable learning opportunity in the organization.

*Jeannine:* Yes. Conflicts and mistakes.

*Linda:* It creates a learning environment, instead of a punitive environment. That is very hard for some organizations to adjust to, and yet that is such a critical shift.

*Bob:* One of the things that used to bother me was that coaching was viewed as a fix-it. Now, organizations have a more sophisticated understanding of the value of coaching in the organization. In other words, it’s not just something that’s going to hopefully fix a leader who’s in trouble.

*Linda:* It’s really about continued development for leaders.

*Bob:* For leaders in organizations and teams.

*Jeannine:* And for high-potentials, who need to be moving up quickly, who need to be developing new competencies. The competencies they've had from the past have been just perfect, and now it's time to step up to a higher level. Coaching can really support that.

*Linda:* Sometimes it becomes a part of the succession planning process. Leaders need to be stretched in competencies and leadership relationships, before or as they are moved to another level within the organization.

*Bob:* As we talk about succession planning, there's another step that we've witnessed at Leadersearch over the last two years. It's what we're calling Sage Leadership Development. Many of the Senior Executive Leaders aren't ready to retire, and in many cases the organization can't afford for them to retire, because they haven't developed those behind them. So how do we make sure that the old sage can still be a value to the organization, and can come back in? There's coaching of that sage leader, to still be a value to the organization, and as well, coaching the person that's replaced them.

*Jeannine:* And with the shelf life of some of the new technology, those sages may not be someone in their sixties or seventies. They could be in their fifties. That gives an entirely different perspective to their continued contribution to the organization perhaps from the outside.

*Linda:* Another area that I see is the line of sight to the bottom line. We talk about it in terms of alignment. Impact and alignment are seen from the company level all the way through to individual, team and organizational goals. I think one of the places where coaching can be beneficial is to help that line of sight be very very clear.

*Jeannine:* Tracking that line of sight all the way to ROI, to the return on investment for the company, is a critical component of coaching. Many of the behavior skills that we look at in leadership competence is how does that impact the entire system, which has a direct return on investment, i.e. profit.

*Linda:* I agree, absolutely.

*Bob:* So, another benefit is in bringing even more effective business processes, even though that wasn't the initial agenda for the coach coming into the organization.

*Linda:* That brings up such an interesting point, Bob, because so many times what the organization comes in with is not actually what we talk about in the coaching. Sometimes it leads to many other things, which deepens the value of the coaching. And that is one of the fun things around coaching because it's very organic. It's not linear, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, although we can be talking about things in linear terms. It's very organic, which allows a number of different areas to be discussed that might not have been in the original scope that was being discussed.

*Jeannine:* We will actually cue the executive that there are several things they may get out of coaching that they're not expecting, or wasn't on their original punch list when they've called us.

*Linda:* Absolutely, I think the contracting and setting that expectation up at the beginning is really important.

*Bob:* But even though we've contracted and set up the expectations in the beginning, we know, intuitively that it will morph and shift.

*Jeannine:* Yes. We need to start talking about that from the very beginning to set both the expectations for the immediate shifts desired as well as to have clients prepared to embrace new directions as they unfold.

*Linda:* We've gotten to the point where we actually will build in quarterly, or semi-annual checkpoints, if it's a multi-year contract, to look at themes. We're checking to see if the original coaching focus from the company's perspective is still on target. With one client in the last year, we called a complete time out, both for the coaching team and for the organization, and totally changed the direction and the purpose of the coaching because the company's international environment had changed so much.

*Jeannine:* You're talking a little bit about being responsible for the focus of the work, and I think that's another benefit that comes out of this. And along with responsibility is accountability. And to be accountable, what you're talking about is making sure the work is going in the right direction, or to stop it if it's not. And I think that's something again that we're modeling for the organizations where we work, again, is this accountability and responsibility, and how critical that is.

*Bob:* Sounds like the creation of a significant learning environment.

*Linda:* Yes, absolutely, at all levels.

*Jeannine:* For the coaching organization that's working with them, the individual clients, their teams, and the sponsoring organization.

*Bob:* Sounds like we're really talking about a partnership in creating a learning environment.

*Linda:* And that goes back then, if I might be so bold, to what we were saying at the very beginning. Having a partnership, having credible executive coaches, senior-level people, who can partner at the levels that are needed in the organization in order to create the transformation that we're talking about.

*Jeannine:* And that's what our whole conversation has been about. We've been talking about how we, the three of us, share and model here how we identify senior executive coaches, and how our companies are utilizing coaching teams to benefit our client organizations, and to challenge us all to be learning organizations.

**Dr. Jeannine Sandstrom, MCC,** CEO and founder of CoachWorks® International Inc. ([www.coachworks.com](http://www.coachworks.com)) has been a business owner and international leader coach since 1979. Clients recognize her as a valued resource in accelerating their leadership development and organizational effectiveness, creating organizations with sustained vitality, while building a lasting bridge between desired personal outcomes and organizational strategic goals.

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