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Coaching Classroom Instruction



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THE CLASSROOM STRATEGIES SERIES

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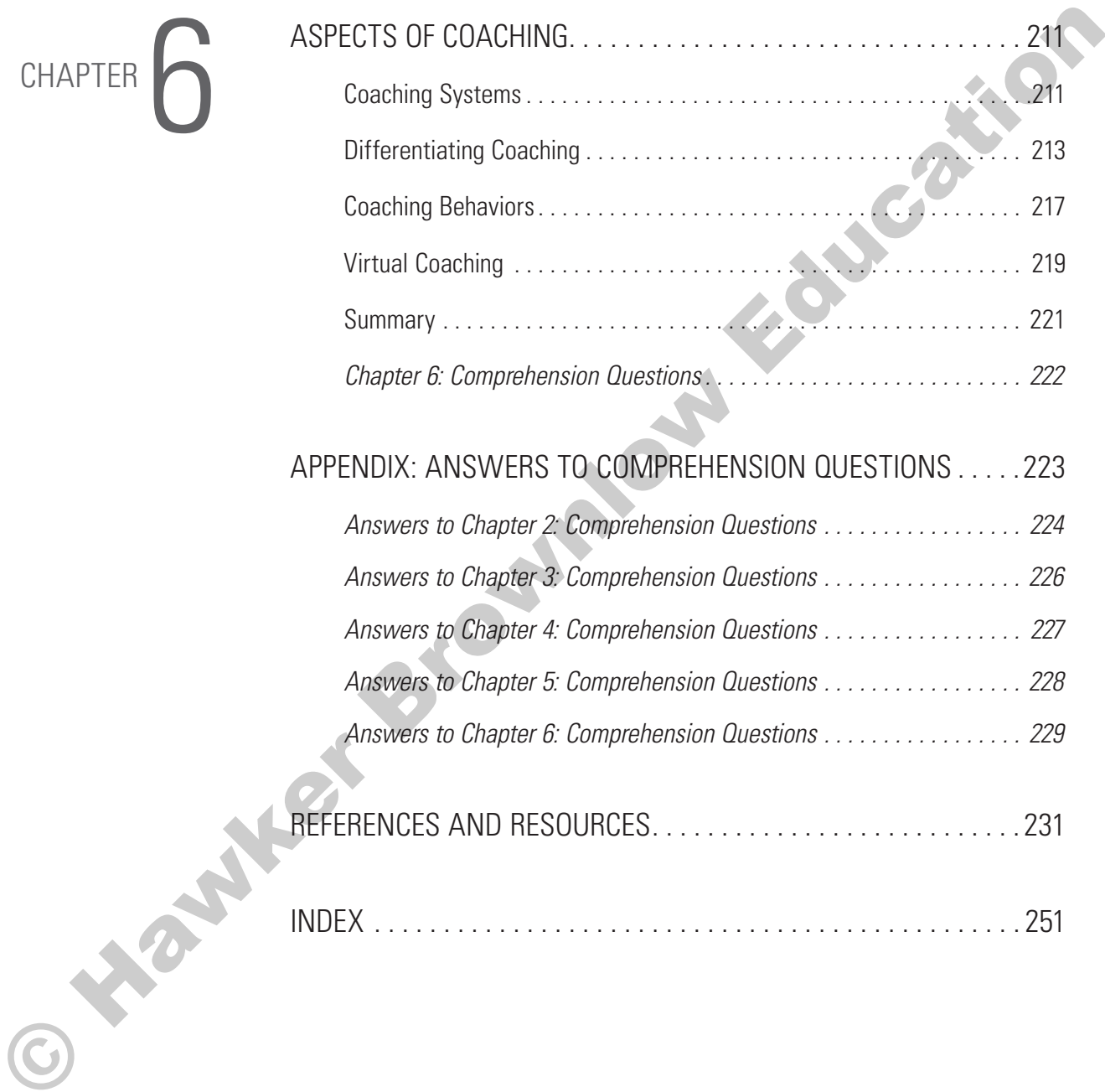
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Chapter 1

RESEARCH AND THEORY

With a complex endeavor such as teaching, it is extremely difficult to reach and then maintain the highest levels of performance without help. The most effective help commonly comes in the form of coaching. As Atul Gawande (2011) noted, “No matter how well trained people are, few can sustain their best performance on their own. That’s where coaching comes in” (p. 1). Gawande further noted that “coaching done well may be the most effective intervention designed for human performance” (p. 9). Because teacher effectiveness is directly linked to student achievement (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004), it is well worth the effort to support teacher growth and performance through coaching.

Coaching also serves as a way to pass along knowledge that has been accumulated over time. Nicholas Emler and Nick Heather (1980) stated that “we are a successful species because we cheat; we tell each other the answers” (p. 145). Bob Garvey (2010) added that “knowledge or experience sharing and advice giving can be an essential part of learning: if we do not do this as a species, we commit the next generation to reinvent the wheel!” (p. 346). Isaac Newton’s famous quote, “If I have seen further than others, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants” (Isaac Newton, n.d.), also echoes this idea. In educational coaching, this knowledge sharing involves helping teachers transfer what they learn in professional development sessions and other experiences into classroom practice. Teachers’ needs often stem not from a lack of knowledge, but from a failure to operationalize their knowledge (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Knight, 2007).

History of Coaching

As noted by Perry Zeus and Suzanne Skiffington (2002), coaching is different from consulting, therapy, or mentoring, although it has historically been related to those concepts. According to Stephen Palmer and Alison Whybrow (2007), Coleman R. Griffith began studying the psychology of football and basketball players as early as 1918. In 1926, he published *Psychology of Coaching*, in which he talked about different aspects of athletic coaching and reviewed learning principles that could help coaches better support their players. According to Palmer and Whybrow (2007), Griffith also “questioned commonsense thinking such as ‘practice makes perfect’” (p. 5). Griffith’s initial efforts to describe the psychology of coaching were soon followed by others.

In two literature reviews, Anthony Grant (2005a, 2006) attempted to provide a history of coaching by examining behavioral-science and scholarly business literature. One of the earliest papers he found was by C. B. Gorby (1937), who described how businesses could use peer coaching among their employees

to reduce waste and increase profits. Grant found that this focus on using coaching to maximize profits continued throughout the subsequent business literature, and it was expanded to include coaching to improve executive development and work performance for all employees. Altogether, Grant (2006) located 393 relevant papers published between 1955 and 2005: 79 of them were empirical studies, and the other 314 discussed coaching techniques and theories. Sixty-seven of the empirical studies Grant found were fairly recent (published between 2001 and 2005), revealing that coaching is still a relatively young discipline. This led Grant to conclude that “far more empirical research needs to be conducted. Such research should focus on the impact of coaching at both individual and organizational levels, as well as the establishment of validated, evidence-based coaching methodologies” (2006, p. 369). In agreement with Grant’s findings, Lindsay Oades, Peter Caputi, Paula Robinson, and Barry Partridge (2005) observed that “while there are many books on coaching (particularly, books on how to ‘do coaching’), there is . . . a paucity of controlled trials on the effectiveness of coaching” (p. 71). The relative newness of coaching as a field and discipline has led to a number of different definitions of coaching and its related terms. Two terms in particular are frequently used when talking about coaching: *coach* and *mentor*.

The term *coach* has its roots in the field of transportation, as Richard Gauthier and David Giber (2006) described:

Coaching is all about helping transport someone from where he or she is to where he or she needs to be. The verb “coach” derives from the old English noun describing the vehicle for transporting royalty, moving from one place to another via the coach. (p. 124)

Tatiana Bachkirova, Elaine Cox, and David Clutterbuck (2010) further elaborated:

The word “coach” derives from a town called “Kocs” in northern Hungary, where horse-drawn carriages were made. The meaning of coach as an instructor or trainer is purportedly from around 1830, when it was Oxford University slang for a tutor who “carried” a student through an exam; the term coaching was later applied in the 1800s to improving the performance of athletes. (p. 2)

Although the term has broadened as the popularity of coaching has expanded, the term *coach* generally means helping someone move from where he or she is to where he or she needs or wants to be.

The term *mentor* dates back much further. In Greek mythology, Mentor was Odysseus’s friend who watched over his estate and family while Odysseus was away fighting in the Trojan War. Mentor cared for and advised Telemachus, Odysseus’s son, and encouraged him to resist the advances of his mother’s suitors and seek out information about his father. Additionally, Athena (the Greek goddess of wisdom and the friend of Odysseus) disguised herself as Mentor to visit Telemachus, giving him practical advice and helping him solve problems. The first recorded modern usage of the term echoes its classical roots. In a 1699 book titled *Les Aventures de Telemaque*, French writer François Fénelon expanded on the relationship between Mentor and Telemachus, recounting their travels and lessons together (Smollett, 1997). The modern use of *mentor* to mean a trusted friend, counselor, or teacher is most likely a result of Fénelon’s book.

Clinical Supervision as the Foundation of Coaching Teachers

Any discussion of coaching teachers must acknowledge the influence of clinical supervision, which was designed by Morris Cogan, Robert Goldhammer, and Robert Anderson at Harvard in the 1950s and 1960s. As they supervised teachers in Harvard’s Master of Arts in Teaching program, Cogan, Goldhammer, and Anderson recognized a flaw in the traditional supervision model they were using.

Supervisors would observe teachers, identify what they thought needed to be changed, and tell the teacher how to change it. This traditional practice failed to consider what issues the *teacher* might think were problematic or what solutions the teacher might want to try.

To encourage “the development of the professionally responsible teacher who is analytical of his own performance, open to help from others, and . . . self-directing” (Cogan, 1973, p. 12), Cogan, Goldhammer, and Anderson developed the clinical supervision model. Described in Cogan’s (1973) and Goldhammer’s (1969) books, both titled *Clinical Supervision*, the model is designed to help teachers appraise their own performance, identify ways to improve, and evaluate how those improvements affect their overall performance.

There is a respectable research base for clinical supervision (Adams & Glickman, 1984; Glickman, 2002; Nolan, Hawkes, & Francis, 1993; Pavan, 1985; Sullivan, 1980), and the concept has been refined since its inception (Acheson & Gall, 1992; Anderson & Snyder, 1993; Costa & Garmston, 1985; Goldhammer, Anderson, & Krajewski, 1993; Pajak, 1993, 2002). Overall, clinical supervision involves five steps:

1. Preconference between supervisor and teacher
2. Classroom observation by the supervisor
3. Analysis of the results of the observation
4. Postconference between supervisor and teacher
5. Evaluation and critique of the supervision process

Although the clinical supervision process was designed as a vehicle for rich dialogue about a teacher’s practice, Robert Marzano and his colleagues (2011) pointed out that “over time, the five phases became an end in themselves” (p. 19). That is, teachers and administrators would move through each stage, but they were not engaging in the “collegial, inquiry-driven quest for more effective instructional practices” (Marzano et al., 2011, p. 19) that Goldhammer envisioned.

Research on the Benefits of Coaching

The efficacy of coaching can be supported from a number of perspectives. Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers (2002) provided perhaps the most robust synthesis of research on coaching as it relates to educators. Describing their research in the 1980s, Joyce and Showers (2002) commented:

We found that continuing technical assistance, whether provided by an outside expert or by peer experts, resulted in much greater classroom implementation than was achieved by teachers who shared initial training but did not have the long-term support of coaching. (p. 85)

In their 2002 research, Joyce and Showers found that even when training included demonstrations, practice sessions, and feedback, it did not noticeably affect teachers’ transfer of their learning to the classroom (effect size = 0.0). However, they did find that “a large and dramatic increase in transfer of training—effect size of 1.42—occurs when coaching is added to an initial training experience” (p. 77). In other words, coaching provided the most effective means of helping teachers transfer newly acquired knowledge and skills to their classrooms.

Joyce and Showers (2002) found that coaching helped teachers transfer their training to the classroom in five ways:

1. Coached teachers and principals generally practiced new strategies more frequently and developed greater skill in the actual moves of a new teaching strategy than did uncoached educators who had experienced identical initial training. . . .
2. Coached teachers used their newly learned strategies more appropriately than uncoached teachers in terms of their own instructional objectives and the theories of specific models of teaching. . . .
3. Coached teachers exhibited greater long-term retention of knowledge about and skill with strategies in which they had been coached and, as a group, increased the appropriateness of use of new teaching models over time. . . .
4. Coached teachers were much more likely than uncoached teachers to explain new models of teaching to their students, ensuring that students understood the purpose of the strategy and the behaviors expected of them when using the strategy. . . .
5. Coached teachers . . . exhibited clearer cognitions with regard to the purposes and uses of the new strategies, as revealed through interviews, lesson plans, and classroom performance. (pp. 86–87)

Other researchers have also provided useful perspectives on coaching. For example, Jim Knight (2007) emphasizes the importance of coaching partnerships. He compared two approaches to professional learning—a partnership approach (learning with coaching) and a traditional approach (lecture from an expert):

Teachers reported that in the partnership sessions, they learned more, were engaged more, and enjoyed themselves more than in the traditional sessions. Additionally, they were four times more inclined to implement teaching practices they learned during partnership sessions than those learned during traditional sessions. (p. 39)

Knight (2007) also reported research by Robert Bush (1984), which showed that traditional professional development usually leads to about a 10 percent implementation rate. In response, Knight stated that “our experience has shown that when teachers receive an appropriate amount of support for professional learning, more than 90% of them embrace and implement programs that improve students’ experiences in the classroom” (pp. 3–4). In addition to increased implementation of professional development, Anthony Grant, L. S. Green, and Josephine Rynsaardt (2010) reported that coached teachers developed “enhanced self-reported leadership and communication styles . . . reduced stress, increased resilience, and improved workplace well-being” (p. 162).

Allison Kretlow and Christina Bartholomew (2010) reviewed the coaching literature and identified three critical components of effective coaching: “(a) highly engaged, instructive group training sessions; (b) follow-up observation(s); and (c) specific feedback, often including sharing observation data and self-evaluation followed by modeling” (p. 292). They also summarized what an effective coaching process might look like:

Prior to coaching, teacher educators should conduct at least one observation (e.g., live, video-, or audio-recorded) to determine with which specific skills the teacher is having difficulty. Then, feedback and coaching activities should directly target skills that need to be firmed up. Coaching sessions should include some form of modeling, whether it is during an actual lesson or one-on-one with the teacher. (p. 294)

Michelle Vanderburg and Diane Stephens (2010) identified behaviors that characterized effective coaches. These included facilitating teacher collaboration, supporting classroom instruction, and

teaching research-based practices. Susan Neuman and Tanya Wright (2010) emphasized the inherent benefits in the personalized nature of coaching:

The on-site, individual, and personal nature of coaching created an accountability mechanism that was tailored to helping the teacher enact better instruction. It gave teachers regular feedback that enabled them to make changes in key skill domains. (p. 83)

In addition to the general research on the effects, benefits, and characteristics of coaching, research has been conducted concerning coaching's effects on specific aspects of education, including student achievement and teachers' knowledge and skill.

Student Achievement

There is not a great deal of research linking coaching to student achievement; however, Vanderburg and Stephens (2010) reported on literacy coaching research and found that “the students of teachers who were coached did better on measures of phonological awareness, timed and untimed word reading, phonemic decoding, passage comprehension, and spelling” (p. 142). Although some studies (Garet et al., 2008; Marsh et al., 2008) have shown that coaching had no effect on student achievement, Gina Biancarosa, Anthony Bryk, and Emily Dexter (2010) noted significant increases in student achievement as a result of teacher coaching:

On average, children in participating schools in the first year of implementation made 16% larger learning gains than observed during the baseline no-treatment period. In the second year, children learned 28% more compared to the baseline data, and by the third year they had learned 32% more. Our analyses also indicate that these results persisted across summer periods as verified through the follow-up of students in the fall of the subsequent academic year. (p. 27)

Although more research on the link between coaching and student achievement is needed, it is reasonable to suggest that effective coaching can have a positive impact on student achievement.

Teacher Knowledge and Skill

The research linking coaching to changes in teacher behavior appears stronger and less equivocal than that linking coaching to student achievement. Kretlow and Bartholomew (2010) reviewed a number of studies on coaching and found “strong evidence for the effectiveness of coaching in promoting the fidelity of evidence-based practices. . . . Overwhelmingly, coaching improved the accuracy of teaching behaviors across studies reviewed” (pp. 292–293). Vanderburg and Stephens (2010) reported the positive effects of coaching on teacher knowledge: “The beliefs and practices of coached teachers became more consistent with best practices as defined by state and national standards” (p. 143). Finally, Kathryn Kinnucan-Welsch, Catherine Rosemary, and Patricia Grogan (2006) reported that coaching helped teachers gain familiarity with the concepts they were teaching, and Susan Cantrell and Hannah Hughes (2008) found that coaching increased teachers' efficacy. In light of this research, it is safe to say that coaching has a positive impact on teachers' knowledge and skill.

Aspects of Coaching

The term *coaching* is used in a variety of ways. Gawande (2011) noted that:

The concept of a coach is slippery. Coaches are not teachers, but they teach. They're not your boss—in professional tennis, golf, and skating, the athlete hires and fires the coach—but they can be bossy. They don't even have to be good at the sport. The famous Olympic gymnastics coach Bela Karolyi couldn't do a split if his life depended on it. Mainly, they observe, they judge, and they guide. (p. 2)

Different researchers and theorists highlight different aspects of coaching when defining it. Some emphasize the instructional features of coaching. For example, Eric Parsloe (1995) noted that coaching is “directly concerned with the immediate improvement of performance and development of skills by a form of tutoring or instruction” (p. 72). Somewhat in contrast, others de-emphasize the instructional aspects of coaching. For example, Anthony Grant and Dianne Stober (2006) explained that “coaching is more about asking the right questions than telling people what to do” (p. 3). Some researchers stress the importance of feedback and goals in the coaching process. Grant (2005b) noted that “the coaching process should be systematic and goal directed” (p. 4). Finally, some stress the importance of coaching resulting in change. As Anne Brockbank and Ian McGill (2006) noted, “Mentoring or coaching has one clear purpose, the learning and development of an individual, a process that involves change” (p. 9). Just as there are many aspects of coaching, so too are there many views of the goals of coaching. Table 1.1 presents some of these goals.

Table 1.1: Goals of Coaching

<p>To point teachers toward best practices</p>	<p>“As the coach leader ‘holds up’ the standards and expectations that have been determined from a solid research base of ‘what works,’ it focuses the work on making decisions and acting in ways that have the potential to most dramatically impact results. When we work from a ‘standards based’ body of research, the possibility of an aspect of the work becoming someone’s personal preference or expectation is diminished” (Kee, Anderson, Dearing, Harris, & Shuster, 2010, pp. 46–47).</p>
<p>To show teachers what good teaching looks like</p>	<p>“Coaches . . . want teachers to know what success looks like and to imagine their own successful handling of situations” (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010, p. 183).</p> <p>“Good coaches know how to break down performance into its critical individual components” (Gawande, 2011, p. 5).</p>
<p>To help teachers maintain their best performance</p>	<p>“The coaching model is different from the traditional conception of pedagogy, where there’s a presumption that, after a certain point, the student no longer needs instruction. . . . No matter how well prepared people are in their formative years, few can achieve and maintain their best performance on their own” (Gawande, 2011, pp. 2–3).</p>
<p>To help teachers achieve “flow”</p>	<p>“Flow happens when teachers are fully immersed in the process of growth and change. To reach that state of full engagement, the activity needs to be intrinsically interesting and just within reach of their abilities. If the activity is too challenging, then it is overwhelming and stressful. If the activity is not challenging enough, then it is boring and tedious. The sweet spot—the flow spot—is where the level of challenge perfectly matches the skills, training, strengths, and resources of the performer. . . . Coaches want to assist teachers to enter that state as often as possible while working on their instructional strategies” (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010, p. 218).</p>
<p>To help teachers take risks</p>	<p>“A coach leader is one who will challenge his or her educators to break away from the norm, to be creative, to use their imagination, to initiate something new, to act in new ways. A coach leader is a facilitator of a new mindset that is critically needed in schools today” (Kee et al., 2010, p. 11).</p>

Arguments for the Nonevaluative Nature of Coaching

One strong theme in the discussion of coaching is that it should be nonevaluative in nature. Carl Rogers and Richard Farson (2006), whose work on communication is widely used and well-respected,

pointed out that effective communication can only take place in a nonthreatening environment: “The climate must foster equality and freedom, trust and understanding, acceptance and warmth. In this climate and in this climate only does the individual feel safe enough to incorporate new experiences and new values into his concept of himself” (p. 281). Joyce and Showers (2002) emphasized the importance of nonevaluative feedback in their work with peer coaches by encouraging coaches to focus their feedback on inquiry rather than evaluation. Others (Ackland, 1991; Skinner & Welch, 1996) have also emphasized the necessity of nonevaluative feedback in a coaching relationship. Peter Bluckert (2010) stated that “description . . . is more important than interpretation. What this looks like in practice is an emphasis on descriptive rather than evaluative feedback and a more faithful reflection and honouring of the coachees’ own words, meanings and subjective experience” (p. 81). Finally, research by Marcus Buckingham (2007) has demonstrated that trying to fix problems by focusing on weaknesses is relatively ineffective.

If administrators coach teachers whom they also evaluate, it is important for them to emphasize learning and growth. Thomasina Piercy (2006) observed that “when leadership is connected to learning, anxiety regarding accountability is greatly reduced” (p. 128). Suzanne Burley and Cathy Pomphrey (2011) suggested a better method, which they term “off-line mentoring.” In this type of coaching relationship, neither the coach nor the coachee has “management responsibilities over the other. In short, the mentee will not be mentored by their boss” (p. 66). They went on to explain that this type of nonsupervisory relationship is appropriate “because of the difficulty of being open in a professional relationship where one person has authority over the other” (p. 66).

Nancy Adler (2006) confirmed the importance of a nonevaluative coaching relationship in which both parties agree to keep the content of coaching sessions confidential. She explained, “The privacy of coaching sessions makes it easier . . . to say, ‘I’m not certain. . . . I just don’t know . . .’ Privacy and supportive advocacy legitimize moments of not knowing. Premature certainty and commitment extinguish innovative possibilities” (p. 243). Finally, Arthur Costa and Robert Garmston (2002) suggest that, “should an employer have performance concerns about a staff member, these concerns are best communicated directly outside the coaching process. Coaching should never be about ‘fixing’ another person” (p. 97).

Requirements for Effective Coaching

Throughout the literature on coaching, researchers and theorists emphasize that effective coaching is not entirely dependent on the coach. Rather, many assert that the person being coached (the coachee or client) is the most important determiner of the success or failure of a coaching relationship. Marshall Goldsmith (2006), who has conducted coaching research with over 86,000 people, stated that “we have learned that the key variable for successful change is *not* the coach, teacher, or advisor. The key variables that will determine long-term progress are the people being coached” (p. 39). Annette Fillery-Travis and David Lane (2007) agree, stating that “overwhelmingly the published work by coach practitioners points to the willingness by the client to change as the primary determinant of the success of the interaction” (p. 63). Specifically, Douglas Reeves (2007) wrote that “the first requirement of effective coaching is that the person receiving the coaching agrees that a change in performance will be useful” (p. 90), and Jenny Rogers (2011) said, “The client needs to be a willing volunteer, open to change, and brave” (p. 342). Edgar Schein (2006) added that, ideally, the person being coached should volunteer and be motivated to learn, grow, and change.