



The Science of Coaching

Data-backed. Transformative. Future-proof.



As the future of work continues to evolve, business leaders find themselves needing to effectively manage continuous change and rapid growth for themselves, their teams, and their organizations.

That's where leadership coaching comes in. Its effectiveness lies in the mix of strategy and positive psychology behind it. And it's the one solution that can help leaders navigate the ever-changing landscape so that both people and businesses can thrive.

86% of companies report that they recouped their investment in coaching, with an average Return on Investment of 600%.¹

This e-book takes a deeper look into what leadership coaching is, the science behind it, and why it's worked for so many leaders and organizations around the world. Who should read this? Business leaders across all industries who want to build cultures where people are continuously learning and growing, upskill and reskill leaders at all levels, and increase employee engagement, retention, and performance.

¹ International Coaching Federation (2009)

Over the next three sections, you'll learn how:

1. Coaching provides the tools to solve future problems.
2. Key behavioral changes can lead to better business outcomes.
3. Coaching improves individual leaders, their organizations, and the teams they manage.

Why is it worth your time? An exclusive partner of Harvard's Institute of Coaching (IOC), AceUp provides personalized leadership coaching for employees at all levels of the organization through an intelligent technology platform, providing a solution that is scalable, measurable, and impactful.



Coaching helps today's leaders solve future challenges.

Coaching, whether it's on an individual level or throughout an organization, gives today's leaders the tools to face and solve future problems.

What is leadership coaching?

Leadership coaching is the partnership between a professional coach and an individual that encourages positive behavioral change both professionally and personally.

According to Dr. Carol Kauffman of the Institute of Coaching (IOC) in a recent webinar, leadership coaches have been proven to improve:

- Leadership development
- Executive management
- Career advancement
- Performance maximization
- Effective communication
- Job transitioning

Coaches can also help their clients with a variety of personal challenges like anxiety management, self-confidence, positive thinking, and well-being. While coaching can address a specific goal or initiative, a coach's focus is to use the goal as an example for solving other problems in the future.

Coaching helps leaders learn how and when to shift from the more strategic, long-term, and other-focused thinking (Empathic Network) to the more tactical, short-term, and problem-solving thinking (Analytical Network).²

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The ideal coachee wants to take the next steps to grow and develop in their professional and/or personal life. The coachee doesn't need to know exactly what that looks like or how to make it happen specifically. They just need to be open, present, willing to explore and take action in pursuit of their goal(s).



Donna Aldrich

AceUp Executive Leadership
& Sales Management Coach

Who are leadership coaches?

Simply put, they're experts – experts with invaluable guidance to offer. Coaches usually have a strong background and many years of experience and expertise in a specific industry or competency, like healthcare, biotech, education, or executive management, leadership transition, organizational change, etc.

Leadership coaches also have extensive training in behavioral change and personal development. They hold professional coaching certifications from organizations like the International Coaching Federation. While coaches come from a wide variety of backgrounds, one thing they have in common is a passion for challenging leaders to step outside their comfort zone and assumptions of what they're capable of.

² Jack, Dawson, and Norr, "Seeing human: Distinct and overlapping neural signatures associated with two forms of dehumanization," 2013; Rochford et al, "Ethical Leadership as a Balance Between Opposing Neural Networks," 2016

AceUp's approach sets leaders and teams up for success.

Coaching that's strategic, systemic, and rooted in positive psychology can improve key behavioral changes and help both leaders and their teams become stronger and more resilient.

60–70% of organizational change initiatives fail because they don't coach stakeholders through the behavioral and mindset changes needed for them to succeed.³

How do we do this at AceUp?

Pre-Coaching

- By talking to stakeholders, we find out what goals they want coaching to help their leaders achieve.⁴
- We then develop clear objectives and guidelines, and ensure that all stakeholders understand what coaching can and cannot provide.⁵

Coach Pairing

- Coachees are taken through our proprietary self-discovery process to increase coachee motivation, commitment, and tenacity in achieving their goals.⁶

- Our AceUp Pairing Algorithm recommends two coaches whose knowledge and experience best match their preferences, and they have the option to choose between them. Extensive research⁷ has shown that giving employees more autonomy boosts their creativity, persistence, and productivity.
- We limit their first choice of coaches to two, as research⁸ finds that too many options can overload consumers and lead to decision paralysis. Since we started doing this, coachee satisfaction with their choice has increased.

1-1 Coaching

Inspire & Focus:

- Once the groundwork for building trust and psychological safety has been laid, coaches lead their clients through a goal-setting process to develop goals that inspire, stretch and encourage them,⁹ then work with them to decide what success could look like and how to measure it at both the session and engagement levels.
- Coaches collaborate with coachees to create a comprehensive action plan to help them achieve their objectives.¹⁰

Spending 30 minutes in a conversation about a person's goals or dreams increases their ability to imagine new ideas, approaches, and solutions/ problem solving and improves their feelings of well-being.¹¹

³ Ashkenas, "Change Management Needs to Change," Harvard Business Review, April 2013, ⁴ Milner and Milner, 2020, ⁵ Hawkins, 2016,

⁶ Sommet and Elliot, 2017; Boyatzis, 2019, ⁷ Baard, Deci, Ryan, and Schwarz, 2004, 2016, ⁸ Iyengar and Lepper, 2000, 2005, 2010,

⁹ Wood and Neal, 2007, ¹⁰ Clutterbuck, 2016, ¹¹ A.I. Jack et al "Visioning in the Brain, an fMRI Study of Inspirational Coaching and Mentoring," Social Neuroscience 8, no. 4 2013.

Strategize & Experiment

- Coaches work with coachees to break down their goals into phases, tactics, and activities so that they are more likely to follow through.¹²
- For each phase/strategy, coaches assist coachees in experimenting with various techniques.

Research shows that though there is considerable variation in how long it takes individuals to form a habit, the average is about 66 days.¹³

Reflect & Commit

- Coaches challenge coachees to evoke awareness or insight.
- Coaches partner with coachees to explore the results of their experiments for maximum learning and insight both in and between sessions.
- Coach celebrates coachee's progress and success.

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Coaching also works to surface potential blocks that we carry with us. Because if we don't look at them, we don't see them, we can't change them. Change is at the centerpiece of this moving towards a constructive outcome.



Dr. Erik Gregory
Positive Psychology Practitioner
and Coach

Group Coaching

In addition to the strategies cited for 1:1 coaching, group trainers use several complementary and evidence-based strategies to maximize the relevance and impact of the sessions.

- Throughout an organization, we define systemic coaching as a multi-dimensional approach to learning that aligns the demands and difficulties of many stakeholders.¹⁴
- We start by talking to decision-makers about a compelling vision for a change initiative/common purpose that would provide the firm with tangible and transformative advantages.¹⁵ We then use a combination of intake surveys, coachee interviews, and anonymized coach assessments to evaluate, challenge, and/or modify that vision in order to decide which competencies/issues will produce the most engagement and impact for both the coachees and the company.¹⁶
- Before presenting the cohort with a difficult problem or challenge connected to a competency, we help them find positive associations, patterns, and motivators to help them become more engaged and innovative in solving related difficulties.¹⁷
- Before, during, and after sessions, our coaches create a more social learning environment, allowing individuals to learn more, recall it more quickly, and act more frequently.¹⁸
- To boost attention, we adopt the AGES (Attention, Generation, Emotions, and Spacing) model.¹⁹

¹² Verplanken and Faes, 1999, ¹³ Wendy Wood, "Good Habits, Bad Habits," FarrarStrauss & Giroux, 2019,

¹⁴ Hawkins and Clutterbuck, ¹⁵ Luecke, 2003, ¹⁶ Clutterbuck, 2015, ¹⁷ Amabile, 2011, ¹⁸ Lieberman, 2013; Sip, 2019, ¹⁹ Davachi et al, 2015

- We establish the psychological safety needed to disclose deep-seated difficulties and challenges by using anonymous and live survey methods, as well as small-group breakout room sessions.²⁰
- We encourage everyone to publicly commit to completing one coaching-related action, as doing so increases their chances of taking action and moving forward toward their objective.

How do positive psychology and coaching work together?

Positive psychology looks at not only what's wrong with us but what's right with us. And research has demonstrated that positive psychology is based on the pillars of courage, hope, and optimism. The goal of coaching is self-awareness leading to self-responsibility.

Positive coaching is not about positive thinking, it's about resiliency.

Positive coaching can help us take a look at the strengths that we have. We can then mobilize those strengths for change in the challenges that we have. For leaders, it can:

- **Bring problematic behaviors to the surface:** If you're not aware of certain behaviors, it's hard to make shifts around them. We all react to things sometimes without knowing why we're reacting.
- **Make change easier:** Some of us are more comfortable with change than others, but change is guaranteed and seems to be happening faster than ever. Coaching that focuses on positive goal definition and pursuit (like AceUp's) helps leaders see the bigger picture, build their resilience, make more effort pursuing those goals.²¹
- **Create meaning:** People need to have a sense of the so what? We can create change by identifying meaning a little bit more and not losing sight of it.

How can coaching impact overall culture?

A huge percentage of people are reporting dissatisfaction in daily life and their work life. According to a [Gallup report](#), 67% of the workforce globally is not engaged. Actively disengaged employees report miserable work experiences and are generally poorly managed. Not to mention the cost of this level of disengagement.

But it doesn't have to be this way. This calls for us to take a deep look at the current model of leadership and pivot to one that works for today's employees. A culture of coaching is created in the spaces between the primary stakeholders, i.e., the coach and the candidate. Research has shown that even coaching a few individuals produces 35% more positive interactions with others than leaders who weren't coached, creating nodes of psychological well-being.

²⁰ Edmonson, 2018, ²¹ A.M. Passarelli, "Vision-Based Coaching: Optimizing Resources for Leadership Development," *Frontiers in Psychology* 6, 2015.

We call this a “coaching neighborhood,” where positive behavioral changes like friendliness, support, advice, and collaboration along with more static variables like information and power flow across the entire network of correlations to expand influence. If you can create a psychologically safe, positive environment, you will create peak performance.

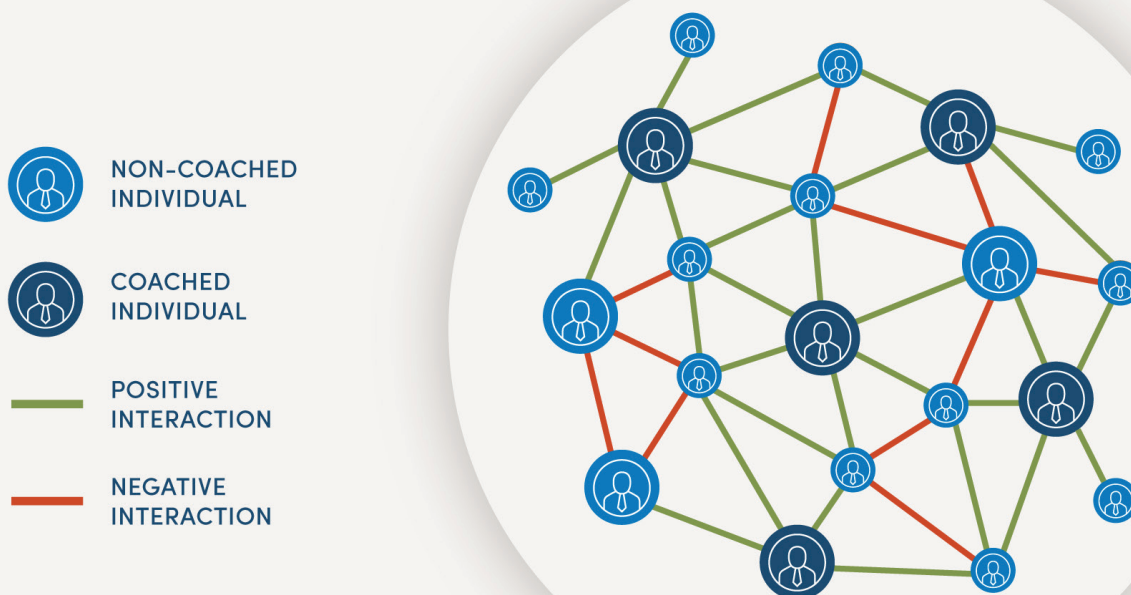
As you can see in the figure below, research shows that leaders who are coached have 35% more positive interactions with others than leaders who aren’t coached.

Coaching improves leaders, their organizations, and their teams for the long term.

If coaching helps change and improve individuals for the better, then it also improves the organizations in which they work and the teams they manage.

Why coaching? Why now?

Today’s workplace is a complicated one for leaders to navigate – balancing employee expectations, turnover, rapid growth, and constant change. Coaching at both individual and group levels can bridge the gap between your people and business strategies, creating purpose, connecting people to common goals, and building stronger, high-performing teams.



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Because of the structure that we work under, the partnership we have, the model that AceUp utilizes, and the breadth of available coaches, we've been able to push coaching deeper into the organization to help us plan for succession, talent mobility – the bench that we need to develop and work on – both in our leadership ranks, but also in our highly technical areas for those who'll be the architects of our products into the future.



Heather Nault
Global Director
Talent Management of Teradyne

Coaching is an invaluable tool for developing people across a wide range of needs in an organization.

Organizations using AceUp see consistent and measurable results like increased performance, higher employee engagement, and improved retention as well as better satisfaction and employee well-being. After three months of using AceUp, employees demonstrate greater confidence, leadership, and organizational commitment.



96% feel more confident in their ability to succeed in their role.

92% find significant improvement in their leadership, communication, and organizational skills.

88% find that receiving coaching significantly affected their feelings about working at their company.

For an organization, coaching can:

- Empower individuals and encourage them to take responsibility
- Increase employee and staff engagement
- Improve individual performance
- Identify and develop high-potential employees
- Identify both organizational and individual strengths, along with development opportunities
- Motivate and empower individuals to excel
- Demonstrate a company's commitment to employee development

But it also has a long-term impact, helping with:

- Succession planning
- Upskilling and reskilling
- Growing people leaders
- Attracting and retaining talent
- Aligning leadership
- Building competencies
- Focusing on DE&I

The Takeaway

A lot of change all at once can be daunting and scary for leaders to manage for themselves, their organizations, and their teams in this moment, but coaching neutralizes that with its incremental nature – providing continuous and future-focused growth, guidance, and reflection to promote positive behavioral changes that impact entire teams and organizations.

- Coaching, whether it's on an individual level or throughout an organization, gives today's leaders the tools to face and solve future problems.
- Coaching that's strategic and rooted in positive psychology can improve key behavioral changes and help both leaders and their teams become more resilient.
- If coaching helps change and improve individuals for the better, then it also improves the organizations in which they work and the teams they manage.

If you like to see the results other companies have had, check out our [case studies](#). For more general knowledge on coaching, we've got some helpful [resources](#). If you want to dive deeper into the science of it all, the [Institute of Coaching](#) can drop some knowledge on you. And if you want to learn how coaching can unleash the full potential of your people, leaders, and teams, [request a demo](#) with us.

About AceUp

AceUp empowers professionals at all levels to maximize their impact through transformational coaching enabled by technology, empowered by science, and backed by data. We combine the power of one-on-one executive coaching, group training, and behavioral technology to foster a culture of coaching within organizations that drives systematic impact.

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