

“Better coaching through chemistry”

Formula 7:

The Chemistry of Accelerated Learning in Executive Coaching

By Dr. Lee Smith and Dr. Jeannine Sandstrom

Everything today moves too fast. This is especially true in business. The leader today no longer flies like an eagle – **he or she must ride the jet stream of the corporate environment moving at warp speed.**

It is a challenge for most leaders just to keep pace with this non-stop flight, let alone move beyond it. Executive leader coaches must also move quickly, sometimes at white-knuckle speed, in order to provide a method for leaders to raise their level of performance quickly – without stopping. A sort of mid-air refueling. Executive coaches become the air traffic controllers, clearing away behaviors that don't work in order to help the leader learn new ones that do.

Leaders must be trained to be students of leadership. Executive leader coaches are the teachers in the classrooms for the gifted and talented. As such, one of their chief roles is as a facilitator of accelerated learning – for both the leader and the coach – in an accelerated business climate.

In our experience, executive attention spans are limited to four-to-six months – tops. Leaders need to learn new things rapidly and be trained to apply them quickly within this time. The corporate current moves so swiftly that other pressing issues will generally replace any learning or coaching focus after a six-month period, and the leader will need a breather, unless there are extenuating circumstances (changing positions, roles, business strategies, etc.) which would call for extended coaching. Every executive coach MUST keep this factor in mind. For this reason, accelerated learning is vital in executive coaching.

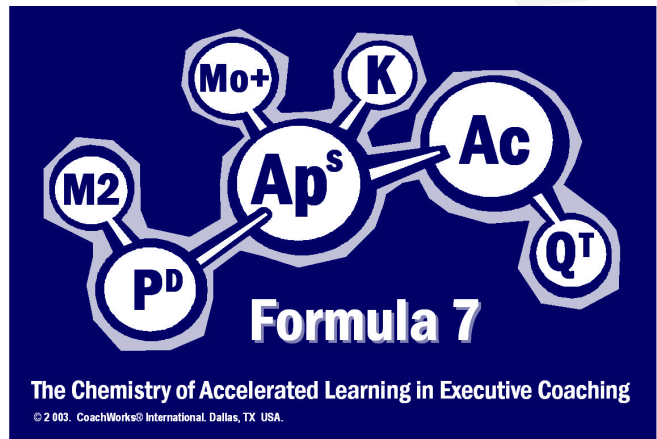
We've noticed, too, that this theoretical six-month period may even be less – perhaps as little as four months. It is imperative that a new plateau be reached in three to six months – where the leader has learned and applied new behaviors – or the leader's (and the organization's, if applicable) interest wanes quickly. We need to stop a moment and clarify the fact that we are not talking about learning new skills (new strategies, new methods, etc.), but new leadership behaviors. And the executive coach has a very limited window of time to create the environment that will yield a dramatic outcome in the executive's leadership competency.

Formula 7

CoachWorks® International has determined seven elements which, when combined, will create this

environment. We call this “Formula 7 – The Chemistry of Accelerated Learning in Executive Coaching.” These elements are strategic, developmental and foundational pieces which accelerate learning during executive coaching. To adapt an old advertising adage, it's “*better coaching through chemistry.*”

We visualize accelerated coaching as an integrated chemical compound having 7 basic elements combined in the right amounts, the right sequence, and the right “positive charge.”




The 7 Elements of Formula 7:

- 1: $M2$ = **Measurement** (2X)
- 2: P^D = **Plan** (for Development)
- 3: $Mo+$ = **Motivation** (+Commitment)
- 4: Ap^s = **Application** (Strategic)
- 5: K = **Knowledge** (Models, etc.)
- 6: Ac = **Accountability**
- 7: Q^T = **Questioning** (Tough)

While there is beneficial learning in each of these pieces, it is only when all the elements are combined correctly that the learning is vastly accelerated and benefits compounded.

Measurement

 In order to launch the coaching process quickly and move into an accelerated learning environment, the coach and the leader must first learn what they don't know. A 360 feedback tool can provide this kind of vital information prior to developing a plan of action. There are many excellent feedback programs. CoachWorks has developed one of their own entitled

The Legacy Leadership Competency Inventory™ (LLCI), based on the leadership model also developed by CoachWorks. The 50 assessment questions on this feedback tool are based on the 10 Critical Success Skills of each of the 5 Best Practices that comprise Legacy Leadership, a comprehensive framework for great leadership. An online service works well for 360 feedback, providing detailed graphs and observations on the leader's behavior and competencies, seen by the leader AND those around him or her.

A 360 is only one form of measurement needed in this accelerated environment, however. In order to acquire the most information in the least amount of time, the coach should develop "interview" questions designed to measure the real performance of this leader by those closest to him or her. The person being coached provides the coach with a list of the people closest in the leadership structure, those who truly know this leader well. These people may also have provided 360 assessments, but the questions asked of these people are separate from performance ratings. These questions have more to do with communication, trust, visionary ability, executive teams and inner workings not generally covered in a standard 360. The coach personally interviews these people, asking the questions and carefully noting responses.

When the results of the 360 feedback are combined with these personal interviews, a comprehensive level of understanding about the person being coached is obtained quickly. The coach now knows what he or she didn't know before, and quite often, the same applies to the leader. These results can sometimes be surprising to the client.

The alternative to these measurement elements is to merely talk to the person, asking the same kinds of questions found on a 360 assessment, or in the personal interviews. However, you must keep in mind that you will gain information from only ONE perspective, and it may or may not be accurate. Some time ago a client told us that his people really loved him and they would do anything for him. This man was in marketing and had achieved very high production sales, well above expectations. However, it didn't take long to determine that "his people" had lost respect for him, and in fact, his turnover rate was excessive. His great sales levels were a result of external abilities, but he could not follow-through after the sales with his staff because his internal behaviors kept him from being an effective leader. His perception was faulty. Interviewing only the leader about the leader will slow, not accelerate, the learning as you begin with an incomplete picture and one that is often based in assumptions, not reality.

Another measurement tool which is very helpful at this phase is the Emotional Intelligence map, which correlates beautifully with common sense, an amazingly scarce yet critical element in excellent leadership.

Development Plan



Evaluate the measurement results carefully for strengths and weaknesses (more positively called "challenges") The coach works with the leader to build an action/development plan which correlates to the leader's greatest needs in the moment, both professionally and organizationally. Typically, a maximum of five new learning pieces should be determined. The information obtained through measurement can immediately reveal specific areas that are targeted for coaching to raise levels of performance in areas that are challenging. Building an efficient and effective development plan without previous accurate measurement is virtually impossible.

A vital component to the planning element is determining how the leader will know when they have "arrived." When will they reach their goals? What will be the observable and measurable behavior that others will see and note? How will they be behaving differently? The coach assists the leader in preparing a roadmap that plots the coaching course and knows what the destination looks like.

Motivation and Commitment



After measurement and planning, and before moving into application, it is imperative to establish motivation and obtain commitment for this accelerated learning path to achieved goals. In many ways this element is the key to success. Without it, any coaching, any attempts at accelerated learning, are a waste of time. Help the leader understand why he or she is being coached. The development plan may clarify goals, but there should also be a deeper, foundational and personal motivation underlying the goals.

Motivation must spark commitment to fire into action. Coaching will not work without it. The coach must help leaders clarify their commitment and determine what they are and are not willing to do during this fast-track to excellence in leadership. Leaders should know from the beginning that their coach will hold them accountable to these commitments.

Strategic Application




One of the largest elements of the Formula 7 compound is application. Unless this application is strategic—attached to specific business situations, issues and challenges—the learning will not "stick." The coach challenges the leader to apply new learning to these strategic areas immediately, then debriefs the applied behaviors during subsequent coaching sessions. This element will, perhaps, be the greatest accelerant to learning during the coaching term. Strategic issues and projects are the most ideal places to enhance learning. The coach helps the leader look for strategic application opportunities, encourages the practice of new behavior, and holds the leader accountable for integrated learning through detailed debriefs.

The Blue Angels, the Navy's precision flying team composed of the "cream of the crop" aviators, spend hours debriefing a simple 20-minute fly-over. Each person involved, from pilots to maintenance personnel, details what they have learned and observed. It should be the same in the coaching partnership. What happened? What could have been done differently? What did you learn? If this debrief isn't conducted immediately after the specific application, the learning can be lost forever. Set your coaching calls to correlate with these strategic opportunities for applied learning.

If the coach is working with a group of leaders within an organization, an Action Learning Project (ALP) works well to effectively and strategically apply new learning. Learning can rapidly vanish if there is no immediate application for practice toward mastery. Action Learning Projects are practice laboratories where the learning occurring in individual coaching and team collaboratives is practiced and mastered. The selected project topic of an ALP is designed specifically for organizational needs. The selection is determined by the team itself, or a sponsoring executive. The project is usually focused on a large overriding strategic issue faced by the executive team, but not being addressed elsewhere.

If desired, the coach can also shadow coach either an individual leader or an entire team during these strategic application opportunities, and discuss what was observed and how learning was or was not integrated.

Knowledge

 Knowledge is the one-word description of all that the leader learns throughout the coaching term. Learning obviously implies a knowledge transfer, and this information is delivered consistently throughout the coaching initiative beginning with the measurement process. Through measurement results the leader and coach begin by knowing what they didn't know before. Essentially, they now know where they are currently, and where they want to be. As the coaching continues, the strategic application and integration of learning adds to the knowledge of the leader as they learn what works and what does not.

Another very important piece of this knowledge element is the introduction and application of tested leadership models. Individuals may have done reading about various leadership models—and there are plenty out there—and organizations may already have some form of leadership structure or expected competencies. However, we have rarely found a consistent and standardized model of leadership within most companies. What you generally encounter are groups of people trained and educated in all sorts of different leadership approaches (command and control, enlightened leadership, etc.)—bits and pieces of many different methods—but not a cohesive model that covers all the necessary aspects of excellent leadership.


While there are a plethora of leadership meth-

odologies available to choose from for coaching purposes, or for general organizational standards, CoachWorks® has developed its own comprehensive leadership model. Legacy Leadership™ is based on 5 Best Practices that provide a cohesive framework beginning with vision setting, ending with accountability, and covering everything essential in between. Current leader books and articles cover various aspects and techniques of leadership, but do not deliver a comprehensive model. Legacy Leadership™ is a complete structure of practices, behaviors, attitudes and values that addresses every aspect of successful leadership. Whichever leadership model the coach chooses to introduce to the leader or organization, it must be consistently applied throughout the company. A good leadership model provides the overlay for consistency of behaviors of people with various backgrounds. It is the blueprint for establishing a leadership culture.

If you are coaching leaders within an organization that already has a standardized leadership model, obviously you will be coaching against that model. If not, look for a leadership model that is comprehensive and suits the needs of the leader and his or her organization. Coaching around a leadership model accelerates learning because it provides the structure on which to hang all the competencies, skills or behaviors the leader is developing. It facilitates and accelerates learning retention and gives process and framework to make the learning more understandable and usable.

The executive coach challenges the leader to become a lifelong student of leadership. The coached leader should be encouraged to read various articles and books that pertain to the highlighted aspects of his or her development plan. Relate the development plan, all strategic application and coaching debriefs to this leadership model of choice, and refer to it often during coaching sessions. The fact that the coach must have an extensive knowledge of leadership also, should go without saying.

Accountability

 The other of the two largest elements of Formula 7 is accountability. This is the key to sustained leaning and application. One of the most difficult, yet most critical, aspects of executive coaching is holding the client accountable, and teaching him or her to hold themselves accountable. An accountability plan can and should be developed by the leader, with the coach's assistance. This plan can cover all aspects of accountability such as communication processes, action items, decisions and follow-up. It will provide the coached leader a plan for personal accountability, as well as a way to hold others accountable. Identify and define such things as how and when primary leaders report in, meeting structures and frequency, organization-wide communication processes, and responsibilities and accountabilities of team members. The coach must hold the leader accountable to completing this accountability plan, and for applying it consistently. Coaching sessions will always deal with accountability on some level,

whether it is to the coach for doing the work requested, or to the organization for providing effective accountability for strategic issues.

In accelerated learning classes, gifted students are required to do more work and are held more accountable for what they produce and learn. The same should be true for executives. More is expected from them, and the coach must hold them accountable.

Sometimes accountability can bring coaching to a screeching halt. Dr. Smith recalls one client who kept avoiding doing what he and she agreed he had to do, and what his company expected him to do. Finally, one day she sat him down face-to-face and said "Look, if you don't make the changes you are being asked to make, you are not going to make it here. You can fire me for this, but I need to say it." This leader decided he didn't want to change, and eventually left the company. A new leader was brought in who could do the job. Holding a client accountable is always a risk, but always necessary, and there is always learning in negative responses as well. The executive in this case learned, and quickly we should add, that he was not suitable for this position. Ultimately, this is always positive learning, even though it may be through uncomfortable or "negative" circumstances.

Tough Questioning

QT The biggest component of accountability is asking tough questions. The coach uses the leader's development plan and strategic application opportunities to formulate questions that will advance the executive's development. Sometimes the questioning will merely be whether or not a person did what they agreed to do during strategic application or other knowledge practice. However, quite often tough questioning will consist of provoking, visionary or sometimes industry specific or economic questions. For this reason, it is critical for the executive coach to have current business savvy to know what to ask and how to ask it. Every coach should have a library of standard leadership questions used to drill down and accelerate the learning of specific competencies, and should also have prepared specific questions pertaining to the issues on the leader's development plan. A well-prepared coach will have done his or her homework to become familiar with the organization's business, so that pertinent industry related questions can be asked appropriately and professionally.

It is possible that the leader may not currently have the answers to these questions, but they will enhance the learning as the questions run in the background, creating productive leadership thought habits.

The Bottom Line

During the coaching process, both the coach and the leader must keep an eye on the return on investment of the coaching. The coach helps the executive discover reasons and purpose for pursuing

learning, even beyond the current coaching initiative. Learning is accelerated and reinforced as benefits are realized and outcomes are measurable.

The Growth Culture

We would be delinquent if we didn't mention the importance of the coach/leader relationship. The growth of certain compounds is advanced when they are placed in an appropriate medium, or culture. The same is true for executive coaching. Accelerated learning is greatly enhanced when the elements of Formula 7 are combined in the growth culture of solid coaching relationships. Establishing and maintaining a healthy and purposeful relationship between the coach and the leader is critical to growth. Without the proper culture of this relationship, learning is retarded and sometimes even stopped altogether. It is the coach's responsibility to build and nurture this relationship from the very beginning of the coaching term. If the relationship is not working, it is then the coach's responsibility to recognize this and direct the client to another more relationally suited coach. The coach/leader relationship is about chemistry, too. When Formula 7 is allowed to thrive within the culture of this working relationship, we are indeed promoting *better coaching through chemistry!*

Everything a coach does is about facilitating learning and integrating newly learned behaviors and ideas and approaches into practical and sustained application. The executive coach must be masterful in listening with a business and leadership ear, analyzing 360 feedback and interview data with a working knowledge of current leadership models, asking tough questions and holding the leader accountable for follow-through on learning.

When the elements of Formula 7 are combined correctly, they produce a powerful fuel which takes the leader higher—faster—with sustained results.



Dr. Lee Smith

Dr. Smith is President of CoachWorks International, and an Executive Leader Coach who has co-authored numerous leader coaching programs and established standards and ethics for the executive coaching profession. Smith is highly skilled in identifying key relational patterns and hidden systems that prevent groups of people from being the best they can be. As barriers are removed, she coaches and guides leaders to reorganize around successful business strategies and to establish new patterns and systems that sustain progress. Dr. Smith regularly presents at national and international professional conferences and has been featured in Newsweek, PBS Specials, and other media. Smith is one of the first internationally credentialed Master Coaches. Her Ph.D. is in Organizational Behavior and Psychology.



Dr. Jeannine Sandstrom

Dr. Sandstrom is CEO of CoachWorks International, and has been a business owner, consultant and international leader coach since 1979. She has focused her leader development coaching in the practical arena of behavioral contracting, outcome clarification, and strategies to sustain performance excellence. Jeannine has coached numerous executive leaders and their teams in the high tech, communications, financial and energy industries. Sandstrom has co-authored coaching materials used extensively throughout the executive coaching industry. She has been featured on PBS specials, in The Wall Street Journal and Fortune Magazine. Sandstrom holds certifications as Master Coach and Corporate Business Coach. Her doctorate is in Human Resource Development, with masters degrees in Business Administration and Adult Learning.

Drs. Sandstrom and Smith are the principals of CoachWorks® International, Inc. based in Dallas, Texas USA.
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