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Helping clients navigate a new hybrid world



The Situation

“I’m coaching a leader who is struggling to bring back the culture and morale of a pre-pandemic office. The lack of impromptu connections means that most conversations are transactional vs. relational. What coaching does this leader need to navigate a new hybrid world?”

The Experts Weigh In

By Craig Carr, BCC, PCC, CPCC

To begin to answer this question, let’s start with the researchers who are hard at work, furiously building data points and hunting for the benefits and drawbacks of the hybrid workplace. Sometimes data can tell you and your client where to look. If that sounds like a starting place, read this informative article: zippia.com/advice/hybrid-work-statistics/

While it will take time for the dust to settle, we can be sure about two things: 1) culture won’t retreat to the past without a fight, and 2) every organization is in a unique set of circumstances. Your client is finding out that the situation calls for a breakthrough in culture. It’s scary – and they’re not alone – but leadership that uses innovation and systemic awareness to pivot and install foundational culture change for the 21st Century will win.

The operative word in “new hybrid world” is the first one, and under pressure, leaders are inclined to revert to old models, mindsets and tactics. For example, the statement that conversations have turned transactional from relational is an assumption that implies a conclusion. If holding that statement as truth got them to coaching, that’s great, but let’s see the evidence and be sure it’s not consultant-speak they picked up somewhere. “Mining for reasons” can be an unwitting attempt to stabilize shaky ground that’s shaky for a reason. Essentially, it sounds true, but is longing for a season past or an executable solution going to bring the culture back stronger and healthier?

I bring this up because one of the most significant challenges for an executive coach is to be in the unknown with their client. I call it “The Great SlowDown” (as people seem to be relating to all things “Great” these days). In the new hybrid world, the best solution may not yet be “speech ripe.” Resist the pressure to have the answer ready to fire at the culture.

In other words, the new hybrid world won’t be pushed into existence at the speed of next-quarter results. Leaders who fail to slow down and listen to what the culture wants will get it wrong and induce more emotional and economic hardship. I’m not suggesting that you shy away from being proactive, but to be proactively slow! I know you want to support this leader and might be looking for something more concrete, but what if it does not exist yet?

A masterful coach understands that “not-knowing-and-being-in-curiosity” is a genuine and powerful coaching stance in the face of significant change. Hold the pressure with the respect it deserves but question any attempts to re-create The Before Times out of anxiety to get something done. Instead, apply an equal and opposite pressure that opens your client’s mind to be the new kind of leader the future needs.

By Suzi Pomerantz, MT, MCC

Look forward, not back. There are some aspects of organizational life that are permanently altered because of the pandemic. Culture and morale are in that category. Some portion of your workforce has been hired during the pandemic and may not have met co-workers in person yet.

You cannot go back to the same vibe that existed pre-pandemic, when everyone was in the office every day. Now most organizations are either predominantly virtual or have some partial requirement for in-office time, but for the most part we are not going to have everyone in the office at the same time all the time ever again. The flow of relationship spontaneity has been eroded.

So, begin by coaching this leader to expand their awareness of this stark reality. Help them to mourn the loss of

the previous culture. Help them to move through the stages of grief and get to a more generative place of possibility. Help them to let go of the struggle to bring back something that isn't coming back. Help them to focus on what they want to create for the future.

- What did they love most about the pre-pandemic culture and morale?
- What aspects of the previous culture did not work?
- What is possible in the new hybrid reality that wasn't possible before?
- What aspects of the prior morale are worth regenerating in the new reality?

Then, focus your coaching around the relational aspects. Does this leader need to develop more empathy? How might the leader foster more meaningful relationships with each staff person, and how might the leader cultivate the space and opportunities for more meaningful relationships between others in the organization?

What activities can the leader sponsor that will create value for being relational over transactional in every conversation? What structures or tools can the organization put in place to support and honor conversations that are not purely transactional, but generative, or relational, or energizing, or profound?

Coaching is a great place to co-create with your leader client who they want to be as a leader, and what conversations they need to design and instill in the culture to shift from a purely operational, transactional focus to the culture they will need for the new hybrid workforce of the foreseeable future.

Help your client to envision and create a new culture that integrates the best of what the organizational culture and morale were before with the current reality and move toward a future possibility that is even better than what was previously imaginable. What might that look like?

By Victoria Trabosh, CDC®, CEC

In this new hybrid world in which we all live, one of the most difficult challenges we have is to navigate the changes that are unwanted yet now unavoidable. As coaches, we know that what got us "here" will not get us "there." And leaders are challenged in the same way.

Leaders look to their coaches for answers, and to be a resource for others, we must educate ourselves. Our education must be continual, or we risk becoming irrelevant in a VUCA (Volatile/Uncertain/Complex/Ambiguous) world. Our relevance lies in our ability to find answers. As a coach, you can learn from others to help your leader.

In 2021, the McLean Institute of Coaching (IOC) completed and published a research project on the future of leadership and coaching. As a fellow of the IOC, I had the honor of being part of the research team and writing the report.

This report is remarkable in its depth, universality, and usefulness to coaches. Our leaders were from around the world, and we coded their responses to interviews in a qualitative data method.

Qualitative data is about the emotions or perceptions of people and what they feel. The conclusions are drawn from this broad pool and offer insights and suggestions for the coach's role for the leader.

The report, titled *Leading with Humanity: The Future of Leadership and Coaching*, is free to download on the IOC site (instituteofcoaching.org/ioc-report-leading-with-humanity-the-future-of-leadership-coaching). I urge you to read it.

You do not need to make up the next steps from your own experience, but can utilize sound research to help your client realize their challenge is the universal challenge of all leaders at this time.

I have shared the entire report with my clients, which is well laid out, and you or your client can read sections without reading the whole document. It has created a focused, straightforward way for me to discuss my clients' unique challenges with them. There are critical themes identified that you will immediately recognize as relevant to your client.

May this resource give you insight and ideas to continue as your client's trusted coach. •

Are you grappling with a sticky situation?

You don't have to go it alone. Let our senior coaches give you some different perspectives to consider. Email your situation to submissions@choice-online.com and put "sticky situations" in the subject line.