



# The Evolution of Coaching in the U.S. Federal Government

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*In this article, Lee Salmon explores the evolution of executive coaching in the U.S. federal government over the past two decades and discusses factors leading to its acceptance as an important tool for leadership development. Salmon discusses a number of ways that coaching is being used in government agencies and presents two agency case studies as examples of how coaching programs are designed, implemented, and the results from evaluation impact studies. Trends for coaching in government are also discussed.*

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## BACKGROUND

In 1995 the United States Federal government went through a period of significant downsizing as part of the Reinventing Government programs of the Clinton Administration. First-line and middle management levels were targeted for reduction and the span of control of managers was increased. At this time government was also beginning to move to a team-based work environment to deal with the growing complexity of problems and issues that were beyond the knowledge of solitary subject matter experts. In 2004 there were 1.8 million employees in the executive branch of government with an average age of 46.8 years and 16.6 years of service (Office of Personnel Management, 2004).

The demands for organizational accountability regarding business results and the socially dynamic nature of teams meant everyone had to learn how to communicate more effectively and develop Emotional and Social Effectiveness (ESE) skills (Terrell & Hughes, in press). With fewer managers left in the management chain, it became even more essential to support development of the skills and talents of front-line managers, and to provide clearer, more effective communication and accountability.

Meg Wheatley, author of *Leadership and the New Science*, summarized this best when she said, "In organizations, real power and energy is generated through relationships. The patterns of

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or view of the Bureau of Public Debt, the Treasury Franchise Fund, or the U.S. Department of Treasury.

relationships and the capacities to form them are more important than the tasks, functions, roles, and positions” (1994, p. 39). This was a difficult challenge for many scientific and technical organizations where managers were valued and rewarded for their technical expertise and not their relationship management skills.

The nature of leadership also began to change. The skills to lead and motivate teams were minimally present in most managers. The need for a clearer distinction between good management skills and one’s capacity for leadership needed to be clarified. The concept of leadership at all levels began its nascent emergence as the concern for how work got done became just as important—it was no longer exclusively the technical substance of the work itself. People were expected to take initiative, step up and lead when required, and not wait for a manager’s approval. This pointed to improved emotional intelligence skills across all levels of the organization. Coaches were engaged to help develop these skills.

During the nineties, coaching gained a strong foothold in the private sector as an effective way of developing leadership talent—but it was only available to a select few at the highest executive levels in government. Coaching at that time also often carried the stigma of being only for those who were in trouble, whose careers were derailing. It was viewed as a strategy of last resort. Today this perspective is still present in some organizations but it is becoming far less prevalent as the value of coaching is becoming more widely known and accepted. Still, with the relatively high cost of coaching, there is a great demand to demonstrate return on investment. Certainly, a good business case for the investment can be made: saving the careers of high priced senior executives and avoiding the large costs of recruiting and training their replacements makes.

In the late nineties, succession planning in government became an important concern. Demographic studies showed an aging workforce and predicted a wave of baby boomer retirements beginning early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In most agencies, human resources planning is weak. Workforce deficiencies will be exacerbated by the upcoming retirement wave of the baby-boomer generation. Approximately 71 percent of the government’s current permanent employees will be eligible for either regular or early retirement by 2010, and then 40 percent of those employees are expected to retire (Office of Management and Budget, 2002, p. 12).

Thus, the need to develop leadership talent is rapidly reaching a crisis point. Coaching is now seen by many government senior managers as one of the more effective ways to develop emotional and social effectiveness skills, as well as leadership (Salmon,

*One of the program ground rules allows for a “no-fault divorce” if the partnership is not working.*

personal communication, 2007). It is already an integral part of virtually all government Senior Executive Service (SES) Candidate Development Programs, and a growing part of agencies' leadership development programs.

In 2002, the Office of Management and Budget introduced the President's Management Agenda with five major initiatives, the most important being the Strategic Management of Human Capital (Office of Management and Budget, 2002, p. 11). The development of human capital, especially leadership talent and succession planning, continues to be at the forefront of concerns. Coaching is increasingly seen as an important tool for development. Most agencies now have a Chief Human Capital Officer to ensure that attention is given to human capital development.

To help guide the development of leadership in government, the Office of Personnel Management (2006) developed a leadership competency model based on five Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs): Leading People, Leading Change, Results Driven, Business Acumen, and Building Coalitions. In the original model there were 27 competencies distributed within the five ECQs. In 2006 the 28<sup>th</sup> competency, Developing Others, was added (see Figure 1 below). This competency pointed more directly to the responsibility of leaders to develop future leaders. It offers one more focus for coaching activity.

**Figure 1. OPM Leadership Competency Model**

<b>Leading Change</b>	<b>Leading People</b>	<b>Results Driven</b>	<b>Business Acumen</b>	<b>Building Coalitions</b>
Creativity & Innovation External Awareness Flexibility Resilience Strategic Thinking Vision	Conflict Management Leveraging Diversity Developing Others Team Building	Accountability Customer Service Decisiveness Entrepreneurship Problem Solving Technical Credibility	Financial Management Human Capital Management Technology Management	Partnering Political Savvy Influencing/ Negotiating

<b>Fundamental Competencies</b>		
Interpersonal Skills Written Communication	Oral Communication Integrity/Honesty	Continual Learning Public Service Motivation

#### **APPLICATIONS OF COACHING IN GOVERNMENT**

There are a number of ways in which coaching is being used in the Federal government.

- Coaching is used in mentoring programs to help provide additional skills for the mentor. For example, at the Corporation for National and Community Service (the organization responsible for the Americorps and Vista programs), managers who serve as mentors go through a two-day training workshop. They learn basic coaching skills, such as listening and inquiry, to strengthen their role as mentors. They strive to serve more as mentor-coaches and provide more learning direction than just offering advice from their career experience.
- Coaching is being used to improve Emotional and Social Effectiveness (ESE) skills that increase levels of engagement in government agencies; e.g., coaching to help with conflict management through use of empathetic listening, caring and compassion, removing judgment, and reframing new possibilities. Some agencies are using emotional intelligence 360 surveys such as the EQ 360 and the ECI 360 (Hughes, Patterson, & Terrell, 2005) with follow-up coaching focusing on the development of emotional intelligence (EI) competencies.
- Most government coaching programs are helping managers improve leadership skills necessary to lead their organizations through times of great change. The ability to think strategically, develop a vision with buy-in from employees, and improve collaboration are some of the skills areas in development. Leadership development programs in the Department of Education, Environmental Protection Agency, and the Food and Drug Administration are examples.
- Coaches continue to serve as trusted advisors to leaders who grapple with complex, radical change. These leaders want to keep their fingers on the pulse of the morale of employees who often get dispirited and lose sight of their contribution to agency mission.
- Succession planning is receiving considerable attention in agencies in response to the growing wave of retirements at the SES and senior manager levels. Coaches are helping with these retirement transitions and working with leadership changes in this election year. SES careerists are now trying to sustain changes initiated over the past few years and prepare the workforce for effective engagement with a new wave of political appointees.
- As executives and managers approach retirement, coaches work with them to develop transition plans that focus on creating a leadership legacy and transferring their knowledge. There are now workshops on retirement planning with follow-up coaching offered to agencies through a number of training vendors.
- The Department of Navy's Office of Civilian Human Resources is offering a pilot onboarding coaching program

for newly minted civilian SES leaders to help make the transition between manager and executive roles smoother, more efficient, and less stressful. This is to ameliorate the situation that many new SES leaders find themselves in: being overwhelmed. They do not clearly understand their new role as an executive leader –they are no longer just a senior manager.

- Coaching is being used to improve the communication and collaboration skills of senior managers in several of the 16 agencies that make up the Intelligence Community. These skills, in response to recommendations by the 9/11 Commission (9-11 Commission, 2004), are intended to help break down communication silos in organizations and develop partnerships, especially during times of increasingly complex missions, declining budgets and increased demand for overlapping, coordinated services. In one agency, team coaching is being used as a way of creating alignment among all members of an executive team. In one agency's leadership development program, team coaching took on a different approach; two or more coaches may work simultaneously with a client to provide added power, combining the strengths and insights of both coaches.
- Although requests for “fix it” (remedial) coaching are becoming less prevalent, there are still executives and managers who get into trouble and face career derailment because of immature and offensive interpersonal communication skills. These leaders create conflict with key staff who then become frustrated and leave. Worse yet, some file complaints and civil suits with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for sexual harassment, race, age, and religious discrimination, and creation of a hostile work environment. The cost savings from avoiding these types of conflicts can be enormous.
- Several agencies are developing their own internal coaching cadres to provide continuous service and cut costs. As an example, the National Cancer Institute has just completed a comprehensive training program to develop its internal coaching team, with all coaches using the same approach and models.

## **CASE STUDIES**

To better illustrate some of these coaching applications, case studies from two government agencies are presented: one a major agency involved in public health (for the purposes of this article referred to as PHA), and the second the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC), Department of Treasury.

### **PHA Case Study**

The PHA coaching program was launched in late 2006 and is

now in its second year. With 32 participants in the 2007 program, and presently with 36 participants in the 2008 program, coaching serves senior executives and managers from across all of the agency's offices. The program is intended to provide a systemic impact and improve the quality of leadership throughout the organization.

The coaching program was sponsored by PHA's corporate university. It was designed in partnership with the Federal Consulting Group, Department of Treasury, with support from the PHA Director. An orientation program was provided to help answer participants' questions about coaching, the program's structure and ground rules, the EQ 360 emotional intelligence assessment, and the program schedule. The 13 members of the coaching team were also introduced.

The duration of coaching for each participant group is typically six months, with up to 30 hours of coaching services being provided. In some cases, participants with heavy travel schedules are permitted to extend their coaching out to nine months. It is expected that the participant, coach, and participant's supervisor will meet during the first month of coaching to align expectations, discuss business goals, and identify respective roles. Approximately halfway through the coaching period, participants are asked to check in about their experience and are asked if they are making progress on their coaching goals. One of the program ground rules allows for a "no-fault divorce" if the partnership is not working.

The initial pilot program evaluation, conducted by a contracted PHA independent performance measurement expert, involved a survey assessment of the value of the coaching program overall and the experience by its participants, their supervisors, and coaches. The evaluation was also engaged to determine if any changes in the program design were needed to make it more effective and efficient. As a result of the coaching program, participants stated their belief that several of their Emotional Intelligence competencies had improved. The evaluation study found a large majority of participants felt coaching was worthwhile and reported a greater sense of self-efficacy, enhanced interpersonal competency, increased job satisfaction, greater ability to effectively complete tasks, increased productivity and greater confidence in exercising leadership. Overall the pilot program appeared to have established an effective foundation for the implementation of an on-going coaching effort.

### **OCC Case Study**

In 2005 the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, Department of Treasury decided to embark on a pilot coaching

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program for their high performing executives and managers. The Comptroller charters, regulates, and supervises all national banks. It also supervises the federal branches and agencies of foreign banks. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., it has four district offices plus an office in London to supervise the international activities of national banks.

The Continuing Education and Resource Alternatives (CERA), a business unit of the Office of Leadership, Learning, and Workplace Fairness, sponsored the launch of the Comptroller's Executive Coaching Pilot Program. In the program's announcement, CERA stated,

Executive coaching is a well-documented strategy for developing leaders and for building the culture at (the Comptroller). CERA believes coaching will support (the Comptroller's) strategic future by formally supporting executives and by strengthening, sustaining, and renewing the culture by focusing on identified leadership strengths (CERA, 2006, p. 2).

The program used both Comptroller internal coaches and external coaches contracted from the Federal Consulting Group, Department of Treasury. Initially the six-month program had 22 participants, 19 of whom completed the program.

Some of the outcomes clients experienced were measures of what is called Return on Value (ROV) which is a meaningful measure even though not as hard a measure as Return on Investment (ROI). In government it is often hard to measure ROI. These measures of the impact of coaching were directly tied to strategies and emotional and social effectiveness (ESE) skills described more fully in the book, *Coaching for Emotional Intelligence*, to be published summer 2008 (Terrell & Hughes, in press):

- Breakthroughs in achievement of personal and organizational goals (Authentic Success)
- Ability to create and lead from a vision (Authentic Success)
- Creation of a high-performance team (Social Intelligence)
- Increased self- and organizational awareness (Responsive Awareness)
- Greater ability to learn and take action (Self-discipline)
- Ability to manage upward (Courage)
- Enhanced partnering and collaboration (Social Intelligence)

By its second year, the Treasury program had 30 participants, including senior executives such as Deputy Comptrollers. More and more federal employees are asking to be coached so they can improve their interpersonal skills, including their emotional and social intelligence (Terrell & Hughes, in press, chapter 10).

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### **NEEDS OF COACHING PROGRAM COORDINATORS**

Recently the International Consortium for Coaching in Organizations (ICCO) conducted a series of informal interviews with a few coaching program coordinators in government agencies to find out what they needed in the way of support to make their work more effective (Salmon & Isaacson, 2008). The following are highlights of their needs, probably representative of what one would find in a more comprehensive survey:

1. Collaborate with International Coach Federation (ICF) and other organizations to share and develop research on coaching trends and future areas for development.
2. Create a community (Special Interest Group) for institutional coaching program coordinators where they can share best practices, wisdom, challenges faced, and provide ongoing support to each other. One person referred to these as Wisdom Circles, another as a Community of Practice (COP).
3. Develop best practices on selling the value of coaching to organizational decision-makers. Provide information on case studies showing the Return on Investment (ROI) and Return on Value (ROV) provided by coaching at different levels in an organization.
4. Provide ideas and best practices on developing coaching programs for middle managers and supervisors. In effect, this is to push coaching further down in the organization using the lessons learned in achieving success with coaching in the senior executive and senior manager ranks. Develop guidelines for managers on when to bring in a coach.
5. Develop best practices on integrating internal and external coaches into a comprehensive coaching program. Provide on-going learning and collaboration within the organizational coaching team.
6. Develop information on coaching rate structures and the range of services provided in different sectors such as corporate, government, and non-profit.
7. Provide information on directories of coaches, and guidance on how to find the best coaches and how to qualify them.
8. Provide reviews on new publications coming out on coaching.
9. Provide ideas on how to integrate coaching with leadership development and other learning activities within an organization.
10. Identify and collect best practices on the design and implementation of coaching programs in different business and public sectors.

### **TRENDS FOR COACHING IN GOVERNMENT**

Coaching's greatest impact in government is in the development of future leadership and leaders who are agile enough to address



a growing complexity of issues. Public management is often seen as having the task of identifying strategies for doing hard things in a steady, high-quality way. Donald Kettl, leadership professor at the University of Pennsylvania, says, “For better or worse, we have evolved to the point where administrative leadership matters more than it ever has because only nimble leaders can help the governmental system adapt faster than problems mutate” (Kettl, 2008, p. 11). Coaching clearly helps leaders learn how to be agile and adaptive to change.

David Walker, Comptroller General of the United States, identified the need for several key leadership attributes needed to guide the Federal government. These are closely tied to work coaches do on developing the ESE skills mentioned previously.

If we expect to successfully tackle issues like health care, immigration, education, energy, and the environment, we will need more leaders in the United States and around the world with several key attributes. These attributes are courage, integrity, creativity, and stewardship. By courage, I mean people who state the facts, speak the truth, and do the right thing even though it isn't easy or popular. By integrity, I mean people who practice what they preach and lead by example. We need people who understand that the law and professional standards represent the floor of acceptable behavior. It's time all of us set our sights higher and do what's right. By creativity, I mean people who can think 'outside the box' and see new ways to address old problems while helping others to see the way forward. Finally, by stewardship, I mean people who leave things not just better off but better positioned for the future when they depart their jobs and this earth (Walker, 2006, pp. 6-7).

These sentiments were similarly voiced by The Clerk of the Privy Counsel, Kevin Lynch, the most senior non-political official in the Government of Canada. *(Note: Please refer to the article by Donna Karlin in this issue to gain more of a perspective on the challenges of coaching in the Canadian government.)* These two senior government leaders point to the challenges facing civil servants who must become more emotionally intelligent, develop ESE skills on their own, or with the help of a coach, and demonstrate an ability to create employee engagement in new and profound ways that will give meaning to the concept of stewardship.

The use of coaching across government will continue to grow. It will be used increasingly to build high performing work teams and expanded collaboration between government agencies. The use of advances in information technology (IT), such as Web 2.0 technologies for social networking, is growing. The development of internal coaching cadres in agencies will become more prevalent. Internal coaching teams, such as those in the National Cancer Institute, Treasury's Internal Revenue Service, and in

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several agencies in the Intelligence Community, will continue to emerge.

At some future point, it may be possible to swap the services of internal government coaches between agencies without exchange of funds through the use of rotational details under the Interagency Personnel Act (IPA). This will help improve communication between agencies, increase collaboration, and leverage coaching resources already existing in government at no additional cost.

Coaching in the federal government will continue to focus on developing relationships between leaders and followers because without motivated and committed followers, there are no true leaders. This speaks to the importance of employee engagement and building relationships across an organization as well as between agencies. With increasing media attention on challenges such as the price of oil in the Middle East, terrorism, and global warming, our need of leadership for global sustainability could not be more important. The ability of our government and business leaders to build relationships and engage in meaningful global dialogue is critical, yet many of these leaders lack the skills necessary to confront and leverage the power of diversity and build enduring relationships. Coaching can be an important intervention to build these bridges and create conversations that are not only needed but meant to happen.

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