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the magazine of professional coaching

Helping Leaders SHINE

How coaches bring out the best
in leaders and their teams

Perspectives
on Leadership

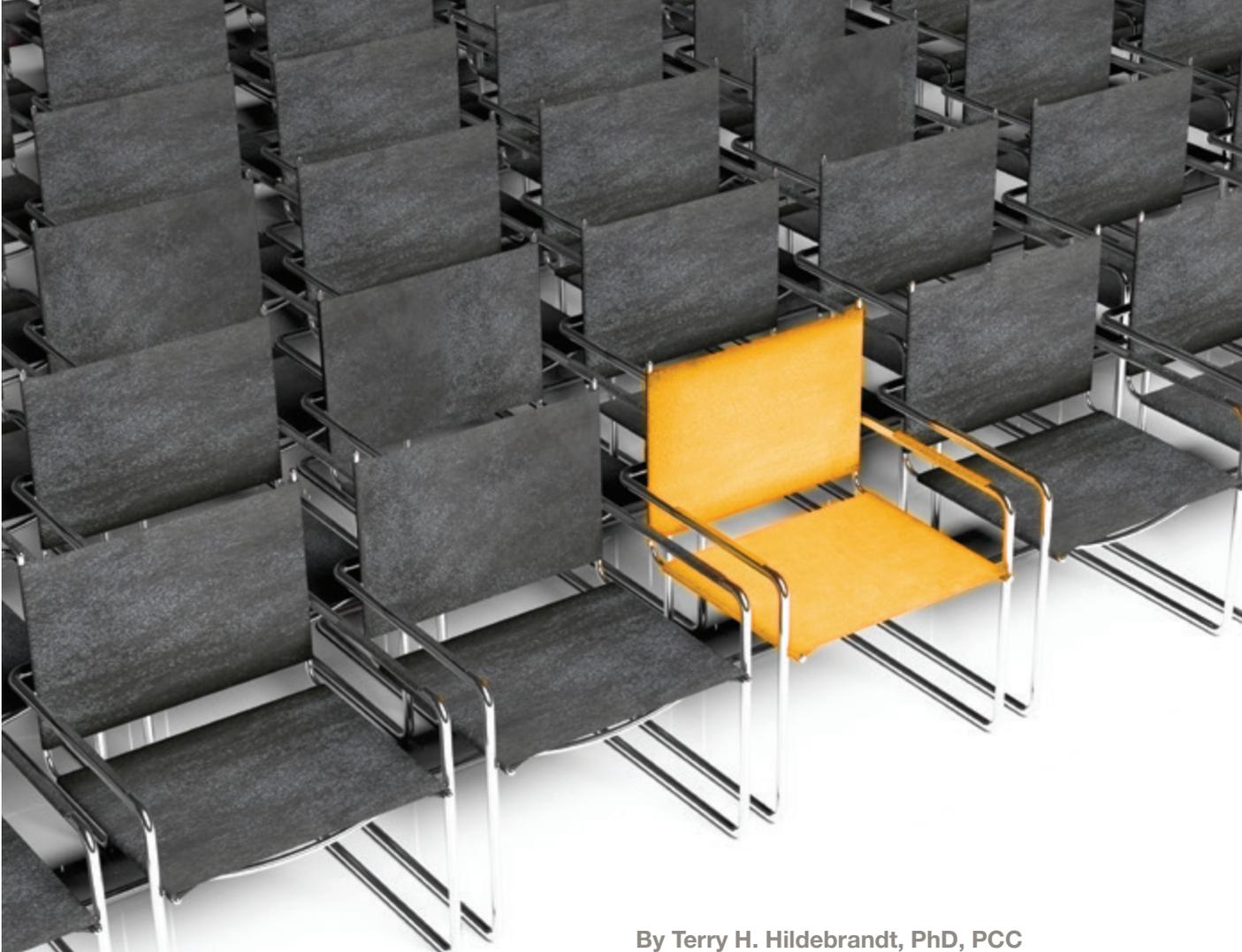
Essential Tools for
Leadership Coaching

Developing
Future Leaders



Helping Leaders SHINE

What is leadership and how do we identify leaders? How can coaching support their development, influence and impact? What does coaching look like and how is it used vs. managing? How do we coach those in non-traditional leadership roles? What are the best tools to use to support leaders? How can we move from traditional supervision to being a coaching manager? We examine the role coaching plays on the leadership path.

A photograph of a row of grey chairs with one yellow chair standing out. The chairs are arranged in a row, and the yellow chair is the only one of its color in the group. The chairs have a modern, minimalist design with metal frames and fabric seats and backs.

By Terry H. Hildebrandt, PhD, PCC

When engaging in leadership coaching, two essential assessment tools for informing the development process include personality assessment and 360° stakeholder feedback. Taken together, these tools enable the coach and the client to gain greater insight into the client's strengths, preferences, style, needs and leadership development gaps. Personality focuses on the style side of the equation and 360 leadership assessment focuses on skills and competencies. Let's first explore personality and how it fits with leadership coaching.

Personality & Leadership

Personality is analogous to handedness. We all have certain natural or preferred approaches to leading, just as most of us have a preference for being right- or left-handed. These preferences are neither better nor worse but are instead equally valid, different approaches to reaching a desired outcome. Just like handedness, with practice we can learn to use our non-preferred hand. However, we might find that this takes quite a bit of practice and focus to improve our ability to do things in our non-preferred way.

Through personality assessment, the client gains greater insight into what is the natural, preferred approach to a number

Two Essential Tools

Using 360 evaluation and personality assessment in leadership coaching

of leadership behaviors. Some of the commonly used personality instruments on the market include the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) based on Jungian psychology, and tools based on the Five Factor Model of Personality including the Birkman Method®, Hogan Assessments, and the NEO PI-R.

Other popular tools focus on behavioral styles including DiSC and TRACOM's Social Style®.

Personality assessments are self-rater instruments that can be easily administered at the beginning of the coaching program and quickly identify the dominant styles of the client. Depending on the instrument, you can also measure potential stress behaviors, needs, ideal work environment, occupational interests, potential derailers, and preferred work styles.

The Importance of Stakeholder Feedback

While understanding preferences is important, leadership coaching requires that we also understand the client's strengths and weaknesses regarding key leadership competencies. The most common way to assess these competencies is through 360° stakeholder feedback. There are two primary ways to gather this feedback including standardized, online instruments and qualitative interviews.

During the last 20 years, much research has gone into understanding leadership competency models. Each of these models consist of dozens of leadership competencies and

Knowing the leader's needs, the coach can quickly pinpoint action steps to recommend to the client to manage stress more effectively.

associated behaviors that drive leadership effectiveness. These models have been translated into online leadership assessment 360 tools that enable various stakeholders to rate an individual on leadership behaviors. Some highly respected examples include the Lominger Voices® 360, Korn Ferry Voices® 360, and The Leadership Circle Profile™. Some of these tools allow not only skill ratings but also importance ratings, which enable the client to pinpoint important strengths as well as leadership gaps that need to be developed.

One major advantage of these tools is that they are cost effective. However, most of the commercially available tools require certification training from the publisher, which can be a significant initial investment for the coach to be able to use these tools.

Another powerful technique is to use qualitative interviewing to explore specific areas using rich examples from key stakeholders gathered during interviews conducted by the coach. I typically will work with the coaching client to devel-

op the interview protocol consisting of a number of key questions exploring topics of relevance to the client. In an ideal situation, I will first conduct an online 360, and use the data to pinpoint specific areas to explore more deeply using stakeholder interviews. One disadvantage of stakeholder interviews is that they are often time-consuming, and require qualitative analysis and report writing. This increases the cost of the coaching engagement.

Bringing Personality and 360 Assessment Together

When analyzing the data from personality assessments and 360 feedback, I look for trends across the instruments to provide deeper insight into the client's strengths and areas for development. For example, someone who scores with a strong preference for structure may commonly demonstrate skills in organization on their 360, while someone with a low preference for structure may score low on organization skills.

By understanding the client's preferences from the personality profile, the coach can help the client decide whether developing those skills is something they want to invest in given their preferences.

The opposite may also be true if the client has made a conscious effort to improve organizational skills. I described this as developing the use of the "non-preferred hand."

Certain jobs require specific skills or leadership competencies. By understanding the client's preferences from the personality profile, the coach can help the client decide whether developing those skills is something they want to invest in given their preferences. For example, an introvert may not wish to develop the people-networking skills required for a field sales management job where meeting with clients all day is a core requirement. This insight provides the client with more informed choices on where they want to invest in leadership development that matches their interests, preferences and strengths.

Personality, Feedback & the Coaching Process

While assessment is typically done at the beginning of the coaching program to help the client understand strengths and areas for growth, these tools can be used throughout the coaching process when exploring specific real life scenarios.

I find that personality influences nearly every interaction

that leaders have with others. In an ideal world, leaders would not only know their own personality profiles but also the preferences of their coworkers, which enables an analysis of interpersonal dynamics to improve communication and teamwork.

In addition, stress is often created by a certain need not being met, which is dictated by the leader's specific personality profile. Knowing the leader's needs, the coach can quickly pinpoint action steps to recommend to the client to manage stress more effectively.

Important Issues to Consider

There are a number of important considerations when implementing instruments in coaching. Some clients are quite nervous about psychological testing of any kind. Before asking a client to complete a personality assessment, I always explain that personality is like handedness and that there are no right or wrong answers on a personality assessment. We are only measuring preferences and style and not skill level.

Using a 360 feedback tool obviously requires that stakeholders understand how the data will be used and who will have access to the data. I require that all 360 data and reports remain confidential to the client, meaning that only the coach and the coaching client have access to the data. This ensures both the stakeholders and the coachee that the data will not be used against them in annual reviews or pay administration.

When 360 data is shared with HR or management, the report now ceases to be developmental and instead becomes an evaluation tool. This process is best reserved for annual reviews or talent review. As a leadership development coach, I typically do not get involved in manager evaluation. These best practices enable the stakeholders to be as open and honest as possible with their feedback.

Conclusion

Taken together, personality assessment and 360° feedback provide greater insight into the client's interests, style, preferences, needs, strengths and areas for growth. Having this data readily available enables both the coach and the client to quickly pinpoint areas for development in a leadership coaching engagement. Personality profiles also enable the coach and client to analyze interpersonal dynamics and support the client in managing and preventing stress.