

# INSIGHT GUIDE #85

## EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

### Ready, set, go – what do new team coaches need to know?

By coincidence, I began team coaching at the same time I started formal training in the discipline. What followed was an intensive three-year period of development, both for the team I was working with and for me. It was a chance

to apply new learning in real time. This guide shares key lessons from that experience, offering practical tips and insights for both new and seasoned team coaches.



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## Doing team coaching versus being a team coach

The distinction between doing coaching and being a coach is a fundamental coaching concept that applies wholeheartedly when working with teams. Hawkins (2024) describes doing as actions and techniques a team coach might use in their work, such as: asking questions, facilitating discussions, sharing models or frameworks, and reflecting back observations. Whereas being is about mindset, presence and embodying a team coaching stance. Both are critical in any engagement.

This guide presents the top five doing insights and the top five being insights that I gained while working within a particularly complex and lengthy case. Let's first look at the case the insights in this guide are based on.

### The case

The formation of a new senior leadership team after a major restructure is a complex challenge – and a significant risk – for any organisation. That is why I was brought in.

For the first 18 months of the engagement, I was a transformation manager, reporting to Michael, the team leader. Effectively, I was both an internal coach and part of the team I was coaching. My remit was supporting the team to become a collective unit and helping individual team members become great leaders. Regular team coaching sessions were used as the primary intervention. Being physically present also allowed me to informally coach individual team members, including Michael, one-on-one, daily.

After the initial contract ended, I worked with the team for a further 18 months as an external consultant, with scope limited to collective team coaching.

I enrolled in practitioner team coaching training just prior to securing the internal role with this team and continued with senior practitioner-level training soon after. Practical application and reflective learning were core to meeting requirements for both courses, so this case was central to me gaining the qualifications.

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## Doing team coaching

### 1. Alignment with strategy and approaches

The alignment of the work you are doing with a team with the organisation's strategy, and with their people development strategy in particular, is critical.

Misalignment may result in loss of credibility with the team and within the organisation.

Models, approaches and ideas introduced should also align where possible. Also, too many new concepts might overload or confuse the team and upset human resources.

In this case, I invested heavily in understanding the strategic context and approaches used internally within the organisation before designing my approach. Where I wanted to depart from, or extend, concepts already used internally, I discussed ideas with human resources before introducing them to the team.

For example, Lencioni's (2002) 'five dysfunctions of a team' concept was already being used within the organisation. I wanted to use Clutterbuck's (2020) PERILL model instead, which was discouraged initially. After some discussion, a compromise was reached and I created a bespoke approach for the team that combined both models.

For a definition of team coaching and how it differs from other modalities, refer to the following guides from Henley:

- *Insight Guide #6: How can I coach my team?*
- *Coaching in Action Guide: Team Coaching*

## 2. Client is the team

The International Coaching Federation (2025) asserts that the client in team coaching is the collective team and that the 'team coach must remain objective in all interactions with team members, sponsors, and relevant stakeholders. The team coach should not be perceived as taking sides with any subgroups or individual members of the team.'

In this case, I admit, my approach was skewed by Michael's requests and preferences – ones that were not always beneficial for the team in the long term. My scenario was complicated; Michael was the sponsor of the work, the team leader, and I also reported to Michael. As his employee, there was an expectation that I would take instruction from him.

An example of this confusion relates to the involvement of stakeholders in team coaching. I suggested we include stakeholders in the PERILL (Clutterbuck, 2020) diagnostic used so we could gain 360-viewpoints. I also suggested that key stakeholders attend team coaching sessions to enable conversations around what they valued and needed most from the team. Both suggestions were vetoed by Michael. He feared stakeholder feedback would be brutally honest and hurtful, and wanted to protect his team. My view differed: I believed the team were strong enough to hear feedback, certainly in later parts of the engagement.

On reflection, introducing an independent sponsor might have helped weigh up the pros and cons of different approaches and critical decisions throughout the process.

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## 3. Sponsorship and stakeholders

Involve a team's stakeholders throughout the process, including their input when prioritising development activities, sharing progress updates and measuring change outcomes. Stakeholders could be more enthusiastic and willing to invest time than you think.

At the conclusion of this three-year case, I gathered information from stakeholders on their views and the changes they noticed in the team. Much to my surprise, all of the stakeholders that I approached (including c-suite members, peers, staff reporting to team members) said the same thing: they wanted to be involved and wondered why they had not been approached previously.

Looking back now, I should have insisted stakeholders be included. In addition to providing valuable input into the process, their involvement would have built stronger relationships between parties.



## 4. Models and adapting models

Be cautious with the use of models and frameworks in team coaching and be sure their use is for the benefit of the team, rather than to satisfy your own preferences, or to provide a security blanket. Also, it is acceptable to adapt models and frameworks to meet the specific needs of teams you are working with.

In this case, the team taught me that overuse of models and theoretical concepts can be disengaging. Although Michael and I were familiar with many development models and theories and enjoyed work to be framed in this way, other team members did not.

The team also taught me that when using models, adapting them can be very engaging. In a team coaching session towards the end of the engagement, the team insisted a seventh element be added to the six existing pillars of Clutterbuck's (2020) PERILL model – team wellbeing and resilience. The team effectively created their own bespoke framework.

## 5. Bumpy ride

Tangible progress results can take time to become evident and the development road can have many ups and downs.

Working with the team in this case revealed stark differences in expectations of progress. At the end of the first year, the PERILL (Clutterbuck, 2020) diagnostic was completed for the third time, showing a negligible increase in score. Engagement scores were also flat. Although verbal feedback relating to our work was positive, I was very disappointed. In contrast, Michael was happy with result, saying that given the complexity of the environment and extreme pressure on the team, a stable result was a good result.

Another example occurred near the middle of the third year. Several team coaching sessions had been cancelled, the team were experiencing delivery issues, and I sensed a drop in psychological safety. Engagement scores and diagnostic results also decreased. The team acknowledged they had lost their way, normalised that ups and downs should be expected, and committed to getting back on track.





## Being a team coach

### 1. Part of the system

A team coach is part of the system, which has pros and cons – be aware of the impact, use pros to your advantage and be wary of cons.

As I was close to the team and worked with them every day for the first half of the engagement, I was able to build an in-depth understanding of the working environment, to role model agreed team behaviours, and to build strong trust with individual team members. There was also ample opportunity to informally coach team members one-to-one and help them to embed work. These were all positive impacts of my role in the system.

But there were also negatives. There was an overreliance on me to uphold team behaviours on behalf of the collective; I became the team counsellor, and my presence caused some relationship tension within the team. These cons were a regular topic in my supervision sessions.

### 2. Client is king

Keep the needs of the client/team at the forefront of everything you do and all decisions you make.

During the first 18 months of the engagement, I struggled with the implications of being part of the team I was coaching. One challenge related to multiple roles I was playing within team coaching sessions. It was difficult to contribute content as a team member and coach the Team at the same time. Michael picked up on this and suggested we introduce an external co-coach as support. We experimented once, but did not pursue it further – at my request.

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Why? Looking back now, I recognise my reluctance was self-motivated. I had a lot at stake in the role - I wanted credit for the work being done and did not want to share the glory and pain that came with it with anyone else. Unfortunately, this is a clear example of acting for my own benefit, rather than in the best interests of the Team.

### 3. Personal boundaries

Take care with personal boundaries and watch for transference.

Michael and I supported each other. I wanted to help him be the best leader he could be, and he supported me with learning and career opportunities. I was his sympathetic ear and he was my most supportive ally. We shared personal challenges and friendship. At the same time, I was frustrated by Michael's leadership style and working style and we often squabbled.

Some referred to Michael and me as 'Mum and Dad' and I did feel like Michael's work wife at times. Transference was in play, and the frustration and tension between us impacted the team. Transference was another regular topic in my supervision sessions.

On reflection, the friendship boundaries between Michael and me should have been tighter, with explicit discussion and contracting around those boundaries.



#### 4. Self-care

Team coaching is extremely complex by nature, and self-awareness and self-care are critical to ensure coaches are fit for purpose.

The importance of self-care is emphasised within the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (2025) team coaching accreditation standards, which state team coaches are expected to 'maintain resilience and self-care and the active management of their own needs'.

As described in the points above, the complex nature of this case took its toll. Despite active self-care (yoga, meditation, time in nature) and significant supervision and support, I struggled.

While I completed the engagement, I often look back on the experience as one of endurance rather than fulfilment. It was taxing on my physical and mental wellbeing, and I came close to stepping away on many occasions. Despite continuing to work with the team, I often wondered whether I was 'fit for purpose' and took this topic to supervision.

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#### 5. Supervision and support

Supervision and support in team coaching is critical, and different types are useful.

The European Mentoring and Coaching Council (2025) team coaching accreditation standards, requires 'appropriate team coaching-focused supervision and a reflective practice plan for own development'.

Given the complexity of the case and the significant impact on my wellbeing, I engaged in several forms of supervision concurrently over the period of this case:

- Professionally led team-focused group supervision – a component of both my practitioner and senior practitioner training programmes
- Professional team-focused one-to-one supervision
- Peer group supervision led by the group – already in place prior to the engagement

Informal support was also critical, including support from coaching and business peers, family and friends.

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#### Implications

Insights shared in this guide are not drawn from textbooks or training courses. Although some are reflected in professional team coaching standards, they stem from real-world application – doing team coaching and the lived experience of being a team coach.

It is uncommon for a team coach to be a member of the team they are coaching, and for the team leader to be their boss. My circumstances in this case most likely exaggerated some of the things that can otherwise happen in more traditional arrangements. However, this case highlights important considerations for all new or experienced team coaches, whether they are internal or external.

## Henley Centre for Coaching

The Henley Centre for Coaching is a global leader in coaching research and coach training. We are the only triple-accredited coaching provider in the world offering both postgraduate university qualifications in coaching and accreditation from the Association for Coaching (AC), the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC).

The Centre provides formal accredited coach training through our *Professional Certificate in Executive Coaching* and *MSc in Coaching and Behavioural Change*, and accredited supervision training through our *Professional Certificate in Supervision* and *Professional Certificate in Team, Board and Systemic Coaching*. These programmes are delivered in the UK, at venues across the world and online.

The Centre provides continuous professional development for coaching professionals through masterclasses, webinars, conferences, and via online access to journals, ebooks and coaching research. These are all delivered through our online learning platform, meaning coaches can connect from anywhere in the world to engage in professional development.

The Henley coaching team consists of leading practitioners and academics who have shaped the coaching profession since the late 1990s. They have written many of the most popular coaching books and they continue to publish in leading management journals and to contribute at conferences worldwide. Their writing, thinking and research informs our teaching and ensures our programmes are at the cutting edge of coaching practice.

The Centre offers annual membership to all professional coaches, providing a virtual-learning environment where the members shape research and practice in coaching. Check out our website for details on how we can help you and your business come to life.



### Helen Zink

Helen holds many qualifications, including Senior Practitioner Team and Individual Coach (EMCC). Helen is author of *Team Coaching for Organisational Development: Team, Leader, Organisation, Coach and Supervision Perspectives* (Routledge, 2023).

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