Section One

Your Traveling Companions: Coach, Client, and Organizational Issues

<div style="border">**Chapter One**</div>

ACTIVATING THE ACTIVE INGREDIENTS OF LEADERSHIP COACHING

Sandra L. Davis and D. Douglas McKenna

Peruse the business book selections online or in your local bookstore and you will encounter a sea of titles about coaching, executive coaching, or even life coaching. Connect with executives in organizations across the globe and ask them about their experience with executive coaching and you will undoubtedly hear positive, personal stories of how a coach helped to make a difference. Coaching has even become a status symbol: "Don't you have a coach?" Executive coaching is hot and it matters.

The field of executive coaching can benefit from the unique contributions of psychologists. Though some executive coaches or HR professionals may be wary of talking about psychology for fear of turning away hard-nosed or skeptical executives, it is psychology theory and even psychotherapy research that provide the magic and means for how individuals change through coaching. Those who do not understand the forces that sustain change may actually be harmful to clients, notes Dr. Steven Berglas of the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. "In an alarming number of situations, executive coaches who lack rigorous psychological training do more harm than good" (Berglas, 2002, 87).

We use this chapter to provide food for thought, stories for learning, and practical principles for action to professionals who touch executive coaching in any way. Whether you coordinate coaching within your organization, train others to be coaches, or deliver coaching yourself, there are ideas here that you can begin to use immediately. Our conclusions come from our experiences as coaches, our education as psychologists, and our unending curiosity about how we help leaders change. We offer these ideas with the hope of advancing the effectiveness of all who are involved in executive coaching.

Consider the case of Keisha, a retail store president recently promoted into a group president role. She sought out and selected an executive coach with the encouragement of her manager and the blessing of her company's chief learning officer (CLO). Her stated goals for the engagement were to learn how to navigate the nuances of upper management and to lead a significant change effort through and with highly autonomous retail presidents. She anticipated resistance from many sides. In the first meeting with her coach, Keisha shared some of her worries and initial challenging experiences in her new role. She and her coach created goals, discovered they had some common interests, and collectively established a rhythm for their ongoing work together. Keisha's coach was tempted to jump in immediately with insights about the organization and its politics, which could help to explain others' behavior, but thought better of it. Instead, the two of them explored many possible reasons for others' behavior, including Keisha's collaborative style itself.

Over the course of the next several months, Keisha learned to trust her own judgment, to recognize others' motivations, and to experiment with multiple approaches to influencing. She made choices about what kind of role she would play with her peers. She forged ahead with confidence and began to provide leadership in areas outside her own retail group. In the end, Keisha, her manager, coach, and HR partner could all cite vivid examples of how she had changed and grown through coaching.

Did it matter that Keisha's coach had a deep understanding of psychology and the ingredients that influence coaching success? We think it did. In this chapter we delve into the theoretical underpinnings from psychology which have an impact on
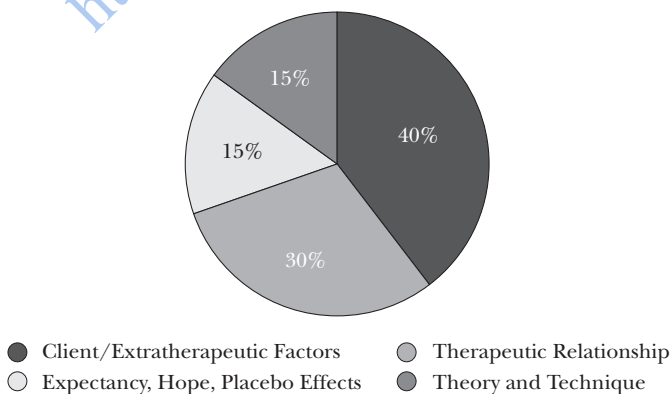
an individual client's ability to change and a coach's effectiveness in being a partner in the change process.

The Active Ingredients in Coaching

To understand the psychological variables at play in the coaching process, we turn to psychotherapy research. Although coaching is not therapy, and vice versa, there are lessons to be learned from what that research tells us. Early on, researchers (Bergin & Lambert, 1978) demonstrated overwhelmingly that psychotherapy works and then turned their attention to a more sophisticated question: If therapy works, what are its active ingredients? For executive coaches and for those who oversee coaching matches, that's where the treasure lies hidden.

Four factors account for almost all the systematic variance in psychotherapy outcomes (Asay & Lambert, 1999). These are the "active ingredients" that make therapy effective. They can also be called "common" factors because they are active in all effective therapeutic interventions, regardless of the theoretical orientation or techniques (for example, psychoanalytic, cognitive-behavioral) employed by the therapist. The relative importance of the four active ingredients based on variance accounted for in psychotherapy outcomes is shown in Figure 1.1 (based on Asay & Lambert, 1999). Here are the four factors in brief.

Figure 1.1. The Active Ingredients of Psychotherapy and the Percentage of Outcome Variance Accounted by Each Factor

- ● Client/Extratherapeutic Factors
- ○ Expectancy, Hope, Placebo Effects
- ◐ Therapeutic Relationship
- ◐ Theory and Technique

Client/Extratherapeutic Factors (40%)

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could take the majority of the credit for the behavioral change we see in our clients? It is exhilarating to know that we have made a difference and it is seductive to believe too much in our own power and magic. The fact is that some individuals are more predisposed to change than others.

Client/extratherapeutic factors are those capacities and conditions that a client brings with him or her to the engagement. The client brings herself, her work, and her social environment. Thus, we can begin to predict whether an individual will benefit from coaching by looking through the lens of individual differences. A client's motivations, skills, interests, defenses, thought patterns, experiences, relationships, and current environment all contribute to capacity for change or readiness to benefit from coaching. As coaches, we cannot control what our clients bring with them—either in terms of their current environment or who they perceive themselves to be. Ignoring individual differences or dismissing the power of a client's current organization or family system to shape behavior is misguided. Individual differences matter; context matters. Even in determining who should participate in coaching, we need to pay attention to these individual and environmental differences; almost half of the potential outcome depends on it.

What a favorable situation Keisha's coach encountered! There were multiple elements that she brought with her that worked toward a positive outcome. Keisha's own drive to succeed, her openness to learning, and her willingness to admit struggles led her to welcome coaching. Knowing the psychology of individual differences provided her coach with the data to move quickly into action. Additionally, Keisha's environment (the context) provided support as well. Her company had used coaching extensively in the past, her manager encouraged her, and the CLO provided the connection. All the external forces were aligned for success.

The Relationship (30%)

Once again, psychotherapeutic research points us in the right direction. The *quality* of the relationship between therapist and

client is the second most powerful active ingredient in psycho-
therapy (Lambert, 1992). The quality and durability of the
client-therapist relationship can make or break the outcome.
The applicability of this proven fact to coaching is obvious. Organi-
zations that engage internal or external coaches worry about the
match between the coach and client. One chief learning officer
boasted, "I can tell in 10 minutes whether a coach can match our
culture." But the relationship ingredient goes far beyond the tra-
ditional chemistry check or beauty contest ("Which coach do *you*
want to work with?"). The *quality and reciprocity* of the relationship
is at play from the moment the coach and potential client meet.
It remains at play throughout the entire process.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that we are only talk-
ing about unconditional positive regard, à la Carl Rogers. There
are other compelling elements at play in the relationship, includ-
ing client involvement and the therapeutic alliance. In coaching,
we are with a client a minimal amount of time; therefore, the
real work of behavior change takes place when the coach is not
around. The relationship has to help promote and sustain the
client's active involvement in the work.

Research on the therapeutic alliance teaches us a great deal
about the dynamic relationship between a coach and client that
leads to change. Bordin (1976) has written extensively about
(therapy) relationships, asserting that at their core they encompass
a *working alliance* based on collaboration and consensus. Bordin
notes that every effective alliance has three elements: goals, tasks,
and bonds. Together with our client, we need to create com-
mon and realistic goals, agree on how we will work together, and
we need to ensure that the partnership stays tight and intact. If
this is true, than any HR-initiated check-in with a coaching partici-
pant during the engagement should focus first and foremost on
the alliance and the quality of its goals, tasks, and bonds.

For Keisha, the relationship factor began working when her
coach listened, refrained from pontificating with advice, and col-
laborated with her so she could reach *her* goals. Empathy, respect,
and even common interests all helped craft a powerful relation-
ship, but it was Keisha who did the work and was ultimately in
charge. Coaching was also a dynamic process for them. At every
stage of their work together, Keisha's coach continued to ask her

for feedback. They used the data to fine-tune their relationship, agree on new tasks, and refine their goals.

Expectancy, Hope, and Placebo Effects (15%)

Why do prospective clients on waiting lists for therapy improve *while they are waiting* for their first therapy appointment? They expect to get better. They have hope that tomorrow will be better than yesterday. Hope is a powerful variable in the medical world as well. Patients with confidence in their physicians experience more positive treatment outcomes than those who harbor doubt about their caregivers. Think too about the placebo effect: in classic research on the effects of a medicine, patients who receive an inert drug often show symptom improvement. The simple act of taking a medicine and expecting improvement creates some positive outcomes. We can use this expectation fever as coaches and as professionals who oversee coaching. In the case of Keisha, the company CLO and her manager's approval provided credibility for the coach and hope for Keisha. The solid connection that Keisha and her coach made in their first encounter strengthened Keisha's expectations for a positive outcome. Keisha's coach further activated this ingredient during their work by introducing Keisha to another executive who had successfully made the transition into the executive ranks and by pointing out each successful step she made along the way. We can too easily overlook the power of this ingredient; it's another hidden treasure.

Theory and Technique (15%)

In the therapy world, debate still rages about the power of the therapist's theoretical orientation. Does it matter which school of theory or technique the therapist embraces? Hundreds of studies and meta-analyses of psychotherapy outcomes have converged on a controversial and still not fully accepted conclusion: the power of psychotherapy to facilitate change comes primarily from factors that the various schools have in *common*, not from the differences between them. When we link this ingredient with hope and expectancy, we learn that the power of a particular technique or theory may well come from the fact that the therapist and the client

believe it will be effective. Techniques and methodologies are important; through them we can give our clients tools for action.

Coaches and HR professionals alike come to the table with preferred theories. We have beliefs about organizations, psychology, individual development, and a point of view about how to approach our executive client. We all have our own theories of change, whether we have taken the time to bring them forward to our consciousness or not. Not only do we coaches have theories of change, but coaching clients have them too. Later in this chapter we will examine the intersection between our own and our client's "theory of change." When those theories have a significant disconnect, that negatively affects the ability of both the client and the coach to use the power of the active ingredients. If you and I disagree about the root causes of the situation in which I find myself, how can we possibly form a relationship alliance that will lead to aligned solutions?

Keisha's coach did have working theories about social systems, about life at the top of an organization for minority women, and about what it takes to succeed in a senior team. She used those when it made sense without making them the sole focus of coaching. Knowing the business world gave the coach sources of insight; but the focus of coaching was not about Keisha's status as the "only female."

These are the four key active ingredients that make our coaching powerful; they just happen to come to us via psychotherapy research. We are not encouraging coaches to stray over the line and practice therapy. Yet, we believe there is a functional similarity between the two processes that deserves exploration if we want to become better coaches. Our colleagues in psychotherapy have knowledge and understanding that can directly add value to our coaching; we would be remiss not to use it.

Theories and How They Apply to the Active Ingredients

As individuals interested in helping others change or become more effective, we all embrace certain techniques and theories of change. Whether we are aware of them or not, we hold them: there is no such thing as theory-free or technique-free coaching. We bring

theories to issues a client presents to us, and each of us upon hearing the same issues will have a perspective and a way of thinking about the problem, its causes, its effects, and possible solutions.

Theory is important because it happens at the *intersection* of the coach's theory and the client's theory. If the coach can put these two theories into creative tension, they will strengthen the effects of the other three active ingredients. If the coach is too rigid to understand or flex with the client's theory, the other three active ingredients will be neutralized and coaching will not be successful. By the way in which we use theory, we can:

- Engage and motivate the client
- Activate his strengths, resources, and sense of personal agency
- Account for helping and hindering forces in his environment
- Strengthen and sustain the alliance
- Bolster her hopes for change

With the goal of shedding light on our own individual theories, we will draw on our psychology roots. Psychology encompasses many theories and schools of thought that help to answer the question, "What is the key to changing behavior?" In a recent publication, Davis and Barnett (2009, 353) summarized seven major theories within psychology that can be tapped by a practitioner (coach) interested in helping clients change their behavior. We have built on and modified their list, paring it down to five primary theories to help coaches and others recognize their own theories in action.

As you read through these five major theoretical groupings, reflect on which of these you use the most and how they influence your ideas about coaching. At a minimum we believe a coach must be clear about his own theory in order to see how it maps to the theory or perspective of the client. We have chosen to present those aspects of each theory that relate specifically to the client/environmental, relationship, and hope factors.

Psychodynamic Theories

Human beings, even billionaire executives, have limited awareness of the forces that drive their thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Psychodynamic theory takes this fact a step further by maintaining that the human mind protects itself automatically and unconsciously against the intrusion of unacceptable drives and motives into conscious awareness. Although they protect the individual from being swamped with anxiety, these defensive maneuvers can give rise to puzzling, ineffective behavior patterns.

A coach who subscribes to psychodynamic models is alert for characteristic ways the client defends herself psychologically, particularly those defenses that negatively affect performance. The path to helping involves bringing these dysfunctional patterns to the client's attention and probing for their unconscious roots. Naturally, such a coach expects the client to resist this probing and rebuff suggestions for change. After all, the individual's defenses serve a deep emotional purpose—ego protection. Change means giving up that protection and experiencing the anxiety that gave rise to the defense in the first place. It puts the client's sense of well-being directly at risk.

Transference and counter-transference are also critical concepts in psychodynamic theory. Your client may begin relating to you as she does to others who are close to her in her life, or you may relate to her as you do to other key figures in your life. When these forces come into play in coaching, they directly affect the quality of the relationship and your ability as a coach to create an alliance for change.

For example, a high-potential director who resisted being direct and candid in conflict situations had an "aha" moment when he realized that his accommodating approach had been learned in his family of origin. Expressions of candor were discouraged and punished. He was smart and had developed a convincing rationale (at least to him) for being "discreet" and "circumspect" in his communications. Because his intellectualized defense had kept his anxiety at bay, he had resisted seeing its roots and was reluctant to give it up. With the support of his coach, however, he was able to realize the source of his resistance and began to experiment with being more direct and honest in his communications with others. Even more important, he realized that this ingrained defense mechanism was also interfering with his ability to be honest with his coach about what he needed from the relationship.

Behaviorism and Work Motivation Theory

Coaches who subscribe to these theories don't spend their time worrying about the origins of behavior; they deal with the objective tasks of behavior change and step-by-step learning of new ways of operating. They focus on goals, situational cues, patterns of reinforcement and punishment, behavioral rehearsal, and successive approximations to the desired behavior. Behavior that is reinforced and rewarded will be repeated. Behavior that is ignored or coupled with negative outcomes will be extinguished.

Using this theory for coaching an executive who has difficulty in conflict entails trying out new behaviors, gaining success with them, and turning them into effective habits. For example, the executive who had received feedback about how he routinely avoided conflict stated that he needed a new skill set. He and his coach began by compiling an inventory of typical conflict situations, how he generally responded to each, and how he wanted to behave in the future. The situations ranged from differences of opinion to giving negative feedback to negotiating for resources. He and his coach began with the "easiest" circumstances first. In each meeting, they set goals for trying out new behaviors, role-played scenarios, and talked through what had worked or not worked from the previous meeting. They even built a flow chart of situational cues that the executive could use to take a new path and avoid old habits. After three months, the executive not only had a new skill set, but his manager told him he had noticed a dramatic change.

Cognitive Behavioral Theories

The coach who comes from the cognitive-behavioral or social learning perspective assumes that behaviors are a function of the individual's way of thinking about and making sense of the world around him. If we can discover the meaning someone makes of an event or understand how the client thinks, we can look for alternative ways of thinking about the same issue. Thinking also applies to experimentation with new behaviors: a client is willing to try new approaches if she thinks the odds are good that she can be successful. This perspective assumes that a new way of thinking will lead naturally to different behavioral choices.

For example, consider the executive who discovered that his reluctance to talk up the work of his staff came from his conviction that "boasting is wrong." He needed to change his thought patterns if he wanted to change his behavior. In the past, he had expected the good work of his team to speak for itself. But when he began to see how important it was for him to be his team's advocate in the company, his reluctance to spread the word about their accomplishments subsided and he began to act as their champion.

Adult Learning and Person-Centered Psychology

Adult learning theorists and person-centered psychologists believe that individuals have the capacity to learn and to heal themselves. Clients don't need an expert to tell them how to change; they need someone to listen and set the stage for them to solve their own problems and do their own learning.

One of the core tenets of adult learning theory is that adults want to direct their own learning. They do not want to be lectured or told what to do. They want information so they can make informed choices and learn on their own. A coach coming from this perspective is acutely aware of the importance of letting the client take the lead and be responsible for her own learning. Holding forth with "shoulds," giving advice, or touting one's own experience and expertise stands in direct contrast to being a catalyst to someone else's learning or work.

The adult learning and person-centered approaches are particularly useful with clients who have clear goals and a strong sense of how they want to work on them. Consider Karen, a senior finance executive, who wanted to work on having more patience and controlling her tendency to fly off the handle. She entered coaching having already decided what she wanted to work on, she had read more than one book on the topic, and simply wanted someone to guide her learning. Although she was open to having the coach do 360 interviews to get a clearer view of how she was perceived by others, Karen knew what she wanted to do from the start and took charge of her own development process. A coach who could not be her partner in learning would have been quickly dismissed.

Systems Theories

This theoretical perspective highlights the part-whole relationship between the individual and the social system in which he is embedded. Systems theories come in a variety of flavors (such as family systems, corporate culture, organizations as systems), but all systems-oriented coaches look for ways in which the individual affects and is affected by—directly or indirectly—the actions and expectations of others. The "others" could be as obvious and immediate as one's own team, or as subtle and distant as the board of directors, whose anxieties about the future may ripple down through the ranks of the company, affecting every employee in ways that are difficult to trace back to their source.

In any case, systems theory maintains that one cannot fully understand a client's perspective, feelings, and actions without knowing how the system works, what behaviors it expects, and how it reacts to unacceptable behavior. Some systems tolerate conflict and use it productively. Others avoid it at all costs. Clearly, a behavior labeled "aggressive" in one system or culture may be interpreted as "open and assertive" in another. Tension at the top of an organization can create serious rifts three or four layers down, and be attached to completely different issues at the different levels.

Here's an example. The coaching client, an executive who came from a highly competitive and sales-driven company, joined a health care organization that valued collaboration and "being nice." Understandably, he met considerable resistance trying to lead a change process in the health system's clinics. He found it difficult to work with others who had been socialized by the system. They were equally frustrated and came close to completely rejecting him. Until he could recognize how his behavior was perceived in the system and find ways to influence others to advocate changes *with* him, he was ineffective.

Recognizing Theories in Action

As executive coaches and professionals who manage coaches, we think it is important to understand how we make sense of the issues that coaching clients bring to us; that is, we need to be clear about theoretical perspectives that shape the way we understand and frame clients' challenges. The reason is that

our clients have their own ways of understanding what they are up against (as in "my family taught me to operate this way" or "I would be able to handle this differently if the culture valued that approach") and their own theories about how to be more effective within that frame. When as coaches we understand our own theoretical assumptions and working hypotheses, it becomes much easier to discern where our perspective and the client's resonate and clash. There's an old saying among teachers: "Meet the student where she is, but don't leave her there."

Our task as coaches is to shine a new light on the client's situation, a light that allows her to see her own assumptions more clearly and expand her perspective in ways that open up new behavioral possibilities. Our task is not to force our theories or interpretation on the client. In fact, to do so is one of the most common ways in which the relationship is ruptured, thus neutralizing the active ingredient over which the coach has the most control. The alliance is damaged and progress stalls. Without an effective alliance for change, the coach and the client are potentially working in different directions or worse, at cross purposes.

Consider Keisha once again. She felt she was at a critical stage in her ascent as a leader. Though she was the first African American senior leader in a primarily white male executive team, she did not want to explore the social system dynamics of being the first or the only. She knew from others who had successfully navigated a promotion into the executive ranks that leadership and peer relations at that level were different from what she experienced at the director level. She wanted to understand her new leadership requirements. When her coach talked about the social dynamics of being the first or, the only, she bristled. "This is not about me as an African American woman; I refuse to hide behind that." She rejected systems theory as a perspective for understanding her leadership challenges.

She and her coach were able to find common ground through exploring the leadership pipeline and its explanation of how the focus of leadership changes as one moves up the ladder. They discussed the leadership behaviors needed at various stages of the pipeline. Keisha agreed that she needed to learn how to better influence her peers, not in terms of the system she was part of, but in terms of her new leadership requirements. Once they settled on a rationale for their work, she embraced her role

as learner. Coaching could be effective because the coach and Keisha were able to build a working alliance grounded in a common perspective.

Imagine what might have happened had Keisha and her coach held rigidly to their divergent views of the situation. Had her coach persisted in forcing a social system view and had Keisha insisted on focusing on the demands of her new leadership role, they would have been speaking different languages. Their alliance would have been fragile at best and might never have gotten off the ground. By finding common ground and aligning their theories, they were able to forge a real alliance for change, and Keisha benefited greatly from coaching. In the same manner, if the chief learning officer had tried to define the issues for Keisha in terms of social systems, Keisha might have rejected the opportunity to participate in coaching altogether.

The Case for Conviction and Versatility

Every coaching session is a dance: a dance between the client and the coach in which their theories of the problem (and the path to a solution) are articulated and brought into lively contact. A great coach has a clear, convicted point of view, but holds space for the client to reveal her perspective as well. He welcomes the pushback that shows the client is thinking for herself. With each of their theories of the problem on the table, the coach will be able to see where he can join in support of the client's point of view. He will also be able to ask questions that challenge and potentially enrich the client's understanding of the situation.

For a coach to have this kind of flexibility and be able to dance with the client in this way, he needs more than one theoretical lens in his briefcase. We believe that the best coaches can find ways to use different theories and techniques to engage the client (and her theory of the problem) without sacrificing their core convictions about people, organizations, or change. In our work with clients, we are constantly looking for a way to hook into the client's way of thinking with a theoretical concept or angle that will stimulate a more robust framing of their challenge. During the coaching process, we find ourselves deliberately invoking concepts from different theories as it makes sense for the relationship and the stage of our work.

Linking Theory to the Active Ingredients

The theories we hold can help us better use the active ingredients because they are the lenses through which we view our client and our work together. The questions we raise and the areas to which we attend shift based on the theoretical perspective we use. We don't mean to imply that any particular theoretical perspective is better than another, but only that the more closely we can link our starting point with that of our client, the more impactful the coaching will be. Our starting point or theory in use affects how we ask questions, how we define the goals, how we build the relationship and of course, which tools or techniques we use. Use Table 1.1 as a starting point to explore how you raise questions or pose topics in the coaching you do.

We have pointed out that a disconnect between your client's theory and your own is problematic. But how do we identify that there is a disconnect? The first step is to recognize which theories most appeal to you and that you use most. The second step is to learn from your clients which theoretical orientation best fits them. Following are some questions you can pose to the client at the beginning of the coaching process to discern the coaching participant's theory in use and to decide where to begin.

- What does coaching mean to you? What do you expect your role and my role will be?
- What needs to change: yourself, the system, your role, others?
- Tell me about your most powerful developmental experience. What was the situation and what created development?
- What do you believe is hard-wired about leadership and what do you believe people can learn?
- What do you *not* want to change?
- When was the last time you decided to learn something or change your behavior? How did you go about doing so?

These questions are relevant as well for the coaching coordinator who is exploring whether coaching is appropriate for a given executive. The more we all can understand the circumstances *from the client's point of view,* the better we can set the stage for a successful outcome.

Table 1.1. Using Theory to Stimulate the Active Ingredients: What We Focus on and the Questions We Ask

Theories	Client and External Factors	The Relationship	Hope and Expectancy	Theories and Techniques
Psychodynamic and Developmental Stages	• What are the origins of the problem? • What do these behaviors have to do with your stage of development?	• How have you related to coaches or mentors in the past?	• What do you have in common with individuals who have shown great personal fortitude and persistence?	• Let's explore your personal values and how they play out in leadership.
Behaviorism and Work Motivation	• What happens positively when you behave in the old way?	• What are your goals and desired outcomes?	• What behavior changes have you successfully accomplished in the past?	• Let's use a system of successive approximation to get you closer to your ideal.
Cognitive	• How have you thought through the problem; what do you believe is happening?	• What role do you want me to play? • What information might I have that you are looking for?	• What tells you that our work together will be successful?	• What is it you tell yourself that keeps you from _____? • Let's figure out ways to think about this differently.

Adult Learning and Person-Centered	• What have you been most successful learning on your own in the past? • What are the issues and how motivated are you to change?	• What is the role of "teacher" in your learning process; what works best for you? • How are you responding to me; what will our relationship be like?	• How do you feel about getting started with coaching? • How hopeful do you feel and what can you envision for yourself in the future?	• What happened when you tried out the new behavior? • Critique yourself in terms of what you learned and what you need to do differently the next time.
Systems-Based	• How does the organizational culture support or resist your current approaches? • What is your manager expecting you to change?	• Who else in your current environment do you believe I need to know well? • What aspects of the culture will you and I have to navigate well?	• What positive things will happen in your world when you make changes? • How are your peers or your team engaged in your coaching?	• What can we do to activate help or support from your team?

How Theory Interacts with the Active Ingredients

Taking a deeper dive into the impact of theory matches or mismatches on the four active ingredients is our intention in this last section. We deal with each active ingredient separately, showing the effect that the coach's theory and the client's theory have on the ingredient. Using client stories, we show the impact of theory and then articulate some core lessons learned from each and provide some principles for practice. In this section, we also draw on our 2009 article "Hidden in Plain Sight: The Active Ingredients of Executive Coaching," published in *Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Perspectives on Science and Practice.*

Exploring the Client/Extratherapeutic Ingredient: A Client Story

In using this ingredient, we need to remember that it is the client's abilities, motivational readiness, and life circumstances that are the most powerful predictors of change. How the client makes use of what we have to offer sets the stage for outcomes. Though it is seductive to believe that we create great outcomes, it is true that some individuals embrace change more readily than others. Sometimes readiness can't be activated because the client and coach start from different perspectives.

Perhaps you have had the experience of being contacted by a client organization with a plea to "help one of our brilliant executives learn to play well with others." In Brian's case, the EVP of Human Resources sought out coaching for him because of significant complaints from his peers in the finance function. Known as an exceptionally skilled controller, Brian had the trust of the board and the respect of the CFO for his expertise. The notion that Brian needed help learning to play well with others was an understatement. His department was suffering from high turnover, his peers were avoiding him due to his outbursts, and the CFO was tired of dealing with the fallout. The coach asked the CFO what kind of feedback she had given Brian and whether she really believed that Brian could change. She said she envisioned coaching as the last possible strategy for saving Brian;

whenever she gave him feedback, he improved for a few weeks and then returned to his ineffective behaviors. Brian had accepted the notion of coaching, but seemed less than enthusiastic about the prospects.

When Brian and his coach first met they candidly discussed the context for coaching, what Brian had heard from his manager about the purpose for coaching, and Brian's motivation for change. Later, after reviewing several personality inventories with Brian and listening intently to his point of view, Brian's coach understood just how exceptionally low was his readiness to change. She confronted Brian with her observation that he seemed to be going through the motions to please his boss with little real commitment to change. He acknowledged she was right; he had concluded that the best strategy for dealing with the CFO's criticism was to find another job.

Brian believed that the problem he was experiencing was a systems issue. In his view, his behavior was fine and the company's culture was far too thin-skinned. His coach rejected a systems explanation; she expected Brian to accept responsibility for his behavior and take charge of his own learning. Given the clear disconnect between their concepts of the problem, the coach could not activate this ingredient with Brian and she terminated the coaching contract within two sessions.

Luckily, all coaches have numerous anecdotes of overcoming low readiness to change or moving quickly into action because of high client readiness to change. We activate this ingredient in many ways, from clarifying organizational mandates for behavior change to helping our clients see the real possibilities for change. By exploring our own and our client's theory about what is happening, we can directly affect commitment and motivation to change.

Here are some principles for *activating* the client/external ingredient:

- Immediately explore the client's concept of the issue; what he or she believes about what is happening can directly affect the outcome.
- Take the time to understand readiness and the individual difference variables that contribute to one's ability to learn and to change.

- Work with the executive's manager to jointly evaluate readiness and whether an investment in coaching is actually the right choice.
- When readiness is low or only moderate, work with the individual to increase readiness to change (for example, collect data to raise awareness of the challenges).
- Terminate the coaching relationship, or don't take it on in the first place, if there is no way to activate this ingredient.
- Tap into the individual's networks (social, business, friends, family) to forces that will promote change.
- Help the client identify specific strengths and resources that she can use to bolster efforts to change.

Exploring the Relationship Ingredient: A Client Story

Without a doubt, a good relationship is critical. Estimates of how much outcome variance is due to the therapeutic relationship vary from at least 30 percent (Lambert, 1992) to more than 50 percent (Wampold, 2001). Clients often single out the personableness, listening skills, and honesty of their coach as key to their progress and satisfaction with coaching. Yet, the relationship ingredient goes far beyond the openness and authenticity of the coach. To truly activate change, the coach and client create a collaborative alliance in which they work together to produce results. When coaching is effective, the client is engaged, committed, and responsible for doing the hard work of making changes *on her own.* As coaches, we need to tap into the power of this ingredient to be most effective; research even suggests that if we haven't solidified the alliance by the third or fourth session, that coaching will likely end early.

Sarah and her coach understood each other well. Both looked forward to their meetings and, almost from the first day, Sarah was actively engaged in learning. Their common goal was for Sarah to learn how to delegate, to quit "saving" her team members, and to focus on the strategic work most central to her role and level in the organization. The alliance between the two was strong; they had established common goals and outcomes. In each session Sarah would describe what she had done to change, report on progress (or lack thereof), and the two would agree on

what Sarah might try next. Sarah's coach was pleased with the direction of their engagement and had also let Sarah's manager know they were on track with their coaching action plan.

Routinely, near the close of each coaching session, Sarah's coach asked for feedback: "What is working here; what do you want me to do differently; how satisfied are you with how we work together?" Sarah's feedback had always been enthusiastically positive. However, at the end of their fifth working session, Sarah expressed her disappointment that her coach had spoken with her manager, even though the communication was affirming. "If I am to take a stronger hold of my senior level role, then I don't need you to report about my progress as if I were your protégé. Also, you seem too quick to point out ways to improve on what I experimented with during any given session rather than celebrating with me or helping me discover lessons learned on my own." The conversation was a wake-up call for Sarah's coach.

Delving deeper into the feedback, Sarah's coach realized that operating out of a behaviorism framework helped them make progress, but Sarah's theoretical orientation was squarely centered in adult learning. They used the feedback to forge a new agreement about how they would proceed going forward. When the coaching engagement closed, Sarah took her coach with her to meet with her manager to review progress and how she planned to sustain what she had learned.

Imagine what might have happened had Sarah's coach not opened the door to feedback. The disconnect they had in terms of their working theories could have damaged their alliance and seriously blocked progress. Their feedback conversation shows how a relationship is established and strengthened over and over again, not just at a single point in time. As coaches, we need to constantly be attuned to the quality of the relationship through the eyes of our clients, which includes exploring the theories we are both using.

Here are some principles for activating the relationship factor:

- With new clients, make building the relationship a priority right from the start. Work toward establishing the three primary components of the alliance—goals, tasks, and bonds.

- Set an expectation that you will have regular conversations about how the coaching is going in order to fine-tune the work and the alliance. Include exploration of your own and your client's theories of change.
- Take stock of the quality of the alliance for each coaching engagement. Ask yourself how the alliance is affecting progress in the engagement and what you can to do improve it.
- Assess your own strengths and weaknesses in building client alliances. Where are your opportunities for improvement?
- Be vigilant in watching for disconnects between your client's theories about the situation and your own.

Exploring Hope/Expectation in Coaching: A Client Story

Hope and expectation account for 15 percent of the outcome of successful therapy. Although research shows that individuals improve slightly simply by making a commitment to work with a professional, hope is an active ingredient throughout a coaching engagement. A coach's confidence about her client's ability to change is contagious, even more so when there are significant challenges to confront or when setbacks occur. Research tells us that hope is a cognitive variable with two key elements (Snyder, Michael, & Cheavens, 1999). One element involves the individual's confidence that he can change and the second involves the individual's understanding of how to change. We want our clients to say, "I can imagine being able to change *and* I see what I can do to make it happen."

In his mind, Tom faced an enormous challenge. As an introvert, he relished closing his door, blocking out time on his calendar for careful planning, and exiting meetings once he was at his quota of "people" time. During his rise from systems analyst to IT operations director, this approach served him well. Now as the CIO of a large organization, he learned through his coach's multi-rater interviews that his peers and direct reports criticized him for being an introvert. By closing his door he telegraphed disengagement, by exiting meetings early he conveyed disrespect, and by blocking out so much "planning" time on his calendar he was seen as unavailable. The data startled and discouraged him. He was a private

person; was being a senior leader in the organization incompatible with how he was hardwired?

Tom's coach thought they would focus on separating what was hardwired from overt behaviors that Tom could change or control. Tom resisted, saying that the last thing he wanted to be was inauthentic. His dejection was evident; the feedback cut to the heart of who he was. It was at that point that Tom's coach suggested they explore how their perceptions of the issue differed. A critical moment came when Tom realized that he had completely dismissed the notion that his introverted behaviors might be malleable. He fully assumed that introversion was a fixed trait that limited his behavioral flexibility. His coach had a developmental mindset and could point to examples of two other executives in the organization who, while both introverts, were able to express some extroverted behaviors in authentic ways. This activated Tom's hope that he could make the changes others seemed to be asking for without being artificial. By exploring the dynamic tension between their two different views on the issue, Tom's coach was able to activate hope and pave the way for new adaptability.

Here are some principles for activating hope and the expectation of a positive outcome:

- Explore your client's personal beliefs about change—what gives him confidence that he can change and what causes him doubt?
- Don't be shy about describing your capabilities or the changes you have seen individuals make in their lives through coaching. Enhance your credibility through storytelling and references.
- Build the credibility of coaches that your organization uses by describing their capabilities and how they have helped others change.
- Treat hope as a cognitive variable; what are you doing to build your client's confidence and belief in what he or she can do?
- Recognize that you are an agent of hope. Constantly ask yourself whether you believe in your client's ability to change and your own ability to assist. If you lose faith, figure out if you can regain it. If not, terminate the coaching engagement.

Exploring Tools and Techniques in Coaching: A Client Story

This is an ingredient that is central to our work as coaches; every coach has models, tools, and techniques she relies on. Before potential clients sign up for coaching, they also ask us for specifics about how we coach. Coaching is a mysterious process to many so they want to know what they will do, what will happen, and how the process will work. If the only answer a coach can give is, "Trust me, I have helped many senior executives change," there would be few participants in coaching. A coach's ability to describe techniques, processes and tools helps a potential client commit. The same thing is true when an amateur golfer seeks out a golf teacher. "How do you work; what do you believe in; what will we do?" We have to hang our hats somewhere. Review Table 1.1 once again. What do you believe in and how does that affect the tools, techniques, and processes that you use with your clients? As psychotherapy literature points out, a coach's belief in what he uses is more powerful in promoting change than the tools themselves.

Gordon had been an executive coach for ten years, working in the upper echelons of global corporations. His clients described him as highly effective, providing heartfelt testimonials about the impact he had made in their leadership and ultimately in the performance of the business. Through experience, he had adopted his own theory in use, which combined adult learning and behaviorism. He disliked anything that touched on psychodynamics and carefully steered his clients away from trying to figure out "Why am I the way I am?"

That is, until he started coaching Emily, who led the R&D function for a Fortune 100 medical products company. A gifted scientist, Emily had numerous patents to her name and loved encouraging younger scientists in their pursuit of innovative solutions or discoveries. She sought out coaching because she wanted to be a stronger risk taker and a more effective leader of her own team; she was sure she could do more to bring new products more quickly through the pipeline from idea to conclusion. In their initial coaching work, Gordon had Emily define what risk taking meant to her, and they crafted a few behavioral goals that would

reflect true progress. To Gordon's surprise, Emily came into the fourth coaching session having read an article about the impact of growing up in highly strict, critical family systems. She insisted that they needed to explore these dynamics because she was convinced that her family history was preventing her from making progress. Gordon stated he was not a therapist and explained the differences between therapy and coaching. Emily persisted, saying that she did not need a therapist; she just needed to have someone listen while she talked through what was holding her back.

Emily was so insistent that Gordon reluctantly followed her lead and engaged in a conversation about Emily's family history. It was a telling conversation. The more Emily reflected on her parents' subtle demands for perfection, criticizing anything that stopped short of excellence, the more she recognized how she held herself back now. For Emily, understanding the origins of her fear of risk taking was key to taking control of the change she wanted to make. Eventually, she and Gordon returned to the behavioral focus they had started with. Gordon's openness and versatility to exploring his client's theory of change allowed real progress to happen; had he persisted with his own allegiance to a purely behavior-focused approach, the relationship would have been damaged.

Theories are critical for us to have, to believe in, and to follow. They inform how we approach coaching, but as we have learned from psychotherapy research, technique does not drive outcome by itself. Plus, rigid adherence to a single approach can damage any of the active ingredients. We need to have an approach and a starting point yet be willing to switch gears as needed. That is part of the dance of coaching.

Here are some principles for using theory and technique to promote change:

- Use theory, models, tools, and techniques that you believe in and can deliver with competence and confidence.
- Learn about those theories or models that you know the least about; don't get caught in adhering to a single perspective.
- Use your expertise on leadership and organizations to draw out and deepen the client's own theory of change. The client will ultimately take or not take action based on his own theory.

- Be confident and clear about how you see the coaching process unfolding and what your client can expect over the course of your work together.
- Explore how your and your client's views of the change process match; make sure you are working from the same base of assumptions about the situation and what it will take to change.

Conclusion

We have used this chapter to explore the active ingredients of executive coaching. Coaching, after all, is about individual change. Psychology offers powerful conclusions about how, why, and under what conditions individuals can change. Even though professionals who manage, deliver, or coordinate executive coaching do not need to be trained as psychologists, we believe they do need to embrace and understand the psychology of change that occurs through a one-on-one relationship. None of us is attempting to be a psychotherapist. Yet the field of psychotherapy holds evidence about change that is relevant to our work. The four ingredients contribute mightily to outcomes and it is our job to do all we can to activate them.

As we have shown, theories of change also affect the ability to activate these four ingredients. At every phase of the coaching process, we need to think about the resonance between our theory of the problem and the client's theory of the problem. Where there is resonance and creative tension, there's a good chance of igniting the factors. Without that resonance, the active ingredients will not come to life. The dynamics of coaching require our flexibility, energy, and intentional actions.

We would like to see more research conducted to validate how the active ingredients work in coaching. Further, though our list of theories in action is not exhaustive, it should stimulate more research and exploration of what happens when the coach and the client are either aligned or in conflict over their conclusions about the issues and the solutions.

We would also like to see HR professionals, executive coaches, and managers enlist the power of the active ingredients, as we all can be catalysts to exciting change in our clients. If you are further interested and inspired about the power of the active ingredients, we heartily recommend reading *The Heart and Soul of Change* by

Hubble, Duncan, and Miller (1999). There is treasure to be found in psychology. Let's hope none of us let it stay hidden. We hope that the ideas in this chapter—which have brought us to new levels in the coaching work we do—help you explore your own experiences, theories, and conclusions.

References

Asay, T. P., & Lambert, M. J. (1999). The empirical case for the common factors in therapy: quantitative findings. In M. A. Hubble, B. L. Duncan, & S. D. Miller (Eds.), *The heart & soul of change: What works in therapy* (pp. 33–56). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Bergin, A. E., & Lambert, M. J. (1978). The evaluation of therapeutic outcomes. In S. L. Garfield & A. E. Bergin (Eds.), *Handbook of psychotherapy and behavior change* (2nd ed., pp. 139–189). New York: Wiley.

Berglas, S. (2002). The very real dangers of executive coaching. *Harvard Business Review*, June, 87–92.

Bordin, E. S. (1976). The generalizability of the psychoanalytical concept of the working alliance. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, and Practice, 16*, 252–260.

Davis, S. L., & Barnett, R. C. (2009). Changing behavior one leader at a time. In Silzer, R. F. & Dowell, B. E. (Eds.), *Strategy-driven talent management: A leadership imperative* (pp. 349–398). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hubble, M. A., Duncan, B. L., & Miller, S. D. (Eds.). (1999). *The heart & soul of change: What works in therapy*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Lambert, M. J. (1992). Implications of outcome research for psychotherapy integration. In J. C. Norcross & M. R. Goldfried (Eds.), *Handbook of psychotherapy integration* (pp. 93–129). New York: Basic Books.

McKenna, D. D., & Davis, S. L. (2009). Hidden in plain sight: The active ingredients of executive coaching. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice, 2*, 244–260.

Snyder, C. R., Michael, S. T., & Cheavens, J. S. (1999). Hope as a psychotherapeutic foundation of common factors, placebos, and expectancies. In M. A. Hubble, B. L. Duncan, & S. D. Miller (Eds.), *The heart & soul of change: What works in therapy* (pp. 179–200). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Wampold, B. E. (2001). *The great psychotherapy debate: Models, methods, and findings*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.