# Why Coaching Is the Answer: A powerful, personalized approach to leadership development

Kincentric recently held a series of conversations with Chief Human Resources Officers (CHROs) and Heads of Talent from leading organizations around the world to better understand the importance of people and talent in driving business outcomes. In these conversations, leadership emerged as a critical force for success, confirming that organizations should focus on proactively developing future-ready leaders with a wide range of skills and capabilities. In fact, nearly 80% of the talent leaders we spoke with indicated that leadership development is a top priority. But while it is clear that having strong leaders with varied capabilities is crucial, what specifically defines strong leadership, and **how does one become a strong leader?**

Our research shows that what makes leaders effective today is much different than what it was just a few years ago. Coming out of the pandemic, we find that three leadership competencies have significantly increased in importance: (1) the ability to inspire and engage, (2) the ability to create personal and emotional connections with people and teams, and (3) the ability and willingness to empower people and teams. These capabilities are often tied to personal characteristics, can vary widely from leader to leader and can be a challenge to effectively master. Thus, such leadership skills often require high-touch development interventions in order to realize a marked improvement in these leadership competencies and capabilities.

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# The Power of Coaching

Despite the growing importance of and demand for leaders who have the ability to connect with, inspire and empower their people, our research reveals a surprisingly low number of leaders seem to have these in-demand skills, with only one-third of leaders perceived as strong in these areas. This gap between what skills are needed and what skills currently exist creates a leadership deficiency that can negatively impact teams as well as organizational outcomes.

When gaps in leadership capabilities exist, organizations may turn to interventions such as broad training. But because individual leaders' strengths and development needs are often varied, nuanced and highly individual, a one-size-fits-all training intervention alone will rarely raise the bar across the organization. For instance, why invest in training all leaders on empowering teams when some leaders might already be quite effective in this area, but are lacking in other capabilities? Instead, a more individualized approach, such as personalized coaching, can better target difficult-to-train skill areas, resulting in accelerated leadership growth and ultimately, huge organizational gains.

Personalized leadership coaching is an incredibly effective developmental tool that, when executed appropriately, has been shown to greatly improve a leader's ability to connect with, inspire and empower their people and teams. Through individualized coaching, leaders can develop more rapidly, increasing their self-awareness, learning new skills, adopting more effective behaviors and modifying their leadership approach, making it one of the most effective solutions available for leadership development.

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# Three Pillars of Effective Coaching

If individualized coaching is the answer, the question becomes how to find the right coach. The prevalence of coaching providers in the marketplace has exploded in the last 10 years, leaving talent managers overwhelmed with options when looking to provide the right coaching support for their leaders. Some organizations may struggle to manage multiple coaching vendors, each with distinct methodologies, curriculums, processes and promised outcomes. Even tech-enabled coaching providers, who may initially entice buyers with flashy dashboards and high-volume discount pricing, have proved ineffective when adoption falls flat and only a fraction of participants complete the recommended number of training sessions.

So how exactly can organizations identify the leadership coaching solutions that will best work for their organization? After working with clients for more than three decades, we have identified **three pillars of effective coaching** that can serve as guideposts to help organizations identify the best coaching solutions for their leadership:

## Kincentric's Balanced Coaching Model

**1. Enhance Awareness**

Use assessment data to uncover reliable, science-based insights and enable increased self-awareness of strengths and development needs

**2. Enable Growth**

Establish trust and create a true partnership to help define challenging goals and make strong choices to accelerate development



**3. Empower Practice**

Unlock leadership capability through appropriate developmental resources and the application of emerging skills

Pillar 1:

**Enhance Awareness Through Robust Assessments (not guesswork or self-evaluation)**

Coaching works best when powerful qualitative and quantitative assessment and performance data are used to identify leader strengths and development needs. Coaches should be experts in assessment, using a

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multitude of tools such as 360-degree surveys, interviews with managers and stakeholders, personality assessments, work samples, leadership simulations and more to gather broad performance and capability information. A robust, multi-sourced blended assessment process enables the coach to create a cohesive narrative, eliminating potential bias while setting a strong and credible foundation for coaching. Look for coaches who can expertly apply the right assessments, then translate assessment data into reliable, science-based insights in order to increase leaders' self-awareness and prioritize development needs.

### Pillar 2:

### Enable Growth through a Trusted Partnership

Coaching isn't just about being friendly and encouraging — it's a challenging process that requires strong trust between the leader and coach. Strong trust between coaches and leaders creates space for self-discovery, goal setting, awareness building and the incorporation of new behaviors, even if it sometimes involves frustration or discomfort. Look for coaching programs that establish well-defined goals and provide leaders with the opportunity to test, revise, practice and incorporate new leadership behaviors. Having this trusted partnership can help leaders maintain focus, persevere, reflect on new experiences and grow.

### Pillar 3:

### Empower Practice with a Personalized Development Toolkit

Once a leader's competencies and capabilities have been more fully developed through effective and personalized coaching, it is important that they are able to practice new skills in a safe and structured environment, supported by a behavioral expert they trust. While there are hundreds of training resources available, having support from a coach who can provide just the right practice, article, course, book, podcast or video at just the right time is invaluable. Further, a qualified coach can prevent ongoing coaching discussions from resembling "random acts of leadership advisory," ensuring development activities and resources are aligned with the goals established in the "enable growth" phase we described previously. Look for coaches who will provide ongoing support as well as powerful tools and resources to help leaders continue to grow.

> Strong leadership has never been so critical to an organization's success. Given that what makes leaders effective today is much different than what it was just a few years ago, coaching can be a powerful solution to help create leaders that can connect with, inspire and empower their teams to drive business outcomes.

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# Case Study – Does Coaching Really Work?

Tasked with leading a transformation initiative to reposition the business and drive growth, a senior functional leader at a Fortune 25 company struggled to motivate and inspire his team, which had the lowest engagement in the organization. Understanding that an engaged team was critical to drive the necessary transformation and fulfill the long-term vision, a Kincentric coach was brought in to coach the leader to success.

- First, a robust assessment was conducted to identify the root causes of low engagement as well as skills in which the leader was strong, where he was weak, and what he needed to work on. The assessment included extensive engagement surveys, executive and stakeholder interviews, and participant and manager interviews. (Pillar 1: "Enhance Awareness")

- Next, a Kincentric coach partnered with the leader to establish challenging goals and make strong choices to accelerate his development, creating a customized coaching plan designed to address the leader's weaknesses as well as the issues negatively impacting engagement. (Pillar 2: "Enable Growth")

- The coach also provided learning resources tailored to the leader as well as opportunities for him to practice new behaviors on the job and receive feedback from peers and others. (Pillar 3: "Empower Practice")

This immersive coaching relationship lasted approximately nine months, with the leader crediting the Kincentric coach's work with helping to accelerate a successful "renaissance" of the function. Additional positive outcomes were also attributed to the coaching:

- Executive and Director engagement increased by 16 and 17 points, respectively; and engagement continued to improve the following year by another 14 – 20 points.

- Senior female leader engagement increased by 54 points.

- Later, this leader was promoted to become the CEO.

**CONTACTS**

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If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us. To receive communication and content from us in the future, please subscribe to our mailing list.

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