

How to Build a Coaching Strategy

Your guide to getting the results you want from an investment in coaching.

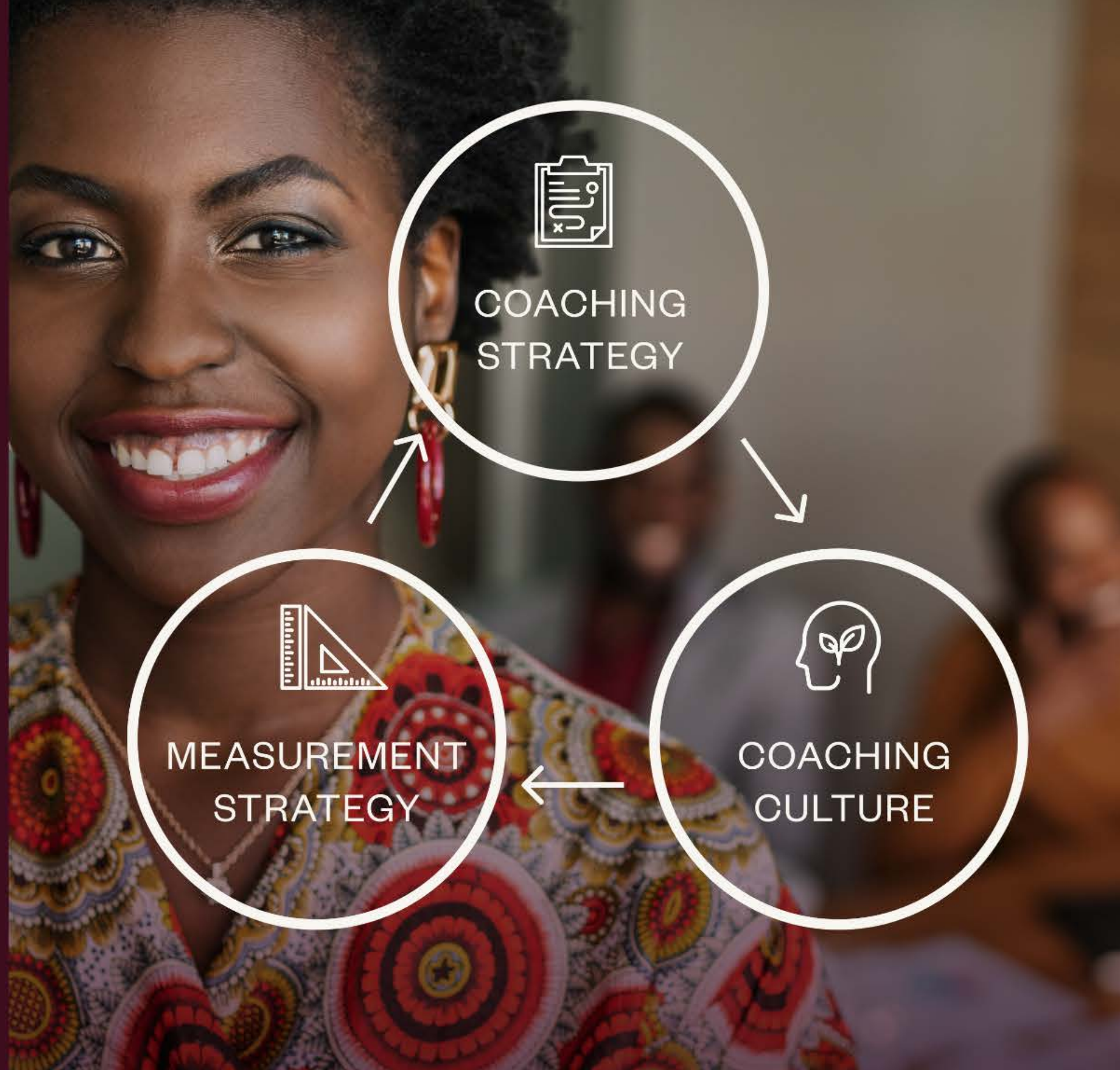


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Introduction

From Socrates to Phil Jackson, leaders have turned to coaching as an effective development tool for centuries. Today, coaching to develop leaders inside organizations is rapidly gaining popularity and traction.

Once reserved for executives (known as “white glove coaching”), this old tool is now being used in new ways to support a wider swath of employees. People leaders—HR, L&D, and line of business leaders alike—are leveraging this tool to support new managers, develop “high potential” performers, strengthen current management and leadership, and help facilitate change management efforts like DEIB (diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging) initiatives.

The growing demand for coaching has prompted a big question for leaders: **“How do I make sure that I get the most out of my investment in coaching?”**

As with any people development initiative, the first and most crucial step is creating a strategy. A strategy guides the program’s success and ties it back to the organization’s goals. **We’re here to help you do just that.**

About this series

Welcome to the Coaching Strategy Series, where we'll walk you through how to use coaching to effectively unlock the potential of individuals, teams, and your organization. To produce these chapters, we spoke to organizations that have invested in coaching—from program owners to coaching participants to coaches—to explore and understand the most strategic way to deploy it. The insights in this series are a result of those conversations.

To get started, we'll focus on a very important first question: "Why is coaching essential to your business?" This will lay the foundation for the strategy work, as well as giving you key talking points for organizational leaders who may not be convinced of the power of coaching. Then, in later chapters, we will walk you through the **Coaching Strategy Cycle** which captures the three critical steps to set your coaching program up for success.

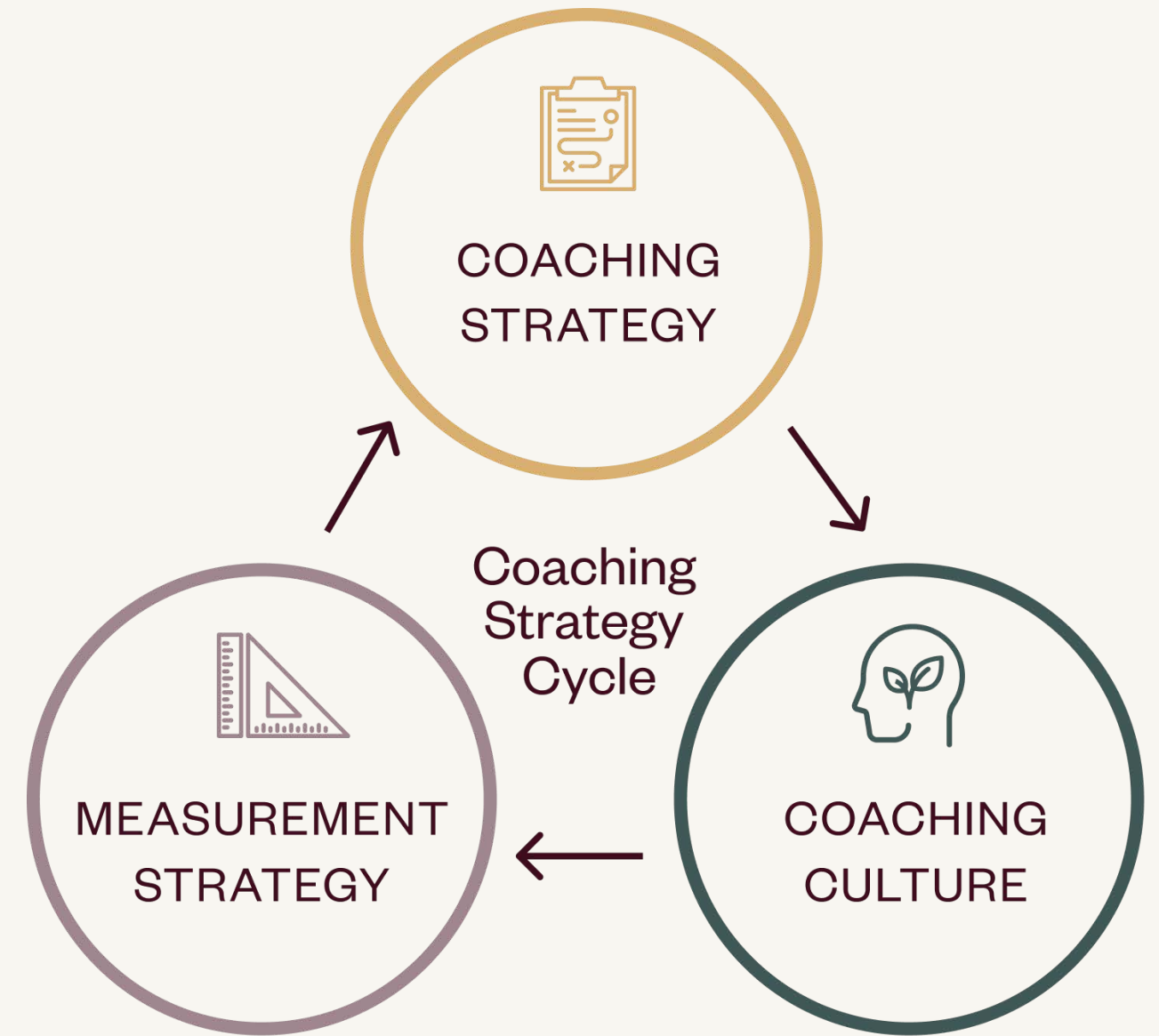


Image caption: While we will discuss these steps consecutively, they are not always perfectly linear. It's normal for organizations to move between parts of the cycle. It's also important to [revise one's coaching strategy](#) as an organization's needs shift, feeding back into the cycle.

Here's a quick summary of each chapter in the series:

CHAPTER 1

Why is coaching important to your business?

Before making an investment in coaching, it's necessary to know how coaching can help you achieve your business objectives (e.g., retaining talented employees, improving engagement, increasing performance, etc.).

CHAPTER 2

How can you develop a coaching strategy?

Develop a coaching strategy that aligns coaching to business objectives. Consider what coaching is for, who coaching is for, when coaching will be most useful, and how to integrate coaching with other parts of the business (such as existing HR and L&D processes).

CHAPTER 3

How can you foster a coaching culture?

A coaching culture helps you scale the benefits of coaching. Understand the actions that you can take to encourage a coaching ripple effect within your organization. Identify champions of coaching, communicate the value of coaching, and model coaching skills.

CHAPTER 4

How can you measure the success of coaching?

It's important to create a measurement strategy to demonstrate the impact and value of coaching. Measurement is critical to communicating success, and to generating further buy-in for coaching within your organization.

Coaching is Essential

This first chapter will introduce what coaching can do and why coaching is an important investment for organizations and leaders who are navigating an evolving work world.

We will answer the following key questions:

- What do the leaders of today need to succeed?
- Why isn't status quo leadership development working?
- Why does coaching work better?
- How can coaching have an impact across my organization?

Ready? Let's dive in.



Status Quo Leadership Development Isn't Working

You have seen and lived the dramatic changes in the world of work. Leaders today have had to respond to many shifts in how and where work is done—navigating hybrid work, ongoing global events like an uncertain economy, and responding to increasing demands for more inclusive workplaces.



As a result, there was a significant evolution in the most effective leadership competencies, according to [Korn Ferry's study](#) conducted between 2020 to 2022. Traditional leadership skills simply were not enough to buoy leaders through the volume of change. **The newer competencies highlight that leaders need relational skills (historically referred to as “soft skills”) to navigate the changes of today and tomorrow.** In fact, 90% of companies believe there will be a future skills gap, but only [16% think they're equipped to address it.](#)

How can organizations prepare to face this gap and equip their leaders appropriately? According to a [recent study from Harvard Business Review Analytic Services](#), sponsored by Torch, a majority of L&D teams (60% of the 665 people leaders studied) are still using traditional methods like leadership trainings. However, only 35% of leaders believe these trainings are effective. [Empirical research](#) looking at the effectiveness of coaching compared to other learning and development methods supports this.

While creating in-house training programs may be lower cost to organizations in the short-term, they do not reliably deliver on long-term goals like ROI or sustained behavioral change. The research points to three reasons for why traditional trainings aren't effective:

- **They follow a one-size-fits-all model.** Trainings tend to only address a specific content topic or skill that a group of employees may need to acquire, limiting their flexibility and ability to speak to individual leader needs.
- **They don't provide the psychological safety** (i.e., the perceived safety to take risks) that is needed for individuals to open up, challenge themselves, and grow.
- **They occur at one point in time**, even though we know that real behavior change and learning happens with intentional practice and accountability over time.

TRADITIONAL TRAININGS AREN'T EFFECTIVE

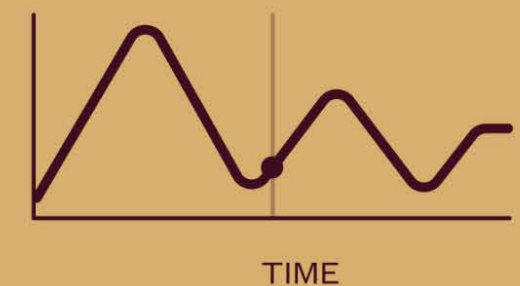
ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL



NO PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



OCCUR ONLY AT ONE POINT IN TIME



Why Coaching Works

Compared to leadership trainings, 60% of leaders from the [Harvard Business Review Analytics Report](#) reported that coaching was extremely or very effective. Why is this the case? Coaching uniquely responds to each of the limitations of traditional leadership trainings:

- First, coaching occurs within the context of individual engagements – tailored to the needs and challenges that each individual employee is facing (while also taking in consideration the organization’s needs).
- Secondly, coaching relies on the power of the relationship between coach and employee, helping employees open up about their challenges by creating psychological safety.
- Third, coaching is a long-term investment in learning and behavior change—not just a one time occurrence.

We will address each of these points in turn.



Coach



Employee Growth Journey

#1 Coaching is uniquely tailored to the individual

Compared to other forms of learning, an overwhelming [86% of people leaders](#) agree that personalized leadership development is required in our changing work environment. By putting the employee in the driver's seat, coaching can support each leader to develop the skills they need to serve and lead in their workplaces. Our customers echoed this sentiment, with one sharing:

"I don't think the one-size-fits-all [model] works. We just launched a training library through our learning platform, and there are professional development courses in there. But I just don't think people get as much from it [compared] to having a real customized plan. I like that Torch is customized to the person, it's customized to their needs, their growth plan... It's just that elevation of quality and consistency that's more than what we'd be able to provide in a one-size-fits-all program"

- TIFFANY PRICE

Senior Director of Human Resources at BluePrint Test Prep

Tailoring content to the individual learner also makes it an empowering and motivating investment, as it allows individuals to grow in ways in which they see fit.

"Coaching differs from other leadership development programs because it's participant-driven. It's more of 'I get to forge my path, and I get to create what I'd like to emphasize in the next 6 months' versus a little bit more of a directive approach."

- ANONYMOUS TORCH CUSTOMER

Coaching can have a powerful impact on individual leaders

From our data, we've found that participants changed in many areas related to their work and relationships with others. **100% of Torch participants changed in at least one way**, with the average participant changing in 8 ways. Here are some of the ways in which participants grew:



PERSONAL GROWTH

- **63%** increased in their confidence and self belief
- **52%** increased in self-awareness
- **38%** adopted more of a learning / growth mindset
- **37%** felt more connected to a personal purpose / mission / vision / values
- **34%** improved in their work/life balance

INTERPERSONAL GROWTH

- **50%** improved in communicating more effectively
- **34%** improved in managing difficult conversations
- **35%** improved the quality of their relationships with team members
- **32%** improved in delegation
- **29%** improved in conflict resolution

Not only are these individuals changing, but this tailored investment has a tangible impact on employees' likelihood of staying and moving up in their organizations. Many of these areas of change can predict retention and promotion. **We found that 94% of coaching participants changed in at least one way that's related to retention, and 89% changed in at least one way that's related to promotion.**

#2 Coaching delivers on long-term learning and behavior change

Coaching accelerates behavior change through ongoing practice across multiple sessions with another person, the coach. Unlike single point-in-time trainings, coaching can repeat and contextualize content, helping participants more effectively retain knowledge : **In fact, one study found that 75% of learners forget what they learn from more traditional methods within six days.**

The longer time frame of practice also gives a coach a unique and wider view of an employee's progress. Zee Gunjevic, the Learning & Development Program Manager at TextNow who is also going through coaching himself, emphasized this point:



“Something for me that has really come to light since I’ve started coaching is that **you start to learn things about yourself and your leadership development that you wouldn't otherwise know.** Your coach is able to tap into things that you discuss during both past and current conversations, and by doing so, is able to help you see the bigger picture.

Last week, my coach told me that in the 10 months or so that we’ve been working together, **she can pinpoint every point where she noticed where I was able to grow** and where I stopped talking about something that had hindered me before because I had learned how to get to that next level. I think that's one of the most important things about coaching. **You don't always see [how you've changed] until somebody points it out to you,** and says hey, “we’ve been talking about this for a couple of months now, but **the way you’re talking about it is completely different,** and you’re much more confident about it.”

WHY COACHING WORKS

Multiple participants spoke highly about having a “reflective mirror” to see themselves grow over time. And while they started to see changes right after starting coaching, a few shared that it took six to eight months to truly transform into better leaders in their organizations.

The experiences our customers shared with us are consistent with what we see in Torch data. Colleagues of coaching participants reported seeing their colleagues make significant progress towards **67%** of their goals after three months of coaching. This leapt to **90%** after eight months in coaching.



“It took over 6 months to be more comfortable in what I was doing. I probably could have been let loose after 6 months and still done pretty well...But as far as what I needed at a base level, I'd say **by 6 to 8 months or so, I really started to feel like I was doing the right things every day** instead of second guessing myself with everything. There's a lot of ground to cover, [even in] communicating with just your own direct reports. How do you communicate things up? How do you keep on track with what the organization is doing? How do you make sure that everything that your own team is doing is aligned with that?”

- Technology director at a tech startup

#3 Coaching relationships provide psychological safety to grow

Coaching is better at driving long-term behavior change because it's anchored in a trusted relationship. **Research has found that relationship-based learning is more likely to result in effective behavior change than other forms of learning, like trainings.**

In fact, researchers have referred to this core component of coaching effectiveness as the **coaching alliance**—the relationship between participant and coach. This alliance provides the psychological safety necessary for individuals to open up, challenge themselves, and grow.

One participant stressed the importance of psychological safety when comparing coaching to other ways in which he could have used his learning & development fund provided by his company.



“Coaching really helped primarily because in a one-on-one context, it’s a very **safe space for me to ask questions** such as, “I am in a meeting with my coworker, what do I say?” It sounds really basic, but I have no idea what to say to people when I haven’t already known them for a decade. And David coached me through a lot of that, and we did a lot of role play...

In coaching, I feel very specifically in a place where I don't know enough, and I need to learn, and I can ask for help. I can ask questions and that is considered to be normal. I’m in coaching because I need help and David, the coach, is here to help me. For example, in the story that I just told you [about] “how do you talk to people?” I can't go to one of my co-workers and say, “You know, I think we need to get to know each other better, but I have no idea what to say to you. What do you think I should say to you?” That’s not going to work. That’s not what coworkers are there for, right? And there is also the fear of being judged. If I asked my coworker that, I’d look really stupid, but **it’s ok if I look stupid to David because that’s why I’m here. That’s his job.** He helps people answer [basic] questions for people and helps them with people matters, or whatever else that the person [needs help with]”

– Software engineer at a US based software company

WHY COACHING WORKS

All of these arguments for why coaching is effective, compared to traditional forms of learning and development, were best summarized by a senior leader as he discussed his experience in coaching:

“Coaching was really helpful because it was one on one, and I felt I was able to give my coach a very clear sense of who I was [including] my background and the challenges I was experiencing. That enabled my coach to take an almost psychotherapeutic approach where they asked me questions and the questions themselves revealed the answers. This resulted in a behavioral shift.

Training for me is telling or suggesting how situations ought to be dealt with, without any, or at best, very little regard for where I sit, what I bring to the table, my own challenges, and my own strengths.

What was most helpful about [coaching] for me was that I felt that the person who was making suggestions understood me. So when they said something, even if at first I might resist or not want to hear it, I would let it sit.

My coach would come back to some things, and, over time, given their capability and the credibility, I would start to see that there's something to it. I'd say, 'Hey, I'm still not sure about this but you know, let's talk about it. Why do you think that?' We'd talk it through and invariably I'd say 'I get it now.'

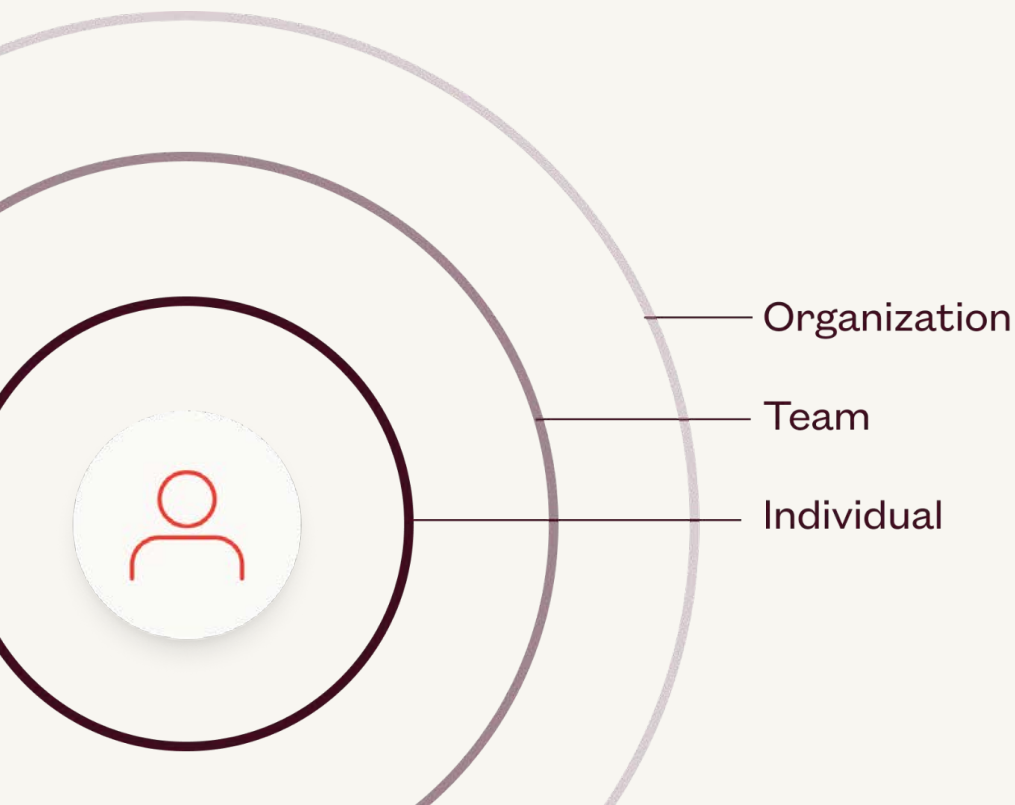
So [what worked] was the sustained nature of the coaching, and for me it [took] a number of months. I'm very appreciative to my company for enabling me to have this because it's not free, and they made this investment in me.

– Vice President, Torch Customer



#4 The coaching ripple effect transforms the organization beyond the individual

Coaching not only serves individual leaders, but has a ripple effect across the organization. Employees who learn coaching skills—such as active listening, question-asking, and delivering feedback—shift how they engage with their teams and drive larger organizational culture change.



For instance, the [International Coaching Federation](#) found that organizations that offered coaching strategically (i.e., offered multiple modalities for coaching, had a dedicated budget line item for coaching, etc.) were more likely to have employees that were high performing, were more likely to retain said high performing individuals, and reported greater engagement scores overall.

[Research also shows](#) that direct reports of coached managers are more likely to be satisfied at work, to stay, and to be committed to their organizations. This is likely because those leaders are changing their behavior to strengthen those relationships.

In Torch data, we found that 88% of our Torch participants were changing their behaviors in ways that tied to greater team performance – improving in communication and conflict resolution skills, for instance.

Finally, the coaching ripple effect extends its positive impact to the wider organization. Coaching embeds itself into the culture, becoming a norm and part of “the way we do things around here.” This increased focus on learning and development improves the [organization’s speed and agility](#) to respond to new demands and change. This is just the tip of the iceberg—we will discuss these scaled benefits in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

WHAT'S NEXT

Setting up a Coaching Strategy

It's clear that coaching can be an incredibly powerful tool. However, to fully maximize its benefit and scale organizational transformation, leaders need to design and support their programs in an intentional and strategic way. Our next chapter focuses on how to build an effective coaching strategy, aligning coaching to business objectives. This is the first (but not last) step to effectively implementing coaching in your organization.

We're looking forward to taking you through each of these chapters and steps in the next coming months. Stay tuned for more!



If your organization is ready to implement coaching now, check out our [Buyer's Guide for Leadership Coaching Platforms](#).

It will give you specific guidance—workbooks, checklists, and cheat sheets—on how to practically set up your programs, gain stakeholder buy-in, and identify budget.

Acknowledgements

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Torch

Torch is the People Development Platform that unlocks the potential of people, teams, and organizations.

By combining coaching and mentoring, Torch helps you design, manage, and measure programs that drive the success of your people—and your organization.

[Request a demo](#)

