Chapter 5: Coaching, diversity and change

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Take home points

1. Diverse learners comprise categories of learners whose rights are legally defined and protected.

2. Micro-inequities can pose unique challenges when coaching diverse learners to self-actualization.

3. Using a strengths-based approach to coaching is an effective methodology for all learners to facilitate change and achieve academic, professional, and personal success.

4. A critical role for coaches is the ability to determine when coaching is not sufficient to support a learner's success.

5. Diversity training is recommended for all coaches.

The role of diversity in coaching

While all learners bring a diverse set of personal attributes and lived experiences to the educational encounter, the term "diversity" has overriding cultural and legal implications. Diversity is a broad notion that encompasses the social and legal dimensions of race, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability and other facets of personal identity.[1] Effective coaching acknowledges these aspects of a learner's identity and, in partnership with the learner, mindfully integrates these elements of identity into positive

Vignette

Dr. Garcia is coaching two different students who have brought up recent challenges.

David is a first year medical student. He has been identified as having a learning disability and receives extra time as an accommodation on his assessments. The first year Foundations course involves weekly individual and group quizzes. David has expressed concern because he is able to receive accommodations for his individual assessment but not for the group assessment. He has been told that, because this is a group effort, giving him extra time would be unfair to the rest of the groups.

In the meantime, her second-year student, Shohreh, has also expressed concerns to Dr. Garcia. Much of the second year curriculum at this institution is spent working in small groups. As the only female in her group, Shohreh has noticed that her male classmates dominate the conversation and talk over her when she tries to contribute to the conversation. She feels that, when she is able to make a comment or suggestion, these are quickly dismissed by her male classmates. She notices that the male small group facilitator does not attempt to change the small group conversation dynamic and appears to enjoy bantering with the other male members of her small group.

Thought questions:

1. What are David's legal rights to accommodations as a learning disabled student? What is Dr. Garcia's responsibility in this situation?

2. What is a strengths-based approach that Dr. Garcia can use to identify and problem-solve Shohreh's issue?

3. To whom should David's and Shohreh's concerns be directed?

strategies for success. It is necessary to understand that both the learner's and the coach's personal identities are each built upon a core set of values and beliefs that influences each one's attitudes and behaviors. However, these values and beliefs are oftentimes unspoken and might not be readily apparent to either the learner or the coach. For coaches then, engaging in a trusting and productive coaching relationship involves identifying, acknowledging and understanding "deeply held beliefs, priorities, agendas, filters and assumptions" held by both the learner and the coach.[1] Thus, coaching is an evolving relationship of discovery for both the learner and the coach. It is this process of discovery that enhances the potential to deepen and enrich the coaching relationship and facilitates the self-actualization of the learner.

Micro-inequities[2] are conscious and subconscious patterns of behaviors which devalue another's performance and/or contributions. Because micro-inequities emanate from an individual's and/or institution's own core values and beliefs, these micro-inequities are oftentimes directed at individuals/groups perceived to be different. Systemic micro-inequities can also occur in organizations where the organizational culture values the contributions of certain individuals/groups over others. Micro-inequities can prove to be an ongoing challenge for diverse learners, and a consistent topic for coaching encounters.

A learner's lived experiences constitute experiential diversity, which is also a key feature of an individual's identity. While this type of diversity is fundamental to an individual's identity formation, it likewise informs his/her perspective on learning. Coaching involves accessing and validating the learner's lived experiences in a non-judgmental fashion and using these as a platform to facilitate the learner's self-

actualization.

Strengths-based coaching techniques to facilitate change

Appreciative inquiry (AI)

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is a problem-solving framework that can be used by learners over and over to address personal and academic learning issues. It is an effective tool for preparing learners for change through encouragement and support.[3] This positive, strengths-based approach to coaching works well for all populations, but particularly for diverse groups. It promotes diversity as a strength and integrates those diverse elements of a learner's identity directly into plans, strategies, and solutions for success. AI focuses on having the learners take action based on their strengths and address those circumstances that are under their control rather than engaging in a deficit-oriented gap analysis. AI can be a useful format for identifying and addressing micro and systemic inequities. This provides a positive format for the learner to take risks and reset goals and expectations due to unexpected outcomes. For diverse learners, taking risks within a monolithic, hierarchy-driven culture such as medicine can pose significant challenges. By using AI, coaches can guide learners to identify their strengths and utilize them to problem-solve and reset while maintaining a positive mindset.

Motivational interviewing (MI)

Effective coaching within the MI framework includes a bottom-up approach in which the coach mindfully guides the learner to make his/her own decisions. The following are MI strategies for promoting autonomous motivation.[4]

Engaging: Create a non-judgmental, safe space in order to communicate and share

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needs. For the coach, this involves recognizing and validating the learner's needs in a respectful manner, regardless of one's own values or beliefs. Creating this environment is exceptionally important for diverse learners whose needs might directly conflict with the values and beliefs of the coach and/or whose needs might not be readily understood by the coach. Coaching with empathy, open-ended inquiry, and reflection are key features of MI.

Focusing: Explore the differences between the learner's goals and his/her current behaviors. For diverse learners, this is an opportunity to surface unspoken values and beliefs. For coaches, using a tool to document and help analyze the learner's perceptions and decisions is a useful exercise. This can create a shared understanding of learners' perceptions and provide a foundation for both the coach and learner from which strategize and promote change.

Evoking: Motivation rulers[4] are useful tools for guiding the learners in their exploration of change. These rulers provide a tangible communication tool for the coach and learner to probe the learner's perceptions and responses and gain a deeper understanding of the motivators and obstacles that influence the learner's vision for change. For diverse learners, this is another opportunity to gain insight into unspoken values and beliefs that can serve as motivators and/or resistors to change.

Planning: Coaching for self-efficacy involves guiding the learner to engage in mastery exercises, which are activities an individual is able to accomplish on his/her own. These types of activities can be useful in reinforcing successful attitudes and behaviors. The coach also needs to guide the learner to set realistic goals and identify potential challenges in order to plan for success. For diverse learners, identifying visible and invisible barriers to success (such as micro- and systemic inequities) is essential to formulating realistic and actionable goals as part of a plan for success.

Coaching for academic success

Academic success can be influenced by many factors. Diverse ways of knowing and being can directly influence a learner's path to success. Coaches and learners need to be informed about organizational and legal statutes and policies that exist to protect diverse learners and help to guide goal-setting and learning strategy development. Coaches should be aware of university support services for diverse learners such as the disability services office, the office for cultural diversity and inclusion, the Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity (AAEO)/Title IX office, and student health services, among others.

Learners with learning disabilities have often experienced challenges or failure in their academic progress. Helping these learners regain confidence and develop skills for positive self-talk can be an important step in the coaching process and an essential step to facilitate the learner's success. For learners who struggle and require more significant advising and resources, coaches need to be trained to recognize when learners have challenges that are beyond their own level of comfort and competence and direct the learner to the appropriate supports and resources. This could change the status of the coaching relationship depending on the needs, circumstances, and best interests of the learner. Working with the learner to maintain accountability helps the learner to monitor his/her performance and progress. As part of the self-directed learning process, it is important to create defined intervals for review and revision of goals and objectives, discuss successes, challenges and responses to challenges, as well as reflect

on what strategies have been most beneficial and how the learner may continue to use them in the future. Throughout this entire process, the coach should continue to engage in a positive and supportive relationship with the learner maintaining trust, reaffirming expectations, and protecting confidentiality while moving the learner towards the ultimate goal of self-actualization.

Coaching for personal and professional success

Learners do not exist solely in an academic environment. They have additional roles and responsibilities within other domains of their lives that are equally significant. Issues occurring in these other domains can and oftentimes do influence behaviors and attitudes within the academic domain. Coaching involves an understanding and valuing of the whole learner, which includes recognizing how different aspects of the learner's life might inform his/her academic performance. This is particularly relevant for diverse learners whose lived experiences can be very impactful in different ways from other learners and even from the lived experiences of the coaches.

Cultural Social Intelligence Framework (Adapted from Law et al. 2008)[5]

Personal competence:	Self-awareness, self acceptance, self-value, self-management
Social competence:	Empathy, management of relationships, ability to collaborate
Cultural competence:	Questions assumptions, respect for other cultures, manages organizational culture
Professional competence:	Giving, receiving and seeking authentic feedback from others

The roadmap to self-actualization for diverse learners can be more circuitous. Employing the principles of the Cultural Social Intelligence Framework, (CSI)[5] above, which is an aspect of the Universal Integrated Framework[5] can help coaches gain a better understanding of all learners, especially diverse learners. For coaches, ongoing mini-assessments of one's own competence in each of the CSI domains can lead to greater self-awareness and a deeper understanding of the learner. For learners, examining interpersonal competence can likewise promote an increased understanding of one's own viewpoints, emotions and behaviors and elucidate how those might inhibit or enhance a plan for success. Introspection can also assist learners to better understand different attitudes, behaviors and perspectives, thus facilitating learners to generate more realistic goals, plans and strategies to promote their success. Assessing competence in the CSI domains also provides the opportunity for the coach and learner to represent diversity as a strength and an essential asset for achieving success.

Determining when coaching is not enough

Coaching learners towards self-determination and self-actualization is an effortful and sometimes stressful endeavor with unforeseen obstacles. The trusting relationship between the coach and learner provides a solid platform for examining obstacles and avoiding unnecessary detours. If, however, there are psychological, physical, or emotional issues that are interfering with the learner's ability to generate realistic goals and make autonomous decisions, then perhaps the coaching relationship is not adequate by itself to support the learner's success. In these instances, the coach and learner need to reassess the role of their coaching relationship. This involves both the coach and the learner determining if the coaching relationship is an accelerant or an obstacle to the learner 's success and/or if other resources are more appropriate to continue to promote the learner's success.

Adapting the coaching relationship to difficult coaching situations

Questions for coaches to determine whether to continue the coaching relationship (Adapted from Buckley and Buckley 2006 in Nash, 2013)[6]

Is the issue separate from the coaching situation or does the coaching situation foster the issue?

Is the issue temporary or likely to resolve itself in a few weeks?

How self-aware is the learner?

Does the learner have a realistic plan to deal or cope with this issue?

Is the issue something that may directly impact the coach?

It is important for coaches to work within their level of competence and have the self-awareness to recognize when an issue extends beyond the goals of the coaching relationship. When an issue is identified outside the boundaries of coaching, the coach should provide the learner with a menu of resources to address the issue.

Effective coaching skills include knowledge of organizational resources that support all learners; however, even more important for coaches is the knowledge about the laws, policies, and protections in place at the local, state, and federal levels to support diverse learners. Facility with these regulations can help guide the learners to generate more realistic goals and actionable plans. Additionally, reviewing the ethical guidelines/policies for coaching at one's organization helps clarify the coach's role, boundaries, and expectations for both the learner and the coach.

For diverse learners, coaches need a working knowledge of the organizational and legal policies and statutes as they pertain to diverse populations. If the learner reports discrimination or sexual harassment, the coach is obliged to report these to the appropriate office/department. In these cases, it is equally important for the coach to let the learners know these types of claims must be reported and will most likely be investigated. While seemingly numerous, these policies/laws provide a roadmap for both the coach and learner to better assess potential issues related to diversity and serve as guides for generating solutions.

The following are coaching modalities that can be adapted to different coaching issues and situations. In each of the following models, coach needs to maintain trust, emotional equilibrium and confidentiality, regardless of the circumstances.

1. One-on-one coaching:

When an issue arises, the coach and learner evaluate the impact of the issue and whether the coaching relationship should continue. This should be a transparent and ongoing discussion to make certain continuing the coaching relationship is in the learner's best interest.

2. Coaching interventions:

If the coach feels the learner is no longer able to make autonomous decisions, then it is appropriate to refer the learner to psychological support staff, even if the learner does not want it. (This should be clarified in the coaching agreement.) Referral to a mental health professional usually signals the end of the coaching agreement and the coach should refrain from contacting the learner. Once the psychological issues are resolved, the learner can work with a new coach.

3. Discontinuing the coaching relationship:

If there are clear violations of legal and/or ethical statutes and/or the coaching agreement, then the coaching relationship should be immediately terminated. If the coach has doubt about whether to discontinue the coaching relationship based on less obvious issues or infractions, then, without breeching confidentiality, the coach should discuss the matter with a supervisor or coaching colleague and refer to the coaching guidelines provided by the organization. The decision to discontinue the coaching relationship should be directly communicated to the learner once the decision has been made.

Diversity training for coaches

Working with diverse learners requires an understanding of the learners' needs as well as their legal, social, and organizational protections. Diversity training is recommended for all coaches. A list of available diversity training resources is included in Appendix 3.[7]

In review

David's concerns are valid. He has been identified as having a learning disability and is receiving accommodations of extra time on his assessments. Accommodations apply to all of David's assessments. Failure to uniformly provide David with accommodations on all of his assessments could potentially result in a violation of David's rights. As a part of diversity training, coaches should be made aware of the rights of learners with disabilities and the organizational resources and supports available to assist them. David's coach should guide David to access those resources immediately and notify the learning specialist or disability services office of his situation.

Shohreh's concerns are valid in her eyes as well and need to be acknowledged and explored by Shohreh with her coach. Using the Cultural Social Intelligence tool from the Universal Integrated Framework is a positive method for exploring Shohreh's feelings and gaining insight into her perceptions and the issues that she is experiencing. Appreciative Inquiry is an effective strengths-based method to validate Shohreh's perceptions of her situation and to assist her in setting realistic goals for resolving these issues. As a part of diversity training, coaches should be made aware of the organizational resources and supports to assist learners who feel they are experiencing micro-inequities. As part of the coaching session, Shohreh's coach should provide these resources to her and encourage her to access them. Should Shohreh's perceptions escalate to the point where she feels that she is experiencing discrimination, the coach should immediately refer her to the Department for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) for review.

Conclusion

Diversity is a broad topic with cultural and legal implications for diverse learners. Academic coaches should receive diversity training to develop a basic understanding of the unique needs and protections for diverse learners. Diversity is a strength that coaches should represent as such when working with diverse learners. Useful methodologies that focus on building on learners' strengths and engaging them in strengths-based problem-solving and goal-setting are Appreciative Inquiry and Motivational Interviewing. The Cultural Social Intelligence Framework is a tool for exploring learners' perceptions and behaviors that can promote or prevent achieving success. Coaches and learners need to continuously evaluate the efficacy of the coaching relationship and work together to reconfigure it appropriately to ensure the learner's success.

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