



Taking Your Leaders to the Next Level With Coordinated Coaching

By Tom Alafat and Emily Livorsi

How Cadre Coaching can help address not only individual developmental needs but also a shared set of organizational objectives.

Over the last few decades, the number of companies using executive coaching has grown significantly. Currently, there are nearly 20,000 professional coaches who have active clients in North America, thus illustrating both a demand for coaching among executives and a realization of the value that these professionals provide.

Here at FMI, we've seen a substantial rise in architecture/engineering/construction (AEC) industry organizations that rely on coaching to help them rapidly accelerate the development of their people. In an industry where talent is a scarce commodity, organizations that invest deeply in their people through the highly personalized coaching experience have identified it as a true differentiator.

In this article, we explore the use of executive coaching in AEC firms, discuss the challenges that leaders encounter when working with coaches, and detail FMI's successful Cadre Coaching approach.

The Seven Limitations of Coaching

Coaching's impact on a business can vary greatly according to the company, the time and effort it puts into it, and the individuals involved in the process. When these stars don't align properly, the following challenges can occur:

1. **Coaching Comes With Minimal Barriers to Entry.** While coaching credentials are becoming increasingly popular for executive coaches, there remains a limited barrier to entry, meaning anyone can be a coach or call himself or herself a coach, regardless of training, industry expertise or certifications. The International Coach Federation (ICF) is the most recognized organization for coaching certification. Sophisticated buyers will ask about where the coach received his or her training and whether he or she is ICF-certified.
2. **Most Coaches Lack Industry Expertise.** While some coaches may have specialized niches, few coaches dive deep in industries and instead pride themselves as being broader leadership experts. While basic leadership principles may apply across industries, a lack of intimate industry exposure and experience can result in misguided support or minimal confidence in a coach's knowledge and reputation.
3. **Many Coaches Operate Autonomously.** While this may work in smaller organizations, many coaches lack the necessary network and/or resources to address the many facets of the construction environment. One FMI coach recently worked on talent development skills with a CEO from a \$500 million specialty contracting firm. During the coaching engagement, the CEO disclosed his issues with field productivity. With careful questioning and industry experience, the coach identified a field leadership issue and connected the CEO with the appropriate resource.
4. **Coaching Is Personal Versus Strategic.** While the purpose of coaching is to support an individual's professional growth, it is also important to be working toward the organization's larger objectives and goals. Coaches who lack industry experience and organizational knowledge may remain too focused on the individual's personal strengths and challenges without coaching to skills closer aligned to the organization's broader strategic needs.
5. **Coaching Lacks Diligence in Measuring Impact.** Measuring coaching's ROI is always a challenge even though there are numerous methods for determining its impact on the organization. Unfortunately, follow-through and diligence around measuring and tracking changes in leaders' behaviors are often abandoned in the coaching process. Therefore, utilizing custom assessments after the coaching engagement concludes is a critical way to evaluate the impact of a long-term coaching investment.
6. **Coaching Remains Remedial Versus System-Focused.** While coaching has grown in its use to maximize the strengths of leaders, many times coaching is a last resort for a challenged or struggling leader. While coaching can certainly be impactful in these cases, coaching can be even more effective in an organization when it is applied as an initiative to drive a leadership strategy, enhancing capabilities of current and high-potential leaders within the organization.
7. **Coaching Lacks a Network.** When coaching is a one-off effort for struggling leaders, the transformative experience of coaching is restricted to a select few. This siloed approach limits impact, whereas coaching a group of leaders simultaneously can create a coaching culture, encouraging peer learning, building stronger accountability and accelerating skill development and application across the entire leadership team.

Leveraging Cadre Coaching to Break the Mold

The good news is that there is a tried-and-tested way to break through the seven barriers of coaching and truly benefit from the experience. Cadre Coaching, or the process of coaching a group of individuals simultaneously, is exceptionally impactful because it addresses not only individual developmental needs but also a shared set of organizational objectives. For example, several years ago FMI was asked to assist a very large general contractor that was in the middle of a reorganization and leadership transition. The engagement's scope involved understanding the complexities of the reorganization and associated desired outcomes, assessing dozens of leaders through comprehensive personality tests, and then individually coaching the new leaders in their new roles.

It's important to note that the engagement's success was not limited to everyone's ability to succeed in his or her new position. The organization had clearly defined values and objectives that it wanted to instill into its company culture. Coaching took place over a few years and involved a half-dozen coaches who regularly spoke with one another to ensure their coaching was aligned with broader company goals.

In other words, the initiative's success was not based on the individual growth of any one leader but rather on the collective energy of the leadership group. This approach helped the new leadership group transition smoothly while moving toward the company objectives and instilling organizationwide core values.

A Step-by-Step Approach

FMI's Cadre Coaching approach follows these steps to ensure maximal impact and address the common coaching challenges mentioned earlier in this article:

Step 1: Deep Organizational Analysis

Launch a rigorous examination to identify the current situation of the organization. This step includes assessing the performance, operations, culture, talent and future aspirations of the company. Collecting this data gives a candid snapshot of where the highest and best use of coaching exists.

Step 2: Develop Objectives Based on Existing Organizational Challenges and Opportunities

Using the information from Step 1, develop a clear set of objectives to target through Cadre Coaching. For example, after assessing the organization, you might determine that significant leadership transitions will occur over the next few years due to the retirement of current members of the executive team. In this scenario, cadre coaches would help those being coached prepare for a future leadership role, the skills required to lead and manage change, and the development of the next generation of leaders. At the start of all Cadre Coaching engagements, executive stakeholders, leaders being

Organizational Challenges and Opportunities Where Cadre Coaching Is Effective:

- Succession management
- Building team dynamics and capabilities
- Implementing new organizational strategy
- Culture change efforts
- Developing new competencies in response to market shifts or structural changes

coached and coaches have an alignment meeting to agree on the cadre journey and its overall objectives. This alignment process helps clarify the focus of coaching as well as developmental expectations and accountabilities.

Step 3: Cadres Select From a Group of Industry Expert Coaches

Once the organizational objectives are determined, FMI goes through a rigorous process of identifying which coaches might best serve the organization. To do this, we align organizational objectives and individual goals with FMI coaches who have the right competencies and experiences. Knowing that the strength of the client/coach relationship is an important element in creating successful outcomes, we also ensure that each leader/client is assigned a good coaching counterpart.

Step 4: Leaders Create Organizationally Aligned Development Plans

Once matched, coaches launch custom assessments to gather feedback on leaders' styles and behaviors, often uncovering hidden strengths or blind spots. Using feedback from personal interviews and 360 assessments, increased self-awareness and a deep knowledge of the organizational objectives, the coach and leader work together to create a development plan of action. Typically, development plans include a few goals that are both individually and organizationally relevant.

Step 5: Use Assessments to Measure Impact

At the beginning and conclusion of a Cadre Coaching engagement, all leaders receive a custom 360-degree assessment that is aligned with their developmental goals. For example, a leader focused primarily on developing executive presence, negotiation skills and relationships would receive a 360-degree assessment. Through that assessment, direct reports, supervisors, peers and clients provide feedback on behaviors related to those primary focus areas at the start and upon completion of the coaching. This allows FMI to gauge progress, skill development and impact.

Tying It All Together

Cadre Coaching involves numerous steps and incorporates coaches, leaders and executive stakeholders. FMI's Cadre Captains are leadership, coaching and industry experts who manage the coordination of the cadre, frequently inform executive stakeholders of leaders' development in the coaching journey, and coordinate among FMI's coaches to gauge leaders' engagement and progress. The cadre captain ensures that the coaching journey is seamless for the leader and that the coaching process results in real business impact for the organization.



Now, the true value of Cadre Coaching in part comes from multiplicity. The impact one leader has on an organization may be significant, for example, but when a group of leaders is coached at the same time, and is influenced by similar philosophies of leadership, the results are often more dramatic and pronounced. The common experience also creates a degree of connection among the team members.

The common coaching experience also helps to build camaraderie among the cadre. This, in turn, opens up new and richer lines of dialogue among cadre members. Deeper communication among executives leads to teams that are more productive.

Here's how one senior vice president remembers the impact that Cadre Coaching had on a group brainstorming session: "Several people who were undergoing coaching (including myself) participated in a committee brainstorming session. It was tremendous. During the exchange of ideas, you could observe how some of the participants had developed over the course of their coaching program—including me. The coaching experience we had in common brought it all together. It's hard to quantify, but it's something I'll always remember as a great experience. It was so much fun—my colleagues and I still talk about it!"

Executive coaches who work with a cadre of leaders also have the means to quickly grasp the dynamics of working relationships. When one coach engages with several individuals on the same team, for instance, he or she becomes a third party who can witness the interpersonal dynamic of each leader firsthand. This gives the coach a vast amount of information to work with—much more than he or she would have if coaching only one leader. Using this data, the coach can quickly recognize the reality of a situation and be more effective for all team members.

As more companies and executives turn to coaching to help them break through barriers and get to the next level, expect to see a growing number of coaches doing their part to help motivate and inspire their coachees in a very accountable manner. And as coaching as a business tool continues to grow in popularity, the basic fundamentals of the process remain intact: Help others become the best that they can be, identify negative behaviors and develop leaders to their fullest potential.



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FMI serves all sectors of the industry as a trusted advisor. More than six decades of context, connections and insights lead to transformational outcomes for clients and the industry.

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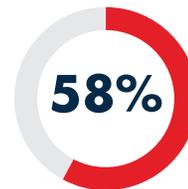
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