

Coaching Leaders to Be Coaches at EDS

JANE MORAN

As part of EDS's recent corporate transformation, a two-pronged coaching initiative is helping leaders think more innovatively, take inspired action, and be more accountable. A brain-based approach provides a coaching framework for professional delivery of one-on-one coaching and for equipping all leaders with the skills to coach others in the organization. A coach or leader uses the four-step methodology to move an individual through the mental stages necessary to alter brain patterns in a way that leads to sustainable behavior change. Coaching skills training is being delivered to EDS leaders around the globe through interactive teleconference sessions. © 2007 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Forty-four years ago, Electronic Data Systems Corporation (EDS) created the information technology outsourcing industry, and since then EDS has grown into a \$20+ billion global business. In 2004, EDS, based in Plano, Texas, embarked on a corporate transformation designed to improve its global delivery system and client engagement model, an ongoing strategic initiative that encompasses the company's more than 135,000 employees in 64 countries. A highly complex undertaking that requires change at all levels of the organization, the initiative places an increased emphasis on effective leadership and communication. At its core is an objective of helping leaders think *differently*, to be better able to think through complex issues and take inspired action in key goal areas. EDS recognizes that this capability is key to successful delivery of mission-critical applications and systems and, ultimately, to client satisfaction.

What can a company do to help its leaders strengthen their capabilities for parsing complex problems and developing innovative solutions? Prior to the transformation, mentoring had been a core learning and development strategy for leaders at

EDS, an activity that predominantly involved seasoned executives sharing wisdom and experience with less experienced employees on topics such as improving skills and effectiveness. But EDS Global Learning & Development (GL&D), the EDS corporate training division, saw that the transformation required a mechanism even more potent than mentoring. It believed that workplace dialogue in the context of coaching could accelerate change and spur innovation. EDS leaders needed to be engaged in effective *coaching conversations* that inspire action and new thinking and facilitate positive change, conversations that entail asking questions in a way that brings about insight and accountability in others.

We envisioned the following coaching framework that would support the transformation and invested the next three years in building it:

- A consistent, integrated, and inclusive *approach to coaching* that is widely applicable and focused on encouraging leaders to ask questions as a means of coming up with their own answers—a robust approach that could deliver positive impact to the business in an integrated and scalable manner.
- A *coaching culture*, where leaders have access to a coach and also have the skills to actively coach others as part of their daily operations—not only as a cost-effective way to deliver coaching but also as a means to infuse coaching into the toolkit of every leader.

A Brain-Based Approach to Coaching

Coaching in many environments is based on one-way, prescriptive approaches, where “the coach knows best.” Instead, EDS sought a coaching approach that would support a cultural shift in

leadership, what Jim Duckels, vice president of Sales Recruiting, Acclimation, and Coaching at EDS, describes as “moving from a ‘let me give you the answers and you execute it’ to more of an open environment of ideas exchange, in a way that increases the level of engagement and performance.”

An approach known as “brain-based coaching,” developed by Results Coaching Systems International (RCS), was first utilized at EDS in 2004 in a small pilot program with the objective of using coaching to support the advancement of high-potential female leaders in the organization as part of an enterprise-wide diversity initiative. One internal coach worked one-on-one with selected female leaders from the United States, Asia Pacific, the UK, and Europe. Coaching sessions were conducted entirely over the telephone over a six-month period, and feedback was obtained at the end of each coaching engagement to evaluate the effectiveness of the approach. The resulting feedback—which included 93 percent of the coachees reporting being better equipped to manage change, and 86 percent reporting greater job satisfaction—caught the attention of the director of EDS Global Learning & Development at EDS headquarters.

The RCS approach draws on several areas of neuroscientific study, including research on how attention changes the mapping processes in the brain.

The RCS approach draws on several areas of neuroscientific study, including research on how attention changes the mapping processes in the brain.¹ The ARIA model of awareness² is based on the theory that change occurs when we

1. Focus on a particular circuit in the brain—*awareness* (A)
2. Shift to a different perspective—*reflection* (R)
3. See the situation in a new way—*insight* (I)

4. Take *action* (A) to embed the new connections made from this “aha!” moment of breakthrough in thinking

Awareness

The brain has significant limitations when processing new ideas. The “working memory” overloads easily (therefore we often find ourselves “stuck” and overwhelmed in response to change and complex issues). When we are at this point we may feel “blocked,” anxious, frustrated, and other uncomfortable emotions.

In the RCS approach, the coach—or any leader seeing an opportunity to help another work through a difficult situation—uses questioning to help the individual simplify complex challenges down to smaller ones, and to then focus attention and thinking on the primary issue.

Reflection

Research is showing that to make a new connection in the brain, the individual must quietly reflect on the *solution* to the challenge she or he faces rather than giving more attention to the problem. In this phase of a coaching conversation, the coach asks the types of questions that get the coachee to focus attention on the possible solutions available, which moves the coachee to apply a high quality and deep level of thinking.

Insight

Insights are the energizing buzz that a person experiences when having a breakthrough in thinking—this is literally making new neural connections in the brain. Such insights can be overlooked if the coach is focused on his or her own agenda rather than the coachee’s. In the ARIA model, the coach’s role in this phase is to recognize when a coachee has an insight, and to focus the coachee on the insight—what has just been realized or discovered. Attention will strengthen the associated new connections being made in the brain.

Action

This fourth phase represents the relatively short time period during which the coachee is inspired to take some action based on the insight or new breakthrough in thinking made in the Insight phase. The role of the coach is to challenge the coachee to make commitments to act upon new insights. The coach also requests to follow up with the coachee—and then does so—to see how she or he is progressing with the commitments to make changes or do things in new and improved ways.

The role of the coach is to challenge the coachee to make commitments to act upon new insights.

The ARIA Model in Action

As an example of the RCS approach to coaching, consider the case of an HR leader—let’s call her Karen—who received a visit from an employee—let’s call him Bob—who came to her seeking a pay raise.

Awareness. Karen applied the first phase of the coaching model to help Bob to obtain greater clarity on the exact nature of his dissatisfaction with pay. She probed using questions that focused Bob on his current thinking about the issue—as opposed to just what the problems were. This enabled him to notice where he was at in his current thinking, and then specifically what was the underlying core issue—which he realized was actually a desire for greater trust from his manager and an opportunity to build a career with the company.

Reflection. To build on Bob’s new insight into his issue, further questions from Karen encouraged Bob to reflect on what greater trust and career opportunities would look and feel like to him. Bob envisioned his manager letting him play a larger role on projects, even giving him the lead on a portion of an important client project, and asking him to partici-

pate in sales meetings with potential clients—all of which would result in Bob being better positioned for promotion to a project manager role.

Insight. Karen acknowledged Bob for sharing his desired ideal state with her, and then asked Bob questions that encouraged him to identify all of the possible scenarios and different activities that he could possibly initiate that would move him closer towards his desired goal. He identified several options, and Karen noticed that he was particularly enthusiastic about one of them: presenting his manager with a new idea for managing a key project with an important client. Further questions from Karen helped Bob identify and vocalize his desire to take action in order to make this presentation happen.

Action. Seeing that Bob was motivated to own this task as a first step toward achieving his desired career opportunities and trust, Karen asked him what he was specifically prepared to commit to as a next step. Bob said that he felt he now wanted to block out some time over the next two days to plan his presentation, and to request time to present to his manager next week. Karen asked if she could follow up with him in a week’s time, to see how he had done in delivering the presentation. Bob agreed, and thanked her for helping him come up with “solution” to his problem. Two weeks later, Karen checked in with Bob again to see if he was on track with making his desired changes, and he reported much greater job satisfaction and an increased level of involvement with the project on which he had presented. On speaking to Bob’s leader, Karen learned that there was a visible improvement in Bob’s all-round performance and engagement.

By helping leaders understand the phases that the brain moves through as a person tries on a new idea and then takes action, leaders can develop and direct their skills in coaching to improve their capacity to drive change, and to work *with* another person’s desire to take action rather than *against* it by telling them what to do. The practical, inclusive,

and respectful structure for productive dialogue in the RCS approach is exactly what EDS was looking for in a coaching solution, and in 2005 EDS piloted the first global corporate coaching program, using the RCS coaching methodology with 35 EDS leaders around the world.

The EDS Coaching Approach

EDS never set out to have professionals coach every leader in the organization; rather, the goal was for leaders to learn to coach other leaders in order to bring about systemic positive change in the workforce. To achieve this, EDS GL&D staff developed a corporate approach, with the RCS methodology at its core, that made both coaching skills training and one-on-one coaching readily available to leaders—an approach that also met the following objectives:

EDS never set out to have professionals coach every leader in the organization; rather, the goal was for leaders to learn to coach other leaders in order to bring about systemic positive change in the workforce.

- **A consistent approach** to one-on-one coaching and coaching skills training. This meant a common language leaders and professionals alike would use to talk about and experience coaching as a practice, to ensure consistency and high quality in all coaching conversations.
- **A simple methodology** requiring skills that could be easily taught and quickly added to a leader's existing tool kit for being effective and productive. The RCS approach came with several advantages: the science is simple, the models practical, and the coaching and training sessions are highly experiential and delivered in digestible “pieces.”
- **A global program, integrated and scalable** for delivery to a highly dispersed and culturally rich global workforce. The RCS curriculum relies

upon highly structured and intensive teleconference training classes and “over the phone” coaching sessions, enabling a small team of coaches and coaching instructors to deliver services and training to diverse audiences in numerous geographic locations.

- **A good fit with the EDS culture.** The RCS methodology utilized models and language that were practical and palatable to a busy and highly analytical professional workforce, and that had widespread usefulness and impact for a broad range of leaders—from technical specialists and program managers to HR professionals and client delivery executives. Demonstrating the link between brain functioning and effective coaching has helped EDS validate the value of coaching in the logical minds of its leaders, thus maximizing the practical application and impact of coaching across the organization.
- **An outcome-focused approach.** In the RCS methodology, the coachee is kept accountable for achieving specific deliverables. In this way the investment in coaching continuously demonstrates tangible outcomes and positive business impact.

The resulting EDS “portfolio of coaching services” entails two core programs: Transformational Leadership Coaching (TLC), in which internal professionals provide one-on-one coaching to leaders selected for the program, and Coaching Skills for Leaders (CSL), an intensive training workshop for imparting practical coaching skills to a critical mass of geographically dispersed leaders.

Transformational Leadership Coaching (TLC)

Through the Transformational Leadership Coaching program, a global team of internal coaches, each trained in the RCS approach, work one-on-one with a leader (coachee) over 12 coaching sessions to bring about:

- Positive change and accountability at both individual and team levels

- Greater ability to drive account intensity (increasing the amount of business from a given client)
- A re-energized focus on the most desired business and individual commitments
- Enhanced thinking around opportunities for increasing core effectiveness
- Increased productivity, innovation, and goal attainment
- Inspired individual ownership and accountability for results

To date, the target audience for the one-on-one coaching has included leaders critical to key areas of the business, with priority given to leaders on key accounts and high performers in a stretch assignment or critical position. We are also receiving increasing requests for coaching in support of leaders participating in rotational assignments, training, and leadership development programs. Because this is a limited resource in high demand, a waiting list for internal coaching services currently exists in every geographic region of EDS operations.

One important feature of the TLC program is that each coachee works with her or his coach to identify and achieve three well-defined goals or targets.

One important feature of the TLC program is that each coachee works with her or his coach to identify and achieve three well-defined goals or targets. As Stephen Chambers, an EDS Management Associate in Texas, explains, “In my experiences as a coachee I have found the ‘pure focus’ that it brings is a significant benefit. As part of the coaching process, true goal clarity is one of the first steps. As a result, I end up creating a means of evaluating every action I take.”

This focus on outcomes also directly supports GL&D’s ability to provide feedback on the impact that both goal attainment and improved thinking

can bring. In a survey of EDS leaders who had participated in the TLC program during 2006, 97.5 percent stated that they have accelerated results in areas important to them, and 91 percent reported being a more effective leader as a result of their coaching experience.

Coaching Skills for Leaders (CSL)

Coaching Skills for Leaders (CSL), the second key coaching offering using the RCS approach, is a training workshop that provides leaders with a set of coaching tools to assist *others* in

- Gaining insights
- Solving business problems
- Making decisions
- Providing effective feedback
- Promoting ownership and accountability

The target audience includes leaders of key accounts and critical projects, and even entire leadership teams, and also extends to any leader who wishes to improve her or his ability to have more effective conversations that encourage others to think in new ways and be more accountable for driving change. The course is also a platform for EDS coaches, trainers, and facilitators to build on their existing expertise by training as a CSL instructor.

The EDS team of RCS-trained coaching skills instructors delivers the CSL course over six teleconference sessions in a highly interactive format that requires full participation and gives practical assignments between all sessions. Using teleconference delivery has enabled widespread reach across the global workforce, with a large majority (90.7 percent) of CSL participants agreeing that teleconference capability is suitable for this training.

Participants leave the six training sessions with simple and useful tools for helping others to think through issues, increase the productivity of meetings and workplace dialogue, and increase the focus on

innovative solutions to problems. “One of my most favorite things to do,” says Colette Dempster, EDS’s Mentoring & Coaching Portfolio Leader who also serves as a CSL instructor, “is to follow up with leaders about a month after they have been through the Coaching Skills for Leaders Workshop. I have heard wonderful stories of how they are having more effective performance conversations, improving client relationships, and even feeling better about themselves as leaders.”

One senior leader described the impact of learning this practical coaching approach as “liberating.” Prior to the CSL workshop, her strategy for establishing credibility was to make sure she was well briefed on every issue by doing lots of research before meetings and then offering her own suggestions at the meetings. The coaching skills training helped her to recognize that she did not need to know everything; rather, she could establish credibility by helping others to find their own solutions without having to understand every problem herself. This also improved her time management now that she no longer felt the need for as much preparation before every meeting. Another CSL participant found that by using the coaching models he was able to reduce his time in meetings by 50 percent, with positive impact on his team—who now perceived his meetings to be much more focused and productive—and with the client—who commented that meetings were now “achieving much more in less time.”

One senior leader described the impact of learning this practical coaching approach as “liberating.”

Jim Duckels, the VP of Sales Recruiting, Acclimation, and Coaching, has used both the one-on-one coaching, and coaching skills training to support his role in acquiring sales talent and acclimating them to EDS sales methodologies and procedures. “It is just a better way, to have a structure in mind for having a coaching conversation that helps people to

come up with resolutions and next steps. You don’t have to be an expert in everything to help people to come up with solutions.”

The latest CSL Self-Efficacy Survey, which is used to regularly assess and track the effectiveness of the training across each geographic region, revealed that participants have experienced a higher level of preparedness to engage in critical activities, including:

- Leading effective performance conversations
- Building high-performance teams
- Conducting constructive, results-oriented dialogue

The July 2006 survey report states, “In summary, over 82 percent of the participants believe the workshop had good or high relevance to their role, and 75 percent believe that it had good or high value to them.”

Building an Internal Coaching Capability

By the end of 2007, EDS will have provided more than 3,000 leaders in 36 countries with professional coaching skills training and 500 leaders with access to their own internal coach. This dynamic training and expertise is being provided on every continent by a relatively small internal team of passionate and highly trained coaches and instructors committed to supporting leaders to facilitate positive change and deliver high-impact results. The Coaching Skills for Leaders curriculum is taught by a global EDS team of RCS-trained instructors: 8 in the Asia Pacific region, 5 in India, 9 in Europe, 15 in North America, and 6 in Latin America. The Transformational Leadership Coaching is done by a team of 24 internal professional coaches who were drawn from a broad cross-section of the organization, approximately half of them employed full-time in a non-HR-related role.

According to Colette Dempster, who is responsible for all corporate coaching initiatives and

training and knows firsthand what it takes to establish a high-performing internal coaching capability, “When we looked at the talent at EDS, we found that there were many employees who had a ‘calling’ for coaching and had even invested in their own development in this area. Exposing these individuals to the RCS methodology gave them all a common language and set of models to have powerful coaching conversations in the company. It also provided GL&D with a start-up team of highly motivated coaches and instructors.”

In response to the demand for one-on-one coaching across the organization, EDS successfully piloted its own Internal Coach Training (ICT) program at the Texas headquarters in March 2007 and in London in May 2007. Further pilots are also scheduled in other regions later in the year. By the end of 2007, the number of professionally trained EDS internal coaches will have tripled, and there is a waiting list for classes starting in 2008.

Walking the Talk

Part of the success of EDS’s coaching programs can be attributed to the coaches’ and instructors’ commitment to “walking the talk” when it comes to applying the RCS coaching methodology. Phil Langstaff, EDS coach and training instructor in the UK, explains:

Part of the success of EDS’s coaching programs can be attributed to the coaches’ and instructors’ commitment to “walking the talk” when it comes to applying the RCS coaching methodology.

I am conscious that I adopt a coaching approach to communication much more widely these days, and that has been noticed by colleagues. I am asking permission a lot more and generally start a planned telephone conversation with, “Is this still a good time to talk about . . .,” and unplanned ones with, “Have you got a few minutes to talk about . . .,”

or something similar. The results have been quite amazing because it gives people permission to say, “Well actually something has cropped up that needs my immediate attention. Can we reschedule?” So instead of having conversations where I only have 50 percent of the other person’s attention, I am having much more focused discussions when the time is right for both of us.

Finding the Right Coach or Mentor

EDS employees can seek either a coach or mentor in a wide area of specializations by registering in our corporate Relationship Matching tool. This centralized database contains the details of internal coaches and mentors and provides a consistent and efficient means of initiating effective learning partnerships.

When Coaching Is Not the Solution

Generally speaking, the Mentoring & Coaching team in the GL&D organization knows that coaching alone is not the solution to workforce engagement and productivity but instead an essential piece of a larger, complex puzzle. In the experience of team members, one-on-one coaching engagements or coaching skills training programs do not deliver maximum impact in the following circumstances:

- When individuals are told by their leader that they *must* work with a coach
- When coaching is seen as a remedial “fix-it” intervention for critical underperformance
- When someone comes to coaching expecting to be mentored or counseled
- When individuals are told, rather than invited or asked, to enroll in coaching skills training

Individuals seeking a more directive solution—an expert to give advice on how to do things—are encouraged to seek out a mentor in the required field. Those seeking new skills are invited to investigate EDS’s extensive training offerings listed in the company’s Learning Catalogue. As an internal coaching capability, team members are skilled at asking people questions to help them identify what their true goals and development needs are in a way that

encourages them to identify the best approach to finding a solution, and to take ownership for resolving it.

Coaching as a Systemic Approach

A steadily increasing number of leaders within the organization are now actively coaching other leaders as part of their existing roles as a result of coaching skills training and/or working with a coach themselves. Furthermore, EDS's coaching offerings were purposefully selected and designed to be relevant enough to support various levels of leadership, and scalable and robust enough to be incorporated into multiple domains, locations, and initiatives across the organization. Given the proven success of our internal coaching capability, GL&D is now beginning to focus on projects that leverage that coaching expertise to support specific internal business and workforce requirements and initiatives, including

- Acclimation of graduates and transitioned leaders
- Career development
- Talent management
- Work-life balance workshops
- Diversity networks
- High-performance team coaching

Also high on the agenda is the formal development of a coaching curriculum and career path that enables professional coaches at EDS to provide appropriate coaching across the various levels of leadership.

Three years after embarking on a coaching initiative in support of its global transformation, EDS is now recognized internally and externally for its global coaching offerings and capabilities. In March 2007, EDS was awarded the International Coach Federa-

tion (ICF) Prism Award for excellence in coaching by the ICF North Dallas chapter and will be in the running for the global award later this year.

Conclusion

In a highly diverse global workforce, where productivity is ever increasing, a leader's ability to empower and assist others to come up with solutions is a critical competency for organizational success. Coaching provides a common framework, and in many cases a springboard, for every leader and employee to think and communicate in new ways that bring about innovative solutions and deliver high-impact results. EDS will continue to systemically embed coaching in the way leaders operate throughout the organization. This has the capacity to promote a leadership and performance culture that further inspires the workforce to fully engage and achieve EDS's business objectives.

Notes

1. Ideas and models pertaining to a "brain-based" approach to coaching are owned by Results Coaching Systems International, headquartered in Sydney, Australia.
2. First published in *A brain-based approach to coaching*, by D. Rock, based on an interview with J.M. Schwartz, *International Journal of Coaching in Organizations*, 4(2), 2006, 32-43.

Jane Moran is the global program manager for Transformational Leadership Coaching at Electronic Data Systems Corporation, as well as a Coaching Skills instructor and professional coach trainer. She established the first global coaching initiative at EDS and went on to play an instrumental role in establishing the EDS Global Learning & Development Mentoring & Coaching Portfolio. She can be contacted at jane.moran@eds.com.
