

Cracking the Code for Building an Internal Coaching Culture in Academia

How Leadership was Bolstered in the Disruptive Time of COVID-19

“Coaching is a partnership with clients [coachees] in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.”

— The International Coaching Federation

1. Executive Summary / Intro

With the onset of COVID-19 in 2020, the world was forever changed. Experts say we are on the cusp of the 5th Industrial Revolution where the way we work, live, play and learn has been transformed. A paradigm shift is necessary for leaders to deal with the challenges ahead. While stress for leaders has never been higher, coaching has never been more necessary and accessible.

Giant corporate organizations, such as Google and Cisco Systems, incorporate internal coaching as part of an employee's learning and development plan. As the value of coaching becomes more widespread, academia has begun to also implement internal coaching strategies.

Repeatedly, when this project came up in professional coaching circles, predominantly the ones that dealt with the academic organizational system, we heard: “We want to achieve the same outcomes. What tips and tools can you provide? I hope you wrote this all down; we don't have time to recreate the wheel.” We have been asked by several universities the question of “How?”

This paper is a collaborative effort between Cornell University and Assenter Coaching, LLC to assist others in creating a repeatable, sustainable and ethical internal coaching practice within academia.

2. A. The Need for Building an Internal Coaching Culture in Academia

As a higher learning institution where excellence is predicated on professional and personal development, Cornell has been employing external coaches for more than a decade with great success. However, when the university wanted to expand outreach from the highest level of leaders to other high-potential and influential leaders, the cost was found to be prohibitive. The average cost of an external coach was anywhere from \$10,000 to \$30,000 dollars per year, equating to a cost of millions of dollars to the system. While reaping many anticipated benefits, the financial cost was not sustainable in the long run. In the fourth

quarter of 2018, Cornell's Vice President and AVP of Organizational Development and Effectiveness approached Assenter Coaching LLC about bringing an ICF-accredited Executive Coach Certification (XCC) program in-house.

The timing around building this internal coaching culture was fortuitous. The onslaught of COVID-19 brought many budget cuts, including all external coaching and consultants, bringing this crucial area of talent development to a halt. Since 360 instruments and other self-assessments are administered by professional consultants, these key professional development components would have ceased, if not for the development of an internal coaching program.

It was at this point that a collaborative effort began between the AVP of Organizational Development and Effectiveness at Cornell University and Assenter Coaching, LLC. Together, they co-created an internal coaching program, rolling out two cohorts in Fall 2019 and Spring 2020.

B. The Goal

Through the development of a coaching culture, Cornell aspires to create individual and organization effectiveness among senior leaders, managers, faculty and staff in alignment with HR's priorities to:

- 1) Support university leadership in creating a climate of innovation and educational excellence,
- 2) Foster a forward-thinking, solution-oriented work environment, and
- 3) Offer competitive programs, services, pay and benefits to attract and retain diverse, high-caliber faculty and staff.

This aligns with Cornell's mission to discover, preserve and disseminate knowledge, to educate the next generation of global citizens and to promote a culture of broad inquiry throughout and beyond the Cornell community. Building the capacity of faculty and staff to develop strategies to meet this vision can lead to an empowering employee experience and engagement with the capabilities to effectively advance Cornell's mission, vision and reputation.

C. The Challenges to Address:

- The difference between professional coaching and other modalities, such as counseling, mentoring and consulting, needs to be determined up front. This serves to level-set expectations for people who are new to coaching and accustomed to problem-solving.

- To maintain the integrity of the program, we needed to ensure confidentiality between coachee and coach, given that the coaches are HR representatives, and first-line managers are often curious and inquisitive about coaching content.
- Set expectations up front with the manager and coachee regarding the coaching process and rules of engagement.
- The necessity to develop expectations regarding a check-in among the coach, coachee and manager midway through a coaching engagement and at its conclusion, while being time-conscious.
- Many people receiving coaching wanted to remain anonymous. In order to track who received coaching, a confidential process that includes the identification of the coachee must be put in place. Ultimately, the coachee needs to be identified in order to report out on ROI.
- The role of HR is typically consultative. Teaching HR professionals to be coaches requires a change in mindset and approach. Questions are leveraged to gain answers from coachees, rather than providing answers in a consultation format.
- In order to market the coaching program to executives and other HR directors (not involved in this process), we engaged them as coachees when the coaches underwent their certification practicum. Leader involvement allowed them to learn about and experience coaching. This imbued leaders with confidence in the program and recommendations that individuals on their team engage in internal coaching.
- Determine the coachability of the issue and/or person up front to ascertain if the coachee is ready for the process of self-awareness and the possibility of shifting to a new perspective. See Addendum 1: *Coaching Readiness Assessment*

3. A. Approach

1. Train and certify internal coaches in Colleges/Units across campus to build the capacity to address current and future coaching demand.
2. Make coaching available to address organizational needs (i.e., high-potential talent, developmental needs, assist leaders in strategic management and organizational change).

3. Train supervisors and staff through “Leader as Coach” to increase coaching competency that will support one another’s ability to identify purpose, passions and possibilities.
4. Publish a vetted external coaching list and make it available to senior leaders and HR. Orient external coaches once a year on priorities and expectations.
5. Encourage individuals moving into new, complex, senior-level roles to engage an internal coach to increase time to proficiency and mitigate risk of derailment.

Standards of Coaching Practice for Coaches, whether internal or external:

- Conversations between coach and coachee are confidential – See [ICF Ethics](#) and ICF [Core Competencies](#).
- Promote learning and growth with coachee throughout the relationship.
- Build long-term strategy, capabilities, problem-solving and processing skills of coachee.
- Ask empowering, open-ended questions
- Create opportunities for the coachee to think through and discover strategies to help realize their strengths and enable their effectiveness.
- Co-create goals and an action plan with coachee to increase success.
- Focus on individual development, linking it to institutional mission, organizational priorities and achieving desired outcomes.
- Leverage assessment and tools as appropriate (e.g., Hogan, Strengths, EQi2.0, 360s, culture in the workplace). Instruments to be debriefed by a certified professional and shared with the coach for use in coaching sessions.

Graph I: Flow of Intention

Coaching Delivery		Client / Coachee		Outcome
Internal Certified/ Credentialed Coaches	>>>>	Coach senior leaders, faculty, managers and staff outside their college, unit or department in alignment with ICF coaching ethics	=====	Improved Individual and Organizational Effectiveness
Managers	>>>>	Coach their staff and others in their network		
External as Coach	>>>>	Coach senior leaders and faculty		

Graph II: Coaching Engagement Process

<p align="center">Sponsor/Supervisor Initiated Internal or External Coach</p>	<p align="center">Employee Initiated – Internal Coach</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Supervisor/sponsor offers a direct report to a coach. Direct report agrees to engage. 2) Supervisor/sponsor contacts Kathy Burkgren, who proposes names of coaches to leadership; coach is selected and name of potential coach(es) shared with coachee. 3) Potential coach and client have an initial, confidential, one-on-one meeting to determine fit. 4) Coach meets with supervisor/sponsor to discuss and document desired expectations, outcomes and learning outcomes of coachee. 5) Coach meets with supervisor/sponsor and coachee to discuss and document desired expectations, goals and learning outcomes. 6) Confidential one-on-one coaching begins. Engagement is a minimum of six sessions in four months, meeting approximately every three weeks, and up to 6-12 months. 7) At the end of the engagement, coachee and coach review learning outcomes in preparation for communicating with the coachee’s sponsor. 8) Communication to sponsor can be done in one of two ways: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A) Coachee drafts a brief write-up, outlining the frequency of meetings, topics and outcomes. The coachee then partners with the coach to finalize the write-up. Coach sends the finalized learning outcomes to the sponsor/supervisor, copying the coachee. If the sponsor desires, there is a check-in meeting with the coachee, coach and sponsor. B) A brief document is not prepared. Coach, coachee and supervisor/sponsor meet to discuss outcomes aligned to expectations, learning outcomes and their individual development plan. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Initiates conversation with a supervisor and ties outcomes to the individual development plan. 2) Coachee reaches out to Kathy regarding interest. Determine coach. 3) Employee engages coach. 4) Coach and coachee have an initial one-on-one meeting to determine fit. 5) Coach meets with coachee to discuss and document desired expectations and outcomes. 6) Confidential one-on-one coaching begins. Engagement may be one session or multiple. 7) At the end of the coaching engagement, coach and coachee review outcomes. 8) Employee circles back to supervisor and shares key takeaways aligned to the individual development plan.

Most important is that the coach, sponsor and coachee are clear about the coaching engagement process they will use prior to the start of the coaching sessions.

Data Collection: Create two separate coaching logs – one for external coaches and one for internal coaches — to track the following for use in the creation of analytics to inform development/training needs.

Graph III: Sample Log* (date, coach, confidential identification of coachee)

*co-created to find the best way to report, considering challenges around confidentiality

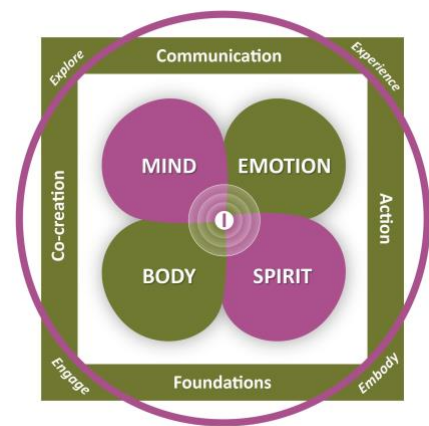
Date	Coach	Confidential Coachee ID	Topics Coached (drop down bucket)	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Anxiety ● Behavioral/Competency development ● Bringing joy and meaning to life ● Career development ● Effective communication ● Communication under stress ● Communicating through conflict ● Conflict management ● Creating engagement ● Culture/Climate ● Delegation ● Developing emotional intelligence ● Difference between leadership and management in academia ● Difficult conversations ● Diversity and inclusion ● Executive in new role, transition ● Executive presence ● Dealing with generational differences ● Gender ● Handling issues where faculty behave badly ● High potential ● Imposter syndrome ● Increasing collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increasing confidence ● Influencing others ● Leader development ● Leading people and teams ● Mindfulness ● Navigating Cornell ● Navigating through politics ● Navigating through uncertainty ● Onboarding faculty ● Organizational design ● Organizational politics ● Priority management ● Manager support ● Managing multiple priorities ● Job fit ● Networking/Mentoring ● Race ● Relationship building ● Resilience ● Self-awareness – figuring out what gets in the way of success ● Soft skills ● Strategic planning and direct setting ● Structuring an effective governance process ● Team motivation/building to get results ● Thinking strategically ● Time management ● Vision and strategy ● Unlovable ● Work life balance

Connecting Coaches for Continuous Alignment and Integrity

- Host meetings for internal credentialed coaches bi-annually to discuss the culture-change effort, explore approaches and share advances, best practices, challenges, ongoing training and general information.
- Hold sessions annually with external coaches to educate and inform them of shifts and themes around the big picture at Cornell to align with their coaching engagements.

B. Coaching Philosophy: An Integrative Methodology

Cornell University's vision is to be the exemplary comprehensive research university for the 21st century. Faculty, staff and students thrive because of its unparalleled combination of its collaborative and innovative culture. Core values include purposeful discovery, open expression and a community of belonging. Leveraging a coaching model that incorporated the essence of an integrated leader and collaborating with an ICF-accredited coach training program were critical components to creating a coaching culture at Cornell. The Assenter Coaching Model fit due to its integrative methodology encompassing mind, body, emotion and spirit. This model also contains the International Coaching Federation's (ICF) core competencies and is grounded in the cornerstones of "Engage, Explore, Experience and Embody."



C. Coaching Reach: How to Promote Coaching Within the Organization

- **Leadership Involvement:**
Create visibility. A key component to gaining visibility that internal coaching was available happened through the linkage between Internal Coach Training (XCC) and executive leaders who participated as coachees. As part of the internal coach certification program, executive leaders were invited to be coached by the newly trained internal coaches. This exercise provided the coach with valuable experience, resulting in greater coaching confidence. In addition, leaders experienced coaching first-hand, and "word of mouth" advertising for the internal coaching program ensued.
- Build program awareness with senior leaders and HR Directors so as coaching needs arise they know about the program and whom to contact, and they experience how easy it is to match talent with a coach.

- Advertise the coaching program to staff and faculty. Those who are ready, engage.
- Offer coaching to new hires and new functional leads as part of the on-boarding process.
- Sustain a coaching presence. HR coaches sustain a coaching presence and offer coaching vs. consulting when appropriate in their respective roles.

4. Intended Impact / Expected Outcome

The ROI of executive coaching has been measured by quite a few indices over the past two decades. The latest information has been consistent throughout:

- Improved executive productivity (reported by 53% of executives)
- Improvements in organizational strengths (48%)
- Increased retention of executives (32%)
- Enhanced direct report/supervisor relationships (>70%)
- Improved teamwork (67%)
- Improved peer-to-peer working relationships (63%)
- Great job satisfaction (52%) *

Measurement: Inception of Coaching Initiative at Cornell

Organizational Assessment and ROI

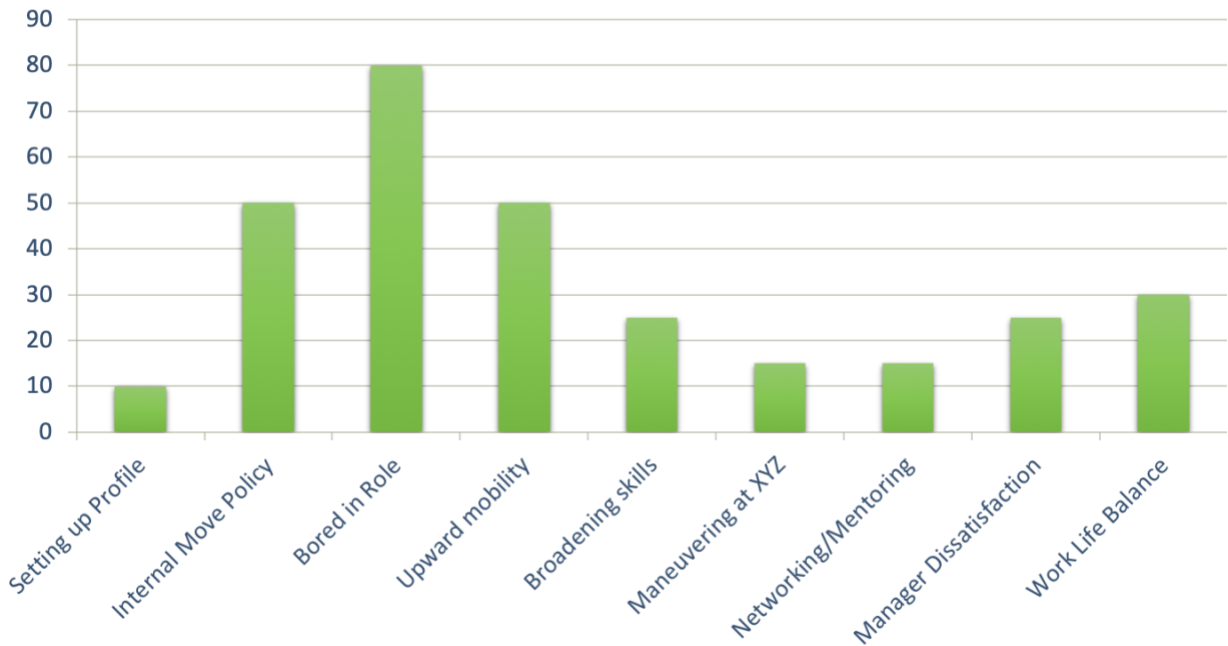
- Quantify number of people coached
- Track career movement subsequent to coaching as compared to the organizational average
- Cite retention of individuals coached as compared to organizational average
- Identify demographics of those coached with an inclusivity audit

Once in place, the internal coaching program can provide data to the learning and development department and/or HR to best target training while maintaining the confidentiality of session content. For example, in the below chart IVa, the coachee is simply identified by the coach's initials and the client number, i.e.; LN013 = Laura Neal, client 13. The organization can then identify what items would be included in the report, such as geography (region), grade level, function and overarching theme for the coaching engagement based on a dropdown menu.

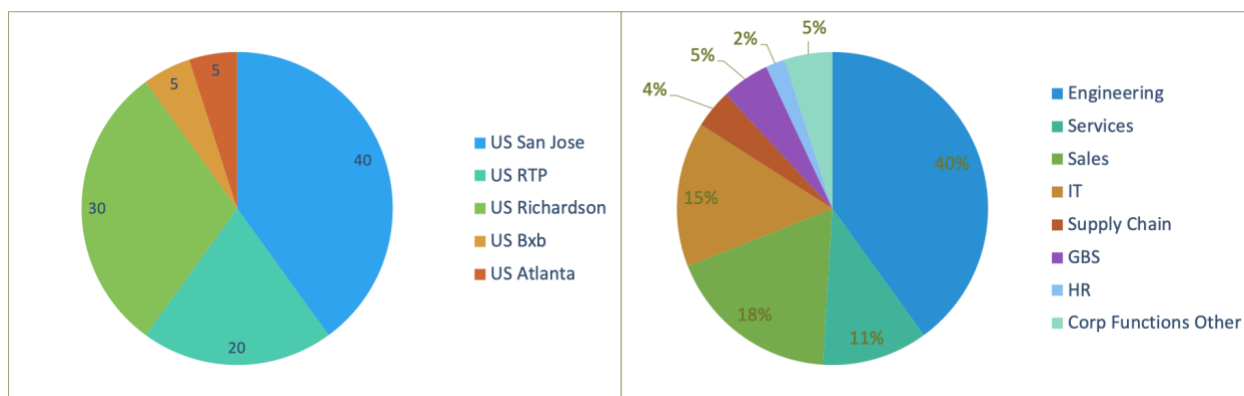
Chart IVa: Report handed into HR by the internal coach

Date	Employee Client Code	Region	Grade	Organization	Themes
3-Aug	LN013	Non-US	11	Sales	Work Life Balance
13-Aug	LN014	Non-US	11	Sales	Work Life Balance
3-Sep					
6-Oct					
20-Aug	LN024	Non-US	13	Services	Broadening skills
8-Oct					
20-Oct					
24-Aug	LN025	US RTP	14	Sales	Maneuvering at XYZ
14-Sep					
10-Jul					
13-Jul	LN030	US Atlanta	10	Engineering	Maneuvering at XYZ
29-Sep	LN031	US Other	11	GBS	Maneuvering at XYZ
22-Oct					

Graph IVb: Overarching coaching themes



Graph IVc: Top locations and functions that use coaching



Coach Assessment:

Measure coachee satisfaction with the coaching experience/effectiveness using a short survey, based on the ICF Competencies with a 1-5 scale. On the assessment note: “Your individual response will not be shared with the coach. Only aggregated information will be shared to continue enhancing our coaching practice.” This will ensure anonymity and trust for honest feedback.

Sample Survey

1. Demonstrated personal integrity and honesty in interactions
2. Was sensitive to your identity, environment, experiences, values and beliefs
3. Maintained confidentiality
4. Demonstrated self-awareness and the ability to maintain their emotions
5. Partnered with you to create clear agreements about the coaching relationship, process, plans and goals
6. Partnered with you to create a safe, trusting and supportive environment that allowed you to share freely
7. Was fully conscious and present with you throughout the coaching engagement
8. Actively listened and responded appropriately
9. Facilitated your insights and learning
10. Partnered with you to transform your learning and insight into action

11. Coachee would be willing to recommend the coach to other colleagues

5. Conclusion

Implementation:

1. Find a coach training organization that is ICF-accredited and meets your vision as an institution. Collaboration is a key component to the success and engagement of the coach training. For Cornell, it was important that this organization was willing to be adaptable, open, tenacious and solution-oriented.
2. Leverage leadership programs already in place to cross-pollinate leaders to experience coaching first-hand. This initiative provides your newly trained internal coaches with real experience and learning.
3. Identify and socialize what coaching is and isn't, the need for confidentiality and what the process is for reporting out and up.

Impact:

1. At the date of publication, Cornell has seen 140 people coached by 20 coaches, with a growth rate that expands each month.
2. A positive shift in the perceived value of coaching.
3. A deeper impact around behavioral changes associated with 360-assessment feedback due to the coaching received thereafter.
4. No discretionary funding was available during the pandemic, so the internal coaching sustained the professional development of the system.

Lessons learned:

- Leverage the executive leaders as participant coachees in the coach training so they experience the value of coaching first-hand.
- The maintenance of confidentiality is paramount to the integrity of the program. Currently at Cornell, one person is the sole conduit for all coaching engagements, matching coachee with coach, and gathering data to track internal coaching assignments.
- Gather data to ascertain ROI metrics. External coaches were resistant to providing information, even in the dropdown menu format. This discussion needs to be had during the onboarding process of external coaches.
- Utilize internal coaches as one type of response to Title IX sanctions to help individuals develop effective strategies for appropriate interactions.

6. What's possible for your organization?

In closing, the collaborative process of creating this internal coaching culture has proven to be timely and highly cost-effective. The generation of integrated leaders has a profoundly positive impact on the organizational system. If you have any questions, comments or would like to discuss any portion of launching your own internal coaching culture, please do not hesitate to reach out to any of the authors listed below.

7. About the Authors:

Dr. Kathryn Burkgren is the AVP of Organizational Development and Effectiveness at Cornell University. She consults, designs and facilitates in the areas of major functional and system changes, strategic planning, workforce planning and organizational structure. Kathy also is dedicated to the areas of diversity and inclusion, leadership and talent development, team development, process improvement and succession planning. She is a certified, ICF-accredited executive coach.

She leads a team that provides consulting, coaching and training across Cornell's campuses as well as Cornell Interactive Theatre Ensemble (CITE), which delivers diversity and inclusion and sexual harassment education at Cornell and to corporations and peer institutions. She provides strategic direction and leadership to campus leaders as well as for-profits and not-for-profits, aligning services and programs to the mission and goals of the organization.

Kathryn served as a board member of the National Consortium for Continuous Innovation (NCCI) in higher education from 2009-15. She served as president of the NCCI board from July 2011 to July 2013. She received the NCCI Brent Ruben Award for her efforts at turning the organization around after the 2008 financial crisis.

She holds a Ph.D. from Cornell University in educational psychology, with an emphasis in organizational behavior.

Maria Glenn, PCC, CPCC, is an executive and performance coach who has a passion for developing high-potential talent. A Merck & Company veteran of 25 years, Maria is all too familiar with corporate quandaries. The goal of her coaching is for her clients to be extremely successful without having to sacrifice optimal fulfillment. Her wealth of experience at Merck also included sales, marketing, training, management and internal coaching. Empowered to go out on her own, Maria co-founded Assenter Coaching, LLC as a vehicle to custom design organizational training that enhances leadership, improves productivity and reaches goal attainment. When Maria steps into the

leadership and development space, executive coaching is inherently built within the programming to lock in the learning and create transformation that sticks.

A graduate of The Coaches Training Institute, Maria was certified by the International Coach Federation in 2009. In 2018, Assenter Coaching launched an executive coaching certification course so students can choose a more business-minded path. An international speaker, Maria enjoys sharing her expertise on conscious leadership with her personal brand of fun and humor.

Laura Neal, ACC, CSD, is an expert executive coach, Spiritual Director and facilitator specializing in authentic, conscious, soul-led leadership. A lifelong career woman, Laura stepped out of her senior management position at Cisco Systems, Inc. to pursue executive coaching with the vision to change the face of organizational culture. The trials and tribulations of corporate politics taught her that a successful career requires being in touch with your own needs, desires and definition of fulfillment.

Laura has held her ICF credential since 2016 and later co-founded Assenter Coaching, LLC, where in 2018 she co-created and launched the Executive Coach Certification (XCC) Program, an ICF ACSTH-accredited training program. She holds various assessment tool certifications and is a Certified Spiritual Director (CSD). Her clients range from individual contributors to senior executives to priests and pilgrims, all of whom have the common goal of searching for a life that connects their core values and unique gifts with a career of purpose. Always attracted to the intangible power of spirit, she believes coaching to the soul always discerns the right goal.

8. References:

[*What Can Coaches Do for You?*](#)

[*The ROI of Coaching: Executive Coaching Statistics \(Updated for 2021\)*](#)

[*Harold D. Craft Leadership Program*](#)

[*The Realities of Executive Coaching*](#)

Addendum 1: Coaching Readiness Assessment



www.assentercoaching.com

Assenter Coaching, LLC Coaching Readiness Assessment

Are you prepared to receive coaching?

Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible by ascribing a numerical value (1 – 10) to the following:

(1 = not at all, 10 = always)

- I am committed to investing the time and energy necessary for coaching _____
- I am open, curious and committed to learning _____
- I regularly ask for feedback from colleagues, peers and subordinates _____
- Upon receiving feedback, I accept it willingly and do not defend my stance _____
- I believe vulnerability can be a strength _____
- I tend to collaborate since my ideas and perspectives might not always be best _____
- I believe I have blind spots _____
- I am willing to try new behaviors, even if they are a stretch or unfamiliar _____
- I will have candid conversations with my coach about my feelings _____
- I often take 100 % responsibility for challenging situations _____

* Coaches note (to be removed before sending to client):

- If score is greater than 50, your client is most likely ready for coaching.
- If score is less than 50, we suggest an additional conversation to determine if there is a fit for coaching at this time

Addendum 2: Cornell Executive Coaching Agreement



Cornell University

Executive Coaching Agreement

Between [redacted] and [redacted]

This agreement outlines the standards, procedures and structure of internal coaching at Cornell. If you have any questions, please contact me directly Email: [redacted] Phone: [redacted]. It is my intention to help you reach your goals and achieve greater personal and professional success through executive coaching.

Coaching Description: We will establish your goals for success early in our coaching relationship and regularly assess progress along the way.

We will meet approximately every [redacted] weeks for [redacted] months and then assess if we continue meeting. We can meet in person, by telephone or via online platform and our meetings will be 50 – 60 minutes in length.

Standards of Coaching Practice:

The sponsor and coachee can expect the coach to abide by the following:

- Ensure conversations between coach and coachee are kept confidential to the extent appropriate in this setting. Given that both the coach and the coachee are Cornell employees, the coach will remain bound by Cornell policies to report any and all alleged violations of law and/or Cornell policy. Other than those constraints, per International Coaching Federation (ICF) ethics, the coach will only talk with the sponsor about the individual being coached (client) in the presence of the coachee.
- Promote learning and growth with coachee throughout a relationship.
- Build long-term capabilities, problem-solving skills and processing skills of client.
- Ask empowering, open-ended questions – what, how, when, who, where – to create opportunities for you to think and discover solutions to become more competent, successful and effective.
- Provide feedback and develop action steps with you to increase success.
- Focus on individual development, linking it to organizational priorities and achieving outcomes.
- Leverage assessment and tools as appropriate (e.g. Hogan, Strengths, EQi2.0, 360s). A certified professional will review the instrument with you, and the coach will use chosen tools when coaching.

First Session: The initial session will provide me with an opportunity to get to know you and for you to better understand what is important to you as a leader.

Coaching Agreement Specifics:

- First, the coachee and coach agree there is a fit. If a sponsor exists, the first meeting will be held with the sponsor, coachee and coach to clarify roles, expectations, learning outcomes, confidentiality and the following bullet points:
- Verbal and/or written information exchanged under this coaching agreement will remain strictly and mutually confidential between the coach and coachee, except when meeting with the sponsor or when the coach is obliged to report any alleged violations of law and/or Cornell policy.
- As the coachee, you will commit to completing any fieldwork/homework agreed upon in-between sessions.
- The coaching relationship can be terminated at-will, by either party, with one-week verbal or written notice.



Cornell University

- At the end of the engagement, we will review your learning outcomes in preparation for communicating with your supervisor/sponsor. The communication with your sponsor can be done in one of three ways:
 - 1) You draft a brief write-up outlining the frequency, topics, outcomes agreed upon at the start of the coaching engagement. You partner with me to finalize the document. I will send the finalized learning outcomes to your sponsor and copy you. If sponsor desires, there is a check-in meeting between the three of us.
 - 2) If desired, we meet with your sponsor to discuss outcomes aligned to expectations, learning outcomes, and items agreed upon at the start of the coaching engagement.
 - 3) You draft a brief write-up (as described in #1 above) and we meet with your supervisor/sponsor to discuss outcomes aligned to expectations, learning outcomes and items agreed upon at the start of the coaching engagement.
 - 4) Coachee is encouraged to provide verbal feedback to the coach to support the coach’s development. Coachee will also be asked to complete a short coaching experience/effectiveness assessment. The coachee’s individual response will not be shared with the coach (unless you specify otherwise). Only aggregated information will be shared to continue enhancing our coaching practice.

Coaching Investment:

Coaching is a valuable investment in yourself to help you **be more successful in leveraging your skills and talents in your role and in all areas of your life**. If this feels like a fit for you, please indicate your acknowledgement and agreement by signing below and returning the signed copy of this letter prior to the start of our first session.

I look forward to partnering with you!

Sincerely,

Coach signature and date

Coachee Signature and date

Sponsor Signature and date

Name | | Email | | Phone number |