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The Multidisciplinary Coach

Linda Layton, PhD

According to Flaherty, “coaching is a way of working with people that leaves them more competent and more fulfilled so that they are more able to contribute to their organizations and find meaning in what they are doing.”

Multidisciplinary coaching (Mc) expands the classic way of working Flaherty refers to in four distinct areas: in philosophy and approach, in process, in attitude and competence, and in resources.

In Philosophy & Approach

It expands our way of thinking about leadership and organizational development by deliberately considering the various disciplines seeking to explain human behavior to answer basic questions about the nature of individuals and groups. It also considers what can be learned from non-humanistic disciplines. It is a way of working with people that connects insights from those disciplines with observed

behavior to “redefine problems outside of normal boundaries and reach solutions based on a new understanding of complex situations” (definitions.net). It helps clients bridge the gap between ideas that resonate and action; to determine what needs to be done.

In Process

There is a process to coaching – beginnings and endings. The upfront investment in time and energy to build rapport, trust, assessment, and commitment to an agenda is highly consistent across coaching relationships. Followed then by focused work, measuring success, and closing. Mc draws upon many helping-professions to identify the best how’s for each phase. It’s a process that integrates multiple models to create an ever-improving, holistic coaching relationship that will make each engagement more meaningful, more robust.

In Attitude & Competence

Throughout all phases of an engagement, the multidisciplinary coach has both the willingness and the ability to flex among roles to meet client’s needs. This way of coaching requires and grants permission to bring a full suite of knowledge, skills, and experience to the engagement. We most certainly coach. And we also consult, advise, strategize, teach, facilitate, observe, and assess. The attitude is guided by holism. We do not stop the

Idea In Brief

Multidisciplinary Coaching expands traditional thinking about executive and leadership coaching in four ways:

- Philosophy & Approach
- Process
- Attitude & Competence
- Resources

flow of a session to declare what role we are playing – we focus on meeting client needs, not our identity needs. In addition to what you would expect from any formally trained executive or leadership coach, the Mc must be a systems thinker, a perpetual student and sharer of learning.

multidisciplinary

mul·ti·dis·ci·pli·nar·y
(mŭl'tī-dīs'ə-plə-nēr'ē, -fī-)
adj.

Of, relating to, or making use of several disciplines at once

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In Resources

A primary resource for a coach is our knowledge, skills, and experience. We develop that suite into ways of developing rapport, uncovering substance for coaching, and formulating the powerful questions that are the core of coaching. The Mc has an ever-growing suite of multidisciplinary tools to identify and solve real problems – finding that just-right resource that resonates,

that sticks. One might reach the highly analytic engineer with a reference to physics or Feynman or foster deeper situational understanding with an analogy to mathematics or statistics models. The point is that many of us may limit ourselves to the typical tools of psychology when we can be expanding our ability to help by including analogies, references, and powerful questions that are offered by multiple disciplines.

The Benefits

Many of our greatest minds drew upon multiple disciplines to maximize their contribution. Charlie Munger became a self-taught beacon for the value of mental models – inspiring others to pay attention to the strong connection between understanding human behavior, how people think, and leading a successful investment organization. Richard Feynman, among the most brilliant minds in physics, also wrote and lectured extensively on politics, religion, and human behavior. Daniel Kahneman's multidisciplinary exploration of unconventional hypotheses, led to research that fundamentally changed what we know about human decision making.

The multidisciplinary coach applies the idea to leadership development. As development partners, being multidisciplinary has the potential to create a more competent and qualified profession, with expanded, well-rounded competencies. Where we are at risk of doing so, it will help us be less of an echo chamber, less inclined to bandwagon jumping; less fragmented. We may be less jargony, more understandable and relatable, more inspirational; more positively challenged and fulfilled ourselves. Perhaps most important, though, is the potential to be a profession with expanded abilities to meet the complex needs of our clients. Better problem solvers.

As Michelle Gelfand put it, recalling a conversation with Karl Popper "We're not students of some subject matter, we're students of problems. And problems cut across different areas."

Coaching clients live in a complex world and work within complex systems. Their success is inextricably tied to the contexts and situations in which they must lead. A multidisciplinary coach is adaptive to a client's unique circumstances and needs.

We leverage a flexible, systems approach that truly meets clients where they are – often many places at once – and with what they need to create sustainable change that others will notice.

Jack of all trades master of none? Not necessarily. The Mc has passions and specialty areas of interest but is not defined by them...we are more than our areas of specialty.

“Each specialist sees something different. By default, a typical Engineer will think in systems. A psychologist will think in terms of incentives. A biologist will think in terms of evolution. By putting these disciplines together in our head, we can walk around a problem in a three-dimensional way. If we’re only looking at the problem one way, we’ve got a blind spot.”
- Farnam Street

The Bottom Line

Many, if not a majority, of us are already being multidisciplined. In conversations with coaches, however, it seems to be either unconscious or something they feel they shouldn't admit to doing. The Multidisciplinary Coach seeks to change that phenomenon. As a profession, it lets us recognize the value of expanding our philosophy, approach, process, attitude, competence and resources with multiple disciplines. It lets us be deliberate about it and aware of its impact on our abilities and on our client's success. As a profession, it lets us be fans of and join others who unapologetically stepped outside of their professional disciplines to expand knowledge and, in so doing, maximized their contribution.

In what ways will Multidisciplinary Coaching be useful to you?

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I'm Linda Layton and I'm a Multidisciplinary Coach. I'm also an analyst, researcher, curator of the un/not yet popular, overlooked, or left behind, solopreneur, and matriarch.

*The purpose of **The Multidisciplinary Coach** is to provide a platform to cultivate and integrate multiple points of view into a cohesive approach to leadership and organizational development.*

Find me at my practice, www.pentafolddevelopment.com, or on LinkedIn.