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## Social Responsibility Through Coaching

How coaching is  
transforming the lives  
of the vulnerable

Coaching Leaders  
in Nonprofits

Social Entrepreneurs &  
Leadership Coaching

Helping the Helpers



# Social Responsibility Through Coaching

The value of not-for-profit coaching

Where is coaching provided to the not-for-profit sector and what is the impact? What are the differences in engagement with not-for-profits vs. for-profits? How does coaching inform and challenge the vision of the social profit sector? Does it help the sector in advancing a strengths-based approach to clients, recognizing their clients as the experts in their own lives? This issue explores how coaching in the not-for-profit sector is transforming the lives of the vulnerable.



# Building a Bridge

## Social entrepreneurs & leadership coaching

By Susan Jones, Esq., ACC, Holly Thompson, PhD, ACC & Wendee Wolfson, MBA, ACC

**T**hrough our experiences coaching early stage social entrepreneurs, we have studied the profound value of coaching for this unique group of entrepreneurs. Social entrepreneurs comprise an important subset of entrepreneurs in the U.S. and worldwide. While they have economic goals, they also pursue a social mission (people and planet) that benefits society.

This article discusses the findings of our research which examines how leadership coaching, a personalized form of individual and professional development co-created by the client and the coach, can help social entrepreneurs – often millennials age 25-34 – realize their dual goals of profit generation and social purpose. In addition to conducting re-

search, learning from our own coaching clients, and reflecting on our experiences, we interviewed leadership coaches, business incubator personnel, angel investors, social entrepreneurs and business professors.

The outcome of our research, although not exhaustive, can be summed up in the mnemonic and metaphor of a BRIDGE:

*Balance*  
*Relationships*  
*Isolation*  
*Dynamics*  
*Grounded*  
*Emotion*





incubators like S & R Foundation's Halcyon House and The Aspen Institute's Network of Development Entrepreneurs support social entrepreneurs and the businesses they are creating.

Researchers have discovered that social entrepreneurs are highly dependent on social capital for starting and managing their social ventures and that more than "traditional" entrepreneurs, they rely on their personal and professional connections in the community to carry out their mission.

### **How Can Leadership Coaches Help Social Entrepreneurs?**

Coaching is critical for early stage entrepreneurs, and while most entrepreneurs value mentoring and business coaching, leadership coaching is different. Social entrepreneurs often *want* coaching on strategy and transactional requirements, while they often *need* it around emotional intelligence and presence. Their influence skills become critical to their success, affecting their ability to enroll team members, raise funding, and develop customers.

Leadership coaching facilitates change and is transformational, forward looking, focused on possibilities, and "why not?" thinking. It goes beyond a purely tactical or current

These are the areas we found ripe for leadership coaching. These young social entrepreneurs are building the bridge as they cross.

Dees defined social entrepreneurs as people who are "change agents in the social sector by adopting a mission to create and sustain social value (not just private value)..."; who "relentlessly pursue new opportunities to serve that mission" while "engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning, acting boldly without being limited by resources currently in hand." They also exhibit "heightened accountability to the constituencies served for the outcomes created."

According to the *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Special Topic Report on Social Entrepreneurship*, social entrepreneurship is a growing phenomenon and about 3.2 percent of individuals worldwide are trying to start a social enterprise, while commercial enterprises worldwide average 7.6 percent. In the US, 8.3 percent of participants in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor reported leading a social enterprise and 7 percent are starting one.

The uptick in social entrepreneurship, fueled by advances in technology, is supported by university new venture and pitch competitions offering prize money for winning ideas. Business

**"Leadership coaching can help social entrepreneurs consider the vexing question of how to balance business success with their commitment to social entrepreneurship."**

view, narrowly focused on operations and incremental improvements (though coaching engagements may begin with or encompass tactical changes towards the broader goal).

Leadership coaches can help entrepreneurs with issues associated with their youth and inexperience, lack of formal work experience and a host of other issues. Coaches can ask powerful questions to unearth awareness and create support mechanisms and tools. Coaches champion clients' opportunities and potential, encourage them to stretch

based on their aspirations and personal strengths, and challenge clients to see blind spots, new possibilities and alternative scenarios.

### **Building the BRIDGE Balance**

Young social entrepreneurs wrestle with the daunting challenge and combined pressure of feeling solely responsible for the success of the business while manag-

“Social entrepreneurs often want coaching on strategy and transactional requirements, while they often need it around emotional intelligence and presence.”

ing teams, advisors and investors, and often, young families. Leadership coaching can help social entrepreneurs consider the vexing question of how to balance business success with their commitment to social entrepreneurship and to consider compromises that often have to be made to get the enterprise up and running.

What if a key funder wants to alter the vision or modify the product? What if the transportation costs for an eco-friendly import exceed the potential sales? What if a mentor suggests testing the service in an easier population to access and assess? A coach can provide a safe place for clients to explore such conflicts, the necessity that feels like

compromise or the compromise that feels like a sacrifice of the vision.

### **Relationships**

Social entrepreneurs quickly learn that creating a solution for a social problem may require a whole new network or a significant expansion of an existing network. They must learn to manage relationships with various constituencies like co-founders, team members, investors, stakeholders and customers.

Clients sometimes come to individual coaching sessions after a dilemma has arisen, often around interactions with co-founders or team members. Coaches can support clients around these relationships, helping them understand the contributions of their team members and deal with conflicts between collaboration, efficiency and productivity.

Moreover, coaches can help social entrepreneurs practice the best ways to communicate with their networks. This may be particularly useful for millennials, who are adept at text and email but often less comfortable with in-person or telephone communication.

### **Isolation**

Social entrepreneurs often feel isolated even in the midst of expanding their networks and growing their teams. Although incubators, accelerators and shared workspaces create a feeling of community, our research found that social entrepreneurs still felt alone and feared vulnerability even in those environments.

Coaches can provide that safe place to be vulnerable and help clients recognize that they don't have to be the smartest person in the room or have all of the answers. Coaches can instead help them learn how to ask the best questions, benefit from recommended books and other resources, and figure out how to get answers.

### **Dynamic**

As entrepreneurs bring on advisors and investors, the voices around the table grow louder and more numerous, each with its own agenda. While board members and investors provide guidance, connections and funding towards growing the business, leadership coaches advocate for learning around personal growth. Frank Ball, founding coach at Georgetown's Institute for Transformational Leadership and an active 'angel investor' notes that for many of those around the table, "the human side is not the last thing they look at – they *never* look at it."

The coaching relationship is most of all a place of safety, like shelter from the storm. In the midst of all of the surrounding noise, a coach can assist entrepreneurs with ways to find their voice, recognize and define their self, and develop clarity of purpose.

### **Grounded**

Media hype about entrepreneurship, such as the television shows *Shark Tank* and *The Profit*, aim to illustrate the highs and lows of entrepreneurship while entertaining audiences, but underrepresent both the daily challenges faced by entrepreneurs and the range of skills needed to succeed.

As Ryan Ross, Program Director at the Halcyon Incubator, observed for Halcyon Fellows, those ups and downs can be jarring. In our interviews, both coaches and clients alike reported that a strong sense of mission and clarity of values was the grounding force that created resilience and sustained young entrepreneurs during the startup phase.

A coach can help them examine opportunities, hold them accountable to the priorities they have established and manage timeframes. When faced with difficult decision points, coach Mike McGinley advises always asking that

essential coaching question, “for the sake of what?”

## Emotion

Daniel Goleman’s work on emotional intelligence indicates that important prerequisites for managing others effectively are self-awareness and then self-management. A coach can help entrepreneurs become more observant of the ways their actions are received by others.

One of our social entrepreneur interviewees said that she appreciated her coach’s ability to provide a mirror to help her see mental and physical habits, such as limiting beliefs and tone of voice, which one rarely sees about oneself. The ability to reflect on the impact of one’s habits is an essential component of a much longer-term effort in self-development, creat-

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ing abilities that are valuable towards leadership over a lifetime.

In addition to enabling them to become better observers of themselves and others, coaches help entrepreneurs create process, priorities and pathways. Along the way, coaches help entrepreneurs notice what data they take in and how to

process that data, all of which can lead to robust conversations, assessing whether to stay with their current game plan, pivot, or move on.

## Advice on Leadership Coaching from Social Entrepreneurs

Prior to coaching, most of our entrepreneurs viewed vulnerability as a liability and felt that there was an implicit presumption that any sort of intervention meant that one needed help or was doing something wrong. During coaching, they appreciated, almost above all else, the opportunity to be vulnerable in a safe setting.

Post-engagement, their advice to other social entrepreneurs is to embrace coaching, talk out loud about the hard stuff, reach out to others to enhance the chances for success, try not to be defensive, and accept that this is about more than business growth; it is about long-term personal development.

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