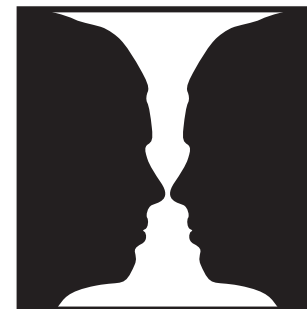


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GENERATION Y

Are British organisations ready for younger executive coaches? A Mixed Methods Study

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Abstract

Research within coaching (Feldman & Lankau, 2005) suggests that background characteristics may influence the perceived credibility of the coach. With an increase in the number of younger coaches entering the profession, this present study focuses particularly on the age of the coach as an influencing factor for clients when selecting a coach.

A mixed method design was adopted, with thirty four participants ranking their perceived importance of twenty-three coaches' attributes in an online survey. Qualitative data derived from semi-structured interviews with six coaches were analysed using Thematic Analysis. The results suggest that 'personal rapport' and 'effectiveness of coaching process' are the most valued attributes of potential executive coachees. 'Age' was ranked as fourth least important of twenty three attributes. However, themes emerging from the qualitative data suggest age can still be a barrier in the hiring of coaches aged under thirty. Practically, this research highlights particular challenges for Gen Y coaching practitioners and offers specific recommendations for young practitioners contemplating entering the executive coaching industry.

Keywords: *coach's age, young executive coaches, Generation Y, executive coaching*

Introduction

Researchers have argued for various coach characteristics as having an important role in influencing the coach-client relationship (cf. Joo, 2005; Passmore & Gibbes, 2007). However, the age of the coach has been relatively under-researched in comparison with other characteristics. As a term, 'Generation Y' is attributed to an editorial in *Ad Age* in 1993 ("Generation Y", 1993) and is generally used to refer to those born be-

tween 1982 and 2004 (Strauss & Howe, 2000). Data suggest that this generation may be more narcissistic, lazy and convinced of their inherent self-worth than previous generations (Stein, 2013). Collins (2014) states that 'Generation Y' workers will make up 50% of the global workforce within the next five years. As Generation Y practitioners enter the coaching industry, how willing might executive clients be to work with them? More broadly, how important is age in

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determining the appeal of potential coaches for executive clients?

Research typically defines younger coaches as those aged between 21 and 30 (e.g. Gale, Liljenstrand, Pardieu & Nebeker, 2002; Jenkins, Passmore, Palmer & Short, 2012). An executive coaching client may be defined as any person in a management role using the services of a coach (Olson, 2007).

Research regarding other professions suggests age does influence a client's selection of service providers, as follows. In healthcare, Varlaam, Dragoumis and Jefferys (1972) suggest older patients prefer older doctors and younger patients prefer younger doctors; these researchers assume such preferences could be reciprocated, with doctors preferring patients of their own broad age group. In counseling research, participants (college women and non-college women) prefer same sex, older counselors (Simons & Helms, 1976). Finally, in therapy, Anderson, Ogles, Patterson, Lambert and Vermeersch's study (2009) suggests the therapist's age influences the therapy's outcome: older therapists had larger rates of improvement reported by clients than younger therapists. Even though the therapist's age and experience (determined by number of completed cases) were not significantly correlated, Anderson *et al.* inferred that age serves as an indicator to clients of the accumulation of clinical experience needed for the therapist to master Facilitative Interpersonal Skills (FIS). Specifically, their study suggests that age and FIS are significantly correlated and that clients whose therapists have higher levels of FIS report larger rates of improvement, compared to clients of therapists with lower levels of FIS.

Within coaching research, Feldman and Lankau (2005) suggest background characteristics, such as age, education and work experience, may influence the perceived credibility of the coach and therefore impact upon the client's openness. According to Passmore (2010), clients not only look at coaches' behaviours, but also seek particular personal attributes.

The International Coaching Federation's global coaching study (ICF, 2009) asked coaching clients to rate the importance of twenty four attributes they might consider when selecting a coach. 'Personal rapport', 'Personal compatibility', 'Coach's confidence' and 'Effectiveness of coaching process' were the highest rated factors (rated as *very* or *somewhat*

important by 96% of respondents). Personal attributes such as ethnicity, physical appearance, gender and age were described as rarely considered (less than 50%) with only 34% of clients rating the coach's age *somewhat* or *very important*. The ICF report concludes that the personal attributes of a coach may sometimes be considered in selection decisions, but are not the key factors and, for the majority of clients, are not likely to have an impact.

In seeking to determine the age range of coaching practitioners, Gale, Liljenstrand, Pardieu and Nebeker (2002) studied demographic data from 1338 coaches. Only 2% of respondents were between 21-30, whereas 72% were between 41 and 60. The mean age for 'personal coaches' was 46 and for 'executive coaches' was 49. Grant and Zackon's (2004) online survey of ICF members found 41.8% of respondents to be 45-54 years of age. They reported no coaches under 25 years old amongst their 2529 respondents, with only 6% aged 26-35. Finally, Jenkins, Passmore, Palmer and Short (2012) showed 1% of 245 respondents to be 30 years of age or younger, whereas 54% were over 51.

These studies suggest that young coaches are a minority in the current coaching community. However, although it has yet to manifest itself in peer-reviewed research within coaching psychology, there is emerging evidence in gray literature that coaching is attracting practitioners significantly below the mean age (Morgan, 2012). As an example, in the year up to February 2014, 47 of 90 individuals attending an 'Association for Coaching' (AC) accredited coach training programme with the Ministry of Entrepreneurship were in their twenties, with a mean participant age of 30 (MOE, 2014).

The willingness of significantly younger practitioners to enter into the profession could be partly due to a shift in understanding of the purpose of executive coaching. Two decades ago, Judge and Cowell (1997), after conducting a survey of executive coaches' characteristics and backgrounds, stated: '*Very few are younger than 35; it seems reasonable to assume that many executives would find it difficult to accept advice from a very young coach*' (*ibid.*, p.72). There may since have been a shift in perception away from the coach as 'Adviser and sharer of experience'. According to a recent survey of executive coaching service buyers (Mann, 2013), a coach's role is now commonly considered to be facilitating clients to reach their own understand-

ing and solutions. If effective coaching arguably needs a skillset rather than a bank of experience, if coaches are less frequently required nowadays to give advice and lead the client, might this shift in perception enable Generation Y coaching practitioners - with the skillset but without decades of business experience - to be accepted by potential executive coaching clients?

The purpose of this research, therefore, was to determine what significance, if any, potential ex-

ecutive clients attach to a younger coach's age when selecting a coaching service. The research questions were: 'How significant is the young age of an executive coach, relative to other personal attributes, in a client's selection process?' and 'To what extent might the young age of a coach influence potential clients when selecting a coaching service provider?' A mixed method design was adopted with the aim that triangulation would provide validity to exploratory data in what is an emerging topic of research.

Study 1

Method

Participants and procedure

Between December 2013 and February 2014, potential participants were invited to complete an online survey. Only data from respondents working at managerial (or equivalent) or more senior levels, over 21 years of age, and with either prior experience of being coached or a clear intention to be coached in the near future, were used. From the total number of 54 participants, this filtering resulted in completed surveys being generated by 34 participants, eighteen of which were female and sixteen male. The mean age of respondents was 45, with an age range from 24 to 66. Participants were a convenience sample from a range of organisations within the UK that varied in terms of size, sector and geographic location.

A link to the survey, together with information about the study, was published on a business networking website and a professional coaching body's member forum. Respondents providing informed consent disclosed their biographical data prior to completing the twenty three survey items, followed by three open questions:

1. What is your preferred age for the coach that you would choose to be coached by - and why?
2. Do you think a person aged between 21 and 30 could be an effective coach? Please give the reasons for your answer.
3. From your point of view, are British organisations ready for young executive coaches? Please justify your answer.

Materials

An online survey using items derived from ICF's global coaching client study (2009) was uploaded to a survey hosting website. The original study contained twenty four items, grouped under five themes: Personal, Background, Experience, Reputation, How coaching is done. It was determined that two of the items from the original instrument ('compatibility' and 'personal rapport') were not meaningfully distinguishable to target participants. Therefore, they were replaced with the single item 'personal rapport', reducing the instrument from 24 to 23 items overall. A three point Likert-type scale ('Not important', 'Somewhat important', 'Very important') was employed to rate the importance of coach attributes.

Results

A scoring mechanism for the three point Likert-type scale ('Not important' = 0, 'Somewhat important' = 1 and 'Very important' = 2) resulted in a score range for each attribute of 0-2. Table 1 shows the means and standard deviation score for each item. (Table 1, next page).

Five of the twenty-three items produced a standard deviation score of 0.50 or lower, with 'Personal rapport' and 'Effectiveness of coaching process' scoring the lowest (0.24). The lowest level of consensus amongst respondents was for the attributes 'Experience with your industry or job' (0.72) and 'Level of formal education/schooling' (0.73). The variable of most interest for this study, 'Age', had an SD score of 0.54.

Table 1. Means and standard deviation scores for coaching attributes

Category	Attribute	Mean	SD
Personal	Age	0.62	0.54
	Gender	0.21	0.47
	Ethnicity	0.09	0.28
	Physical appearance	0.53	0.61
	The coach's voice	1.12	0.68
	Coach's confidence	1.82	0.38
	Personal rapport	1.94	0.24
	Sense of humour	1.41	0.55
Background	Level of formal education/schooling	0.85	0.73
	Level of coach-specific training	1.47	0.61
	Coaching credential or certification	1.47	0.50
	Curriculum vitae or resume	1.12	0.63
Experience	Number of clients served	0.91	0.61
	Years as a coach	0.97	0.51
	Experience with your industry or job	0.68	0.72
	Other relevant experience/background	0.94	0.68
Reputation	Personal referrals	1.38	0.59
	Client references	1.39	0.60
How coaching is done	Physical location of the coach	1.21	0.63
	Delivery method used	1.38	0.59
	Explanation of coaching process	1.68	0.47
	Effectiveness of coaching process	1.94	0.24
	Cost of coaching	1.47	0.55

As the central research question sought to determine the relative importance of age compared to other coach attributes, it is of relevance to rank the attributes from the highest to the lowest mean (Table 2).

These responses suggest the highest valued attributes in an executive coach are Personal rapport (1.94), Effectiveness of coaching process (1.94) and Coach's confidence (1.82). The attribute of central consideration is 'Age' which received a mean score of 0.62, ranking it 20th of the 23 attributes. If accurate, this suggests age is of lower significance in relation to other coach attributes when actual and potential executive clients are looking to select a coach.

Rating attributes of coaches: Discussion

Results derived from the statistical analysis were highly congruent with ICF's study (2009) where the most critical attributes to the selection process for the client were: Personal rapport, Personal compatibility, Coach's confidence and Effectiveness of coaching process (all four were rated as Somewhat or Very important by 96% of 2023 respondents). It is worth noting that the 'Personal Compatibility' attribute in the current research was merged with 'Personal Rapport'. This suggests that clients want to ensure they will get along with their coach, that their coach knows what they are doing and that they will achieve their objectives. Personal rapport in Wasylyshyn's study (2003) was named 'The abili-

Table 2. Coaching attributes, ranked by mean score

Attribute	Mean
Personal rapport	1.94
Effectiveness of coaching process	1.94
Coach's confidence	1.82
Explanation of coaching process	1.68
Level of coach-specific training	1.47
Coaching credential or certification	1.47
Cost of coaching	1.47
Sense of humour	1.41
Client references	1.39
Personal referrals	1.38
Delivery method used	1.38
Physical location of the coach	1.21
The coach's voice	1.12
Curriculum vitae or resume	1.12
Years as a coach	0.97
Other relevant experience/background	0.94
Number of clients served	0.91
Level of formal education/schooling	0.85
Experience with your industry or job	0.68
Age	0.62
Physical appearance	0.53
Gender	0.21
Ethnicity	0.09

ty to form a strong "connection" with the executive' and rated the most important characteristic of an effective executive coach by 86%. The characteristic involved connection, empathy, listening skills, warmth and building trust.

Answers to the open questions: Discussion

What is your preferred age for the coach that you would choose to be coached by - and why?

18 of the 34 respondents provided a specific age or age range for a coach, with 35 years of age or above the most commonly given. Many respondents stated this would enable them to connect with their coach through having similar experiences: '35 - 55 years as they have life experience and can relate

to some of my dilemmas' (Respondent #5). In the personal selling literature, Ewing, Pinto and Soutar (2001) suggest people experience meaningful interactions when they have similar backgrounds, characteristics, tastes and lifestyles, labelled as 'Common grounding behaviours'. Might it be that the perceived lack of common grounding behaviour might act as a barrier for Gen Y coaches?

Do you think a person aged between 21 and 30 could be an effective coach?

85% of respondents stated that a 21-30 year old could be an effective coach. They went on to identify a range of attributes that could make a young coach effective. These were: emotional intelligence, qualifications, references, level of maturity, experience, communication skills, freshness, spontaneity, honesty, ability to ask the right questions, build a professional and respectful relationship, training and wisdom.

One common theme in these answers, which could be labelled 'Closed Cycle' to demonstrate its 'Catch 22' nature, can be well represented by the following response: 'Yes, given the right training and coaching experience but may not have the breadth of experience to coach at an executive level.' (Respondent #28). The dilemma is that only those who have a chance to coach executives can gain this kind of coaching experience. However, young coaches in order to coach executive clients are expected to have the experience of coaching at an executive level already. In contrast, other respondents (11 out of 34) did not require this bank of experience: 'I do feel someone of this age group could be an effective coach, if someone has the skills and enthusiasm for coaching then it would not matter what age they are.' (Respondent #17). This creates a possible entry point for young coaches, but they will need to be able to source executive clients that share this viewpoint.

Are British organisations ready for young executive coaches?

Place in the Market

Respondents suggested there may be a range of market niches more readily available for younger coaches. Those mentioned: peer mentoring at secondary school level, sport, drama, coaching young executives within emerging micro businesses, media, telecom, web services and IT companies. Many of these niches represent more dynamic are-

as of business where the workforce is also typically young: *'I guess modern expertise like in technology or something trendy and new may be the exception in providing a hook to show the youth have the advantage - which I believe they have'* (Respondent #26). Respondents believed young British entrepreneurs that reached an executive level themselves at an early age would welcome coaching from someone of their own generation and mindset. Research conducted by Pew Research Centre (2010) suggested Generation Y is the most connected and open to technology and social media of all the generations. Generation Y's use of modern technology is largely what distinguishes them from other generations.

A majority of respondents described the hierarchical structure within corporations as creat-

ing a limiting access for younger coaches: *'In the organisation I work in there is snobbery with what level coach you get against what your role is i.e. Police Officers of Inspector rank and above wouldn't use anyone qualified below Level 5 ILM. So it's not about age and more about stature and standing in the organisation. (...)'*(Respondent #29). It can be concluded that the acceptability criteria for potential coaches may rise in correlation with the rank of the potential client. Some respondents argued that coaches should coach others if they were already in an equivalent role to their client. In addition, some stated that experience comes with age and that this could be determined by the coach's appearance: *'People think grey hair is an accurate indicator of credibility'* (Respondent #3). One respondent mentioned that young people are discriminated against in their workplace.

Study 2

Methods

Participants and procedure

A semi-structured design allowed themes from Study One to be explored and follow-up questions to spontaneously emerge during each thirty minute interview. These interviews also allowed triangulation to potentially counteract any weaknesses in both quantitative and qualitative research (Dawson, 2007). A purposive sampling strategy was adopted with the intention of obtaining a breadth of perspectives across different organisations and roles within the coaching profession. Interviews were conducted with the Chair of one professional coaching association and the COO of another, the founder of a global coaching training organisation and three Gen Y executive coaching practitioners.

Materials

The following standard questions were put to each participant:

1. How much of a factor is a coach's age when executive clients are choosing coaches?
2. Can the coaching 'profession' benefit from young people becoming certified coaches? If yes – in what way?

3. Which barriers and challenges can you foresee for young coaches entering the executive coaching industry?
4. What recommendations do you have for young executive coaches entering the industry?
5. Considering the development of coaching, is there a need for research into the role of age as a selection attribute?
6. What else might be worth investigating in this project?

Participants were informed that additional questions would emerge during the interview to allow a deeper understanding of their views.

Analysis of the Interviews

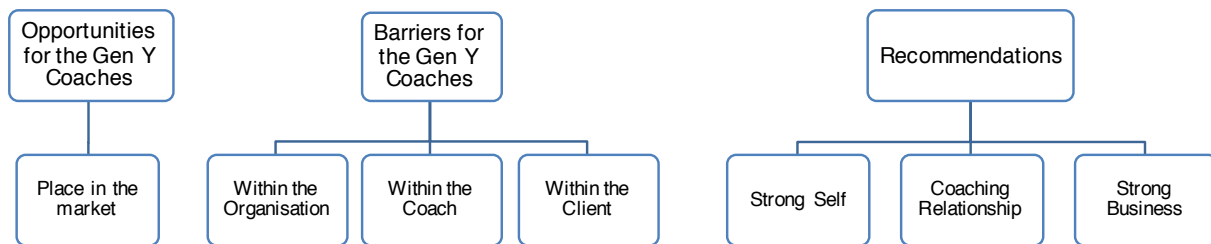
Figure 1 presents the main themes 'Opportunities for Gen Y Coaches', 'Barriers for Gen Y Coaches' and 'Recommendations', alongside subthemes that emerged through thematic analysis.

A: Opportunities for Gen Y Coaches

Subtheme: Place in the market

The theme encompasses suggestions for young coaches and possible niches that might be present in the market. A common statement was that the coach's age can be less of a barrier in life coaching, as the coach's role here is less advisory, whereas ex-

Figure 1. Emergent themes



executive coaching could be perceived as operating with an “archaic understanding” (Mann, 2013) of the ‘coach-as-adviser’. A common feeling about the value of such advice is typified in this comment:

What experience they have in their life is kind of irrelevant, in a way, simply because they are not going to follow the same path as a coach. That’s not really the aim of coaching.’(05:108-5:111)

Potential entry points for Gen Y coaches included personal coaching and third sector space including talent and young leader’s programmes, and coaching for SMEs and entrepreneurs. Half the interviewees mentioned ‘reversed coaching’ as a rising opportunity for the young. Its equivalent, ‘reverse mentoring’, exists as an innovative, cost-effective organisational approach to foster cross-generational relationships and develop millennial leaders. Starcevic (2001) perceives young people as coming with fresh eyes, open minds, and instant links to future technology. Energy, fresh insights, forward thinking and forward moving were seen as advantageous not only within IT companies but across all sectors. Younger coaches can also bring these same benefits to the coaching profession itself:

‘[Young coaches] would give a different dimension to other coaches that were born into the coaching industry ten, twelve, fifteen years ago.’ (3:43-3:45)

B: Barriers for Young Coaches

Subtheme: Within the Organisation

Joining organisations as a younger coach was identified as a challenge, as interviewees argued that age is widely considered a correlate of attributes that clients seek in coaches: qualifications, accreditation, supervision, CPD points or years of experi-

ence at a senior level. Individuals responsible for coaching within organisations (i.e. ‘Programme Manager’ or ‘Head of Learning & Development’) set prerequisite criteria when matching a credible coach with an executive client to avoid risk of potential harm and low return on investment:

‘The company is demanding, and they are naturally risk averse and the risk they potentially see is when they put somebody less experienced in front of one of their senior executives.’ (3:84-3:86)

However, the definition of credibility varies from sponsor to sponsor and changes over time.

In 2003, Wasylyshyn’s research identified the top credentials for executives choosing coaches as: ‘graduate training in psychology’ rated by 82% participants as the most important, followed by ‘experience in/understanding of business’ (78%) (Wasylyshyn, 2003). Ten years on, coach credibility, according to Mann (2013) stems from: ‘Track record of successfully coaching business leaders’, ‘Broad business understanding and appreciation of the specific business context of the sponsor’s organisation (underpinned by business and coaching consultancy experience)’ and ‘Generally sounding and looking like they would relate easily to senior business leaders’.

Credibility may remain a fundamental issue whilst ‘coach’ remains an unlicensed term with no formal barriers to entry. One interviewee made this comparison:

It’s a bit like using the term ‘cooking’; well, who can’t cook? I can boil an egg so I’m a cook. But coaching is about conversation (.) I can have a conversation so I am a coach! Right?! Yeah! I like it [clapping]! Good number!’ (1:44-1:46)

Grant (2004) highlighted this issue in the inaugural volume of the International Coaching Psychology Review, yet it still remains unresolved. It may partially explain why some companies adopt their own criteria for coach selection.

Subtheme: Within the Coach

Possible barriers within younger coaches were suggested by interviewees to possibly stem from an awareness of the stereotypical executive coach with grey hair and a bank of business and life experience, who was mentoring-coaching-advising others:

(...) there's currently a stereotype of what a coach should look like and that's being built up just through the coaches who were available in the market (...). Really, most of the coaches that I know have entered from different professions rather than coming in an early age (...). (3:81-3:83; 3:46-3:47)

As Gen Y coaches do not meet this description it might evolve to a stereotype threat. This threat arises from negative performance expectations in a specific domain: in this instance, young coaches in the executive coaching domain. According to Steele & Aronson (1995), any group can show evidence of underperformance if the situation brings attention to the threatened identity (here: being a young coach). As a result of this stereotype threat, Gen Y coaches might underperform, portray themselves as young, underestimate their experience and generate doubt in themselves:

'Another thing about the young is that they may need to have more practice in the way which they position and portray their story, because sometimes they think they haven't got anything that is going to make a difference.' (1:280-1:282)

Subtheme: Within the Client

The subtheme focuses on barriers within the client, expressed through their behaviours and attitudes towards Gen Y coaches. Executives' open-mindedness can differ from person to person:

(...) by the time they get to be a CEO or be on the board or be a senior executive,

most of the individuals are quite set in their ways and not necessarily open to what's different, what's new, what's relevant for their market place, for the way that they work, for their industry sector, what can they learn (...). (3:130-3:134)

Interviewees variously described 'rapport' as a connection, as mutual trust and as free exchange between the client and coach, essential in further development and growth. All interviewees stated that it is not an absolute matter of age. Instead, rapport may depend on a mutual willingness and readiness to collaborate. Therefore, if an executive is not open to a relationship with a Gen Y coach, this may negatively affect the level of rapport, with age then plausibly used as a reason for coaching not working.

Interviewees stated that barriers within executives may possibly be created by over-ambitious Gen Y coaches that lack an understanding and appreciation for more seasoned clients. Some executives might consider Gen Y coaches operating with an informal language, saturated with colloquialisms and typical technology-era vocabulary, as displaying a lack of sensitivity, creating a barrier within the client. It was also argued that executives might similarly exhibit a lack of sensitivity:

'I was coaching a senior level director in a big multinational corporation (...) One of the first things he said, joking me, was like: "Oh my God, I didn't really expect, uhm, a young woman like you" (...) It was a little bit awkward slash funny.' (4:129-4:135)

C: Recommendations

Subtheme: Coaching Relationship

'(...) don't think about yourself: think about who the people you're trying to help.' (2:307-2:308)

A common theme across all interviews is the risk of a Gen Y coach having a lack of understanding of the reality in which their client operates. Without seeking knowledge about the industry, politics or business, the Gen Y coach may miss very important meanings, often expressed in a coded utterance or hidden agenda. Therefore, knowing and

understanding the context is argued as essential for building rapport:

'(...) one of the most important things about relating to people is knowing enough about the context that they are living in, so they don't have to explain it to you.' (1:171-1:173)

Gen Y coaches are encouraged to read business-related materials such as annual reports, newspaper content regarding the economy and geopolitics and, in general, learning about their clients' roles. To build effective relationships, Gen Y coaches are advised to choose a long-term, non-selling approach towards potential clients, focusing on building trust:

'(...) you have to ... meet people several times so they can get to know you, trust you, from there also to figure out how to add value.' (2:333-2:335)

Subtheme: Strong Self

Most interviewees recommended Gen Y coaches use a strengths-based approach when presenting themselves to leverage the experience and skills they already have. Portraying themselves as mature and confident - including an appropriate dress-code - may contribute to creating a professional image to help executive clients relate to them and to facilitate openness and trust:

'(...) realising how much you can find within yourself that the other person is going to recognise and relate to. As the entry point. Because they next start to put their real agenda on the table, if they trust you.' (1:154-1:157)

Interviewees argued that Gen Y coaches should build themselves strong as a firm foundation for their practice. 'Strong foundations' were articulated as having a solid self-belief, as continuously investing in personal development and learning and as being proactive and bold in making the most of opportunities:

'(...) pick up the phone and have a go, because most people talk about doing things

but they don't actually do it'. (2:362-2:363)

Subtheme: Strong Business

This subtheme represents business-related recommendations such as correct positioning in the market, establishing your own business and creating meaningful networks:

'Coaching is also a business: it's also about who you know'. (6:23)

One theme for Gen Y coaches was to be visible to potential executive clients so that, when clients need a coach, they would know where to find the right person. Thinking about who the target clients are and finding smart ways to get to know them may help Gen Y coaches to become that 'right person'. In addition, the entrepreneurial journey is argued to be difficult and requiring great resilience and strong character, including a high investment of energy, focus, time and other resources:

'(...) make sure you've got your own money to be able to invest, because it is very very difficult to set up and grow the business.' (2:330-2:331)

One newly established Gen Y coach saw their young age as an advantage: it gave them more time to gain a bank of experience earlier on in their working life compared to someone entering the coaching profession midway through their career:

'For example, you are becoming a coach when you're twenty. By the time you are thirty you've been a coach for ten years and you are only thirty years old, whereas someone else might only train to be a coach at thirty.' (6:34-6:36)

Conclusion

The open questions within the survey explored the views of potential executive clients, whilst the interviews created an opportunity for knowledgeable professionals from the coaching industry to share their experience and viewpoints regarding the importance of a coach's age in executive coaching, including possible challenges and opportunities. The signature recommendations for Gen Y coaches

derived from the interviews were: build yourself strong because you are the foundation of your business, be a great coach and a great businessperson at the same time, be proactive, and take bold actions to succeed and invest in long-term relationships of trust with people within your network. These interviews provided a variety of perspectives, intended to contribute to a better understanding of British organisations' attitudes towards Gen Y practitioners entering the executive coaching profession.

The findings of this study suggest that age, in itself, is not one of the most significant factors in a client's selection of a coach, but that it is often a signifier of credibility and experience. In addition, sufficient executive coaching experience is often a prerequisite for corporate buyers shortlisting coaching service suppliers, making it difficult for inexperienced Gen Y coaches to enter organisations. Gen Y coaches may gain this desired experience through coaching independent executive clients, with ICT start-up leaders possibly being more receptive to younger practitioners. There may also be a place at the corporate table for younger coaches in working with emerging talent and 'young leader' programmes within organisations. Whatever the opportunities that emerge over the coming years, Gen Y coaches will especially need to be comfortable and competent deploying a coaching skillset that facilitates an open-mindedness and willingness to have conventions challenged amongst their potential clients. Finally, coaching bodies may need to consider how we are going to nurture, encourage and attract younger practitioners into our profession.

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